

Another look at Noun-Genitive vs. Genitive-Noun in Early New High German

It has long been recognized that historical varieties of German exhibit variation between prenominal vs. postnominal genitives (GN vs. NG orders), with an overall development away from GN and toward NG under various conditions (Behaghel 1923). In broad strokes, retention of GN order is associated with possessive genitives (as opposed to subjective, objective, partitive, or explicative genitives), genitives denoting persons, and single-words, proper names, or pronouns. By 1700, near the beginning of the Modern German era, GN order accounts for only 10% of adnominal genitives, and GN becomes restricted to proper nouns by 1750 (Niehaus 2016). In Early New High German (ENHG; 1350-1650) there is often variation between GN and NG within these conditions even within individual texts. Despite several examinations of this variation and change (e.g., Ebert 1988; Lunt Lanouette 1990, 1998; Pickl 2020), this topic remains surprisingly under-researched.

In this paper, we explore the hypothesis that in at least some varieties of ENHG, the grammar of adnominal genitives includes two properties not found in Modern German:

- (1) Adnominal genitives are generated in the Specifier position of the NP.
- (2) NG order is derived by an optional rule that extraposes the genitive DP or a subpart of it and which is sensitive to the length/weight of the genitive phrase.

Property (1) accounts for examples like (3), in which pre-nominal genitives appear to the right of attributive adjectives, and property (2) accounts for instances in which the pre-nominal genitive is modified by a post-nominal phrase.

(3) *eyn besunder* [_{DP} *Rulands*] *streitgesel* (*Fierrabras* 196 [1533])
a certain Ruland-GEN battle-companion ‘a certain combatant of Ruland’

(4) [_{DP} *Josephs* _{TPP}] *sun* [_{PP} *von aramatia*] (*Karrenritter* 472 [1430])
Joseph-GEN son of Aramathea ‘Joseph of Aramathea’s son’

Taken together, these properties yield the tendency for NG order with longer genitive DPs, but GN with one-word genitives, as well as the split construction illustrated in (4).

We present data from an ongoing corpus-based study of GN vs. NG variation in ENHG. The corpus will ultimately consist of 60 texts, with one text per 50-year bin from 10 dialects, representing a variety of genres. Texts in the corpus are constituency parsed according to the Penn annotation system (e.g., Kroch 2020). Preliminary data have been extracted from the first four completely parsed texts, yielding the following results thus far:

- By text: GN varies widely from 84% in *Karrenritter* (1430) to 48% in *Fierrabras* (1533) to just 7% in *Geistlicher Mai* (1529). More texts need to be analyzed to tease apart the effects of time, dialect, and genre.
- Proper vs. common noun genitive: In texts other than *Geistlicher Mai*, proper nouns appear in GN order more frequently (67-83%) than common nouns.
- Genitive type: for both GN and NG, the vast majority of adnominal genitives are possessives, thus the effect of this factor is inconclusive so far.
- Length: One-word genitives most strongly favor GN (67% excluding *Geistlicher Mai*) and longer genitives increasingly disfavor it (down to 19% for five or more words, again excluding *Geistlicher Mai*.)

We suggest that the Modern Standard German pattern in which only personal possessives in *-s* (which are probably no longer genitives, see Fuß 2011) and possessive adjectives occur prenominally and full genitive DPs occur only in the order NG, results from a reanalysis triggered by the increased application of the extraposition rule in the late ENHG period.

References

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