第 I 部

A Note on Possessor Agreement*

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1. Introduction

Since the seminal work of Abney (1987) and its introduction of the DP-hypothesis much progress has been made in the understanding of the structure of nominal phrases. Given the complementary distribution of the possessor phrase and the determiner—*Mary's book* or *the book of Mary* but not **Mary's the book*—it seems attractive to argue that the Saxon genitive –s occupies the same position as the determiner, namely the D-position. The question is then how to analyze possessive pronouns as in *her books*. Is *her* a D-head? Or is it a phrase in SpecDP with an associated zero D-head? I want to add some remarks about this question that arise from a comparison between English and German, and in particular from the question of the possessor's agreement with N(P).

2. A significant Difference between English and German

As has been noticed at least since Haider (1988), German shows the following contrast.

(1) a. All-e   ihr-e   Büch-er   sind nass geworden
       all-PL her-PL   book-PL   are   wet   become
       'All her books got wet'

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* The idea for this squib came from a seminar on the syntax of Germanic DPs that I taught in the winter term 2012–2013. My students may not have been aware of the fact that I learned from their questions. Thanks to Ellen Brandner and to Henk van Riemsdijk for communication.

A Note on Possessor Agreement   3

b. *All-e   Marias   Büch-er   sind nass geworden[1]
      all-PL   Maria's book-PL   are   wet   become
      'All Maria's books got wet'

Notably, this contrast is absent in English

(2) a. All her books got wet
    b. All Mary's books got wet

English and German look the same with pronominal possessors but different with nominal possessors. Where does this difference come from?

3. Agreement

Consider now the following German "possessor doubling" construction that differs formally but not semantically from the one in (1b).

(3) All-e   de -r   Maria ihr-e   Büch-er sind nass geworden
      all-PL the-DAT   Maria her-PL   book-PL are   wet   become
      'All Maria's books got wet'

This construction is historically older than the Saxon genitive and survives especially in Southern German dialects but also in all kinds of spoken varieties. The name *Maria* appears decorated with the definite determiner *der*. The fact that this determiner can hardly be dispensed with may have to do with the fact that the possessor here is in dative Case, and that there are strong reasons in German to license dative Case by means of overt morphology.[2] Since proper names have given up overt Case morphology, assistance from outside is called for. Since pronouns and determiners etc. retain overt Case in the language, this assistance comes from the determiner. Assume now—following standard proposals about the German DP—that in the pos-

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[1] Notice that the examples in (1) can also appear with the plural –*e* lacking: *All Marias Bücher* …. The reason seems to be a mainly phonological one. There is a rule of schwa-deletion which might kill the final vowel. The issue is not trivial as seen by the deviance of missing-*e* in *all*(-e) Bücher von Maria* (all-(PL) books of Maria). I have to leave this issue aside.

[2] Various argument for that can, for example, be found in Bayer, Bader and Meng (2001).

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sessor doubling construction the dative possessor *der Maria* is in the specifi-
er of the DP headed by the possessive pronoun *ihre* (her- NOM,PL): [$_{DP}$
[$_{DP-DAT}$ *der Maria*] [$_{D'}$ *ihre* [$_{NP}$ *Bücher*]]]. The example looks exactly like
the grammatical version in (1a), the only difference being the presence of
the doubling DP in SpecDP. Compare now (4a) and (4b), where agreement
in terms of Case and phi-features appears in bold-face.

(4) a. all-**e** ([der Maria]) ihr-**e** Büch-**er**
　　b. *alle-**e** Marias Büch-**er**

This representation, I would like to argue, paves the way to understanding
the contrast between German (1b) and English (2b). Two ingredients are
required for the explanation: (i) pre-nominal agreement must be contiguous,
i.e. there is something like an uninterrupted "agreement chain." [3] (ii) the
Saxon genitive fails to agree. If this is the case, Q, Poss-pronoun and N
agree in (1a) and (3) whereas Q and N fail to agree in (1b). As seen in
(5b), there is intervention by the non-agreeing possessor *Marias*.

(5) a. all-**e** ([der Maria]) ihr-**e**　　Büch-**er**
　　　 +AGR　　　　　　 +AGR　+AGR
　　b. *alle-**e**　　Marias　Büch-**er**
　　　 +AGR　–AGR　+AGR

What does this proposal say about English? The only logically sound con-
sequence can be that (i) is trivialized by the fact that there is no agreement.
If so, Q, N$_{Gen}$ and N, "agree" in the sense that they all lack agreement
features. This seems to be reasonable. There is no overt agreement in the
pre-N domain in English whereas there is obligatory agreement in German.
Is there "abstract" agreement in English with the Saxon genitive morpheme
-*s* in an agreeing D-position? If this were the case, why would the same not
hold in German?

　Proposals about the syntactic structure of possessors are often and, in fact,
should be guided by a hypothesis of maximal uniformity. Like any hypoth-
esis, however, they must be open to falsification. According to Roehrs

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[3] I believe it was in early work by Sue Olsen that I came across the useful term "Kongru-
enzkette" (agreement chain).

