

## Deflexion and the development of the genitive in English<sup>1</sup>

CYNTHIA L. ALLEN

*Australian National University*

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This article looks at the role of deflexion in the development of the genitive in English and offers an empirical base for evaluating some claims which have been made about how this development proceeded. It focuses primarily on the claim that it was impossible for the genitive to remain as a morphological case once the other case distinctions were lost in the nominal system. This claim is based on a dubious typological argument and evidence is presented that the genitive retained some inflectional characteristics in Middle English. The article also looks at how the so-called ‘*his* genitive’ found in some earlier texts fits into the general picture of the development of English possessives.

### 1 Introduction

The development of the genitive in English has long been a subject of interest to students of the history of English (see e.g. Allen, 1997; Ekwall, 1943, 1913; Fischer, 1992; Furnivall, 1865; Janda, 1980, 1981; Jespersen, 1894: ¶247–8, 1942: §17; Lightfoot, 1999: 117–25; Mustanoja, 1960: 159–66; Seppänen, 1997, to name only a few of the important older studies and some more recent works, excluding those which focus on the use of the prenominal genitive versus the *of* construction). As Otto Jespersen pointed out long ago, the possessive marker in English is different from an ordinary inflection; it does not necessarily attach to the possessor noun, but rather to the end of a ‘syntactic group’, i.e. the NP containing the possessor, as in the ‘group genitive’<sup>2</sup> of (1):

(1) the king of England’s daughter

This development is of interest to linguists generally because, as Janda (1980, 1981) notes, such a development seems to present difficulties for Givón’s (1971) famous dictum ‘today’s morphology is yesterday’s syntax’. The English ‘group genitive’ has continued to be a topic of considerable debate in the recent literature on grammaticalization (see e.g. Lehmann, 1995; Janda, 2001; Norde, 2001; Tabor & Traugott, 1998) because of the questions it raises for the ‘unidirectionality’ hypothesis, i.e. that the direction of grammatical change is always from more lexical to more grammatical.

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<sup>2</sup> My use of the term ‘group genitive’ will not cover appositives such as ‘King Henry the Eighth’s wives’, as these are syntactically different, as will be shown below.

It may seem as if there is little more of value to be said about this construction. However, the recent literature on the matter includes a typological claim which merits examination. This claim concerns the case-marking systems which are humanly possible and has been used to argue that the Middle English (ME) genitive could not have been a case inflection because of the deflexion which had occurred. Much of the discussion has been very schematic, and the more theoretical works in particular lack sufficient detail about earlier stages of English to make the analysis of any given stage convincing.

This article examines the development of prenominal genitives in English on the basis of data gained from a systematic investigation of fifty-three texts (detailed in the Appendix). Section 2 briefly surveys analyses of the possessive marker in Present-day English (PDE), as this bears on the question of what changes we want to say have taken place. Section 3 looks in detail at genitives in ME. Its primary focus is on the question of how deflexion affected genitives, particularly in Early Middle English (EME). Section 4 looks briefly at the further development of the prenominal genitives in Early Modern English (EModE) and specifically at the possible relationship between the agreeing prenominal periphrastic genitive which arose at that period and the group genitive.

## 2 The genitive in PDE

One problem we have when trying to figure out how the OE genitive case turned into the modern possessive marker is that there is no unanimity among syntacticians and morphologists concerning how to analyse the PDE genitive. There is general agreement that the possessive marker is unlike a typical inflectional affix because of the existence of group genitives. But there is a great deal of difference in the analyses which have been offered. There is not even agreement that the possessive marker should be called a clitic. Zwicky (1987) argues that the possessive marker is ‘an edge-located inflectional affix’, a position which he notes (139) calls into doubt the very existence of phrasal affix clitics. If we adopt Zwicky’s analysis, there has obviously been no switch from inflection to clitic with the English possessive, although there have been important changes to the distribution of the inflection. See also Seppänen’s (1997: 205–9) discussion of the affixal characteristics of the PDE genitive and Plank (1992) on its categorially ‘fuzzy’ status.