(2013), Krause (1999: 203) suggests that -*s* and possessive pronouns are
allomorphs. This can well be the case but only as long as their semantic
side and their internal distribution is considered. Morphologically they ap-
pear to be rather different. Roehrs (2013: 56) suggests for German a uni-
form structure as in (6) in which the functional exponent of the possessor is
the morpheme -*s* throughout. It appears separated from the determiner and
assigns Case to the lexical possessor that appears in (6a, c). [4]

(6) a. [$_{FP}$ Peter s-] [$_D$ ein] Buch　　*Peter his book*
　　b. [$_{FP}$ pro s-] [$_D$ ein] Buch　　*his book*
　　c. [$_{FP}$ Peter 's] [$_D$ ∅] Buch　　*Peter's book*
　　d. *[$_{FP}$ pro 's] [$_D$ ∅] Buch　　*'s book*

The proposal is developed in such a way that there is underlyingly a gener-
alized poss-head -*s* which then moves into the head position of FP. Al-
though Roehrs does not say much about agreement, it seems to be implicitly
assumed that the poss-head agrees with (the extended) N(P),[5] and that di-
vergences from the underlying structure hold only on the surface. Of
course, it depends on which properties of grammar one would relegate to the
"surface". To me it seems that the difference between possessors with -*s* in
English and in German signal a rather robust typological split between these
historically closely related languages. As I will argue on the basis of further
examples below, this split suggests that (2b), *All Mary's books got wet*, is
fine because English lacks pre-nominal agreement altogether. German, on
the other side, insists on pre-nominal agreement. The remarkable property

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[4] FP stands for a functional projection. In (6a), the idea is that the separated -s assigns
dative Case to *Peter*. As I said in note 2, according to my own intuitions an overt deter-
miner would be required here: *dem Peter sein* ….

[5] He makes an exception though for Norwegian *hans* (his) which is said (p.86) to be
uninflected.

　According to Georgi and Salzmann (2010), Krause (1999) proposes that in the Saxon
genitive construction –s assigns dative Case to the possessor:

　(i) [[$_{DP}$ *Peter*$_{DAT}$] *s*]

But in this case we have to ask why (ii) is ungrammatical.

　(ii) *[[$_{DP}$ *dem Peter*$_{DAT}$] *s*]

If the -*s* is essentially the same as the possessive pronoun, it becomes difficult to account
for the difference between (1b) and (3).

of German is then that with the adoption of the Saxon genitive its grammar has integrated a non-agreeing possessor. If this is correct, the descriptive generalization is as in (7).

(7)   Generalization about prenominal agreement

	Q	D	A	-*s*
English	–	–	–	–
German	+	+	+	–

The examples with *all* are by no means isolated. Here are some with *every* and *some*.

(8) a.   People put at *every John's gate* a decorated Christmas tree.
         http://www.exploringromania.com/saint-john-day.html   26.03.2013

   b.   *Some John's most personal songs* were on his first album after the Beatles
         http://www.richmond.com.mx/microsites/readers/pdfs/MEDL4_3_FILE.pdf
                                                              26.03.2013

Any such examples are inconceivable in German. If in German the Q-head is followed by a Poss-DP, this DP is normally in a PP.

(9) a.   Die Leute   stellen vor   jedes   von   Johns   Toren einen …
         the people put   in-front-of every of   John's gates a
   b.   Einige von Johns   persönlichsten Liedern waren …
         some   of   John's most.personal   songs   were …

With possessive pronominals it would be a genitive construction as in (10).

(10)   Einige sein-er   persönlichst-en   Lied-er   waren …
        some   his-GEN.PL   most.personal-GEN.PL   song-GEN.PL were …

There are speakers who do not use the genitive any longer. They produce data like the following.

(11) a.   Jede-r   mein   Schritt   führt in die Hölle
          every-NOM.SG   my-NOM.SG   step-NOM.SG   leads in the hell

       'Every step of mine leads to hell'
       http://forum.gofeminin.de/forum/carriere1/__f3336_carriere1-Warum.html
                                                              26.03.2013

   b.   Und   einig-e   mein-e   Freund-e   haben
        and   some-NOM.PL   my-NOM.PL   friend-NOM.PL   have
        sogar   geweint …
        even   cried …
        'and some of my friends even cried'
        http://stubb.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/wahlen-erfahrungsbericht-nr-1.pdf
                                                              26.03.

The interesting thing is that even under such conditions of loss of Case prenominal agreement remains as solid as ever.

The following data from English appear to be exceptional. Possessor and quantifier are inverted.

(12) a.   Larry only likes girls who hang on his every word
          http://idioms.thefreedictionary.com/hang+on+every+word   17.12.2013
   b.   John's every word seems to contain pearls of wisdom
          http://www.awakin.org/forest/index.php?pg=profile&cid=38&sid=11568
                                                              17.12.2013

One can conclude from this that quantifier and possessor are equal with respect to agreement, no matter whether the possessor is a pronoun or a DP marked with the Saxon genitive *-s*.

4.   Beyond Possessors

As one would expect, the findings about agreeing and non agreeing possessors are not an isolated fact. There are various cases that show that German insists on pre-nominal agreement whereas this is not an issue in English at all. Take the particle *only* and its correspondent *nur* in German. As the category 'particle' suggests, it cannot be inflected. In both languages it can appear in the leftmost position of DP where some researchers analyze them as adverbs and others as syncategorematic heads.

(13) a. Only the rain disturbs me
b. Nur der Regen stört mich

Non-agreement in a pre-DP position, even if this position is part of DP, does not affect the generalization. The question is what happens when *only*/*nur* become part of the agreement chain. Here the languages diverge sharply.[6]

(14) a. The only real friend he has is George
b. *Der   nur   echte Freund, den   er hat, ist George
the   only real   friend   whom he has is George

The fact that *only* cannot be inflected does not hamper its role as a pre-nominal modifier or operator in English. German can only resort to lexical options which are semantically equivalent but are adjectival and can as such be inflected. Consider the adjective *einzig* (single).

(15) De-r   einzig-e   echt-e   Freund, den   er hat, ist George
the-AGR single-AGR real-AGR friend   whom he has is George

The same is true for pairs like *The very idea makes me shiver* versus *Der {bloss-e / *bloss} Gedanke macht mich zittern*. *Very* does not and cannot agree, *bloss* can agree and it must agree for the German construction to converge.

Before I conclude, let me add that agreement in DP is slightly more complex than shown so far. As van Riemsdijk (1998) has shown on the basis of Dutch data, agreement needs to be signaled at the right edge of AP.[7] A post-adjectival adverb disrupts the agreement process although the adverb *genug* is contained in the AP *groß genug* and is therefore not a non-agreeing

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[6] Notice that *nur* does appear inside DP.
(i)   Sein-e   nur   wenig-en Freund-e   sind gekommen
his-PL only few-PL   friend-PL are   come
'His friend, which were no more than few, have come'
Since *nur* has only scope over the quantifier, it is part of the agreeing QP *wenige* and does not interfere with the agreement between the three categories which are linked in (i) in an uninterrupted chain of agreement. This is different from (14) where *only*/*nur* takes scope over the next two words that follow it.

[7] In the generative literature this has become known as the HEAD FINAL FILTER, cf. Escribano (2004).

intervener between D, AP and NP.

(16) a. ein genug   groß -**er**   Teller
a   enough big   -AGR plate
b. *ein groß-**er** genug Teller

Witness now that the order Adv < A can be inverted and is even preferred in inverted order in predicative or adverbial usage as seen in (17).

(17) a. Der Teller ist groß genug
the plate   is big   enough
'The plate is big enough'
b. Hans lief nicht schnell genug
Hans ran not   fast   enough
'Hans didn't run fast enough'

As van Riemsdijk observes, speakers who continue to use the order A < Adv frequently "repair" this order by simply inflecting the adverb.

(18) %ein groß genug-**er** Teller

For English, in contrast, there is no question that (19) is a completely legitimate output. Agreement plays no role.

(19)   a big enough plate

A can be expected from this, English abounds with prenominal modifiers which lack the right-edge designation of adjectives altogether.

(20) a. a tongue-in-cheek remark   (Escribano (2004: 26))
b. a wrong in my opinion view   (personal observation)

If so, one could expect all kinds of interventions between A and N in English, e.g. *the tired after the long walk people*. These are for sure dispreferred in comparison with *the people tired from the long walk*. My guess is that there are factors involved which are independent of agreement proper, perhaps preferences in phonological phrasing. I refer interested readers to Biberauer et al.'s (2008, 2014) discussion of the so-called Final-Over-Final

Constraint.[8]

5.　Conclusion

　English and German are, although historically closely related, typological-ly rather different languages. In English, the lack of agreement in DP leads to significant deviations from German (and certainly also from the predeces-sors of modern English). It is tempting to speak of a parametric alternation. Interestingly, however, one can see that the agreement system can be disrupted. The adoption of the Saxon genitive into the grammar of German has obviously lead to a small lacuna which the system somehow has to cope with. Possessors which are marked with the Saxon *–s* genitive are relegated to the DP's left edge, which as we have seen, is allowed to contain material that does not participate in agreement. If so, we can explain the deviance of (1b), **alle Marias Bücher*. It is not really clear how one should exclude the order that does not interfere with agreement, namely **Marias alle Bücher*. An explanation of this, related to the rare English examples in (12), must obviously come from a different angle. Notice that the quantifier *beid-* (both) is restricted like all- (all) in (1b) but allows the Saxon pos-sessor in first position.

(21) a. *Beid-e　　Marias　　Büch-er　　sind　nass　geworden
　　　　　both-PL　Maria's　book-PL　are　　wet　become
　　　b.　Marias　　beid-e　　Büch-er　sind　nass　geworden
　　　　　Maria's　both-PL　book-PL　are　　wet　become
　　　　　'Both Maria's books got wet'

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[8] This constraint, abbreviated as FOFC, is formulated in the form of a filter: *[ɣP [αP αβ] ɣ]. It rules out the example in (i) whose relevant structure is as in (ii).
　(i) *John is a proud of his son man
　(ii)　… [ɣP [αP proud of his son] man].

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