Sadock (1991), arguing against a sharp distinction between inflectional suffixes and clitics, proposes a framework in which this affix can be treated as involving a mismatch of the syntax and the morphology; morphologically, the possessive marker is part of the word to which it attaches, but it is a separate syntactic entity. Sadock’s and Zwicky’s approaches share the treatment of the possessive marker as an affix, although Sadock’s is different in assuming that the marker has its own syntactic position. With Sadock’s analysis of PDE, as with any analysis which assumes a separate syntactic position for the possessive marker, we must assume that somewhere along the line in the history of English, there has been the creation of a new syntactic position for this marker.

What we say about the history of the English possessive *'s* will depend on our analysis of PDE. While I am not going to argue the merits of the different analyses for PDE, I will argue against analyses which involve a single reanalysis between the OE genitive inflection and a PDE clitic. Whether we treat the PDE marker as an inflection or a clitic, I will show that the possessive marker in EME was different both from the inflection of OE and the more loosely attached marker of PDE. The widely held view that deflexion in EME triggered a reanalysis of the OE inflectional genitive at a very early stage depends more for its support on typological arguments, which I will argue are dubious, than on the observable facts of the history of English.

### 3 Genitives in ME

#### 3.1 *Deflexion in EME*

As is well known, EME was a period of considerable deflexion in English (see e.g. Mustanoja, 1960: 67 for an extremely general statement concerning the decay of the OE inflectional system in EME and chapter 5 of Allen, 1995 for a more detailed look at the evidence concerning deflexion in the different dialects). In particular, the distinction between the nominative, dative, and accusative was completely lost in the nominal system, and the dative/accusative distinction was lost in the pronominal system. Case agreement was lost for determiners and adjectives. These developments took place at different times and in rather different ways in different dialects, but by the mid thirteenth century we find that they are pretty much complete everywhere except in Kent. However, the genitive marker is retained, although with an important difference from OE; there is now a single dominant genitive marker, namely *-(e)s*, which is used for most nouns, as opposed to the OE system in which different inflectional classes had different genitive markers. At issue here is the analysis of this genitive marker; is it to be analysed the same way as the PDE possessive marker, or is it more similar to the OE inflection?

#### 3.2 *Analysing the EME genitives (1100–1300)*

We turn now to the genitives of EME texts which show advanced syncretism in the nominal system and advanced loss of agreement of modifiers. It is first of all important to note that the genitives of EME are different from pronominal genitives ending in *-s* in Modern Dutch. In Dutch, the pronominal genitives which descend directly from the old genitive case are limited to proper nouns and kinship terms such as ‘mother’, which can be used like proper nouns, as discussed by Weerman and de Wit (1999):

- (2)(a) Willems boek  
William-s book  
‘William’s book’
- (b) \*de jongens boek  
the boy-s book  
‘the boy’s book’

Weerman and de Wit argue that the possessive marker is not a genuine case marker in Dutch, and that prenominal possessives are to be analysed as complex determiners, so that recursive possessives and NPs which are not simply proper nouns are ruled out. They suggest a similar analysis for ME before the appearance of the group genitive, claiming (1999: 1174) that '[t]he construction [the -s construction/CLA] is internally restricted to proper names and when determiners do occur, they do not bear any case'.

But in fact the genitive in English was never restricted to proper names and kinship terms, either in EME or at any other period:

- (3)(a) þou has anoþer man[ne]s wijf  
 thou hast another man-G wife  
 'you have another man's wife' (CMundi (Vesp) 2976 (c. 1350))
- (b) til ald mans words  
 to old man-G words  
 'to an old man's words' (CMundi (Vesp) 1740)
- (c) þatt laþe wifess faderr  
 that hateful woman-G father  
 'that hateful woman's father' (Orm 19829 (c. 1180))
- (d) ðis ferðe dais nigþ  
 this fourth day-G night  
 'the night of this fourth day' (Gen&Ex 157 (MS a1325, comp. c. 1250))

Furthermore, just as in both OE and EModE, the possessive of EME was recursive:

- (4) Off Godess folkkess ahhte  
 Of God-G people-G goods  
 'of the goods of God's people' (Orm 12218 (c. 1180))
- (5) þat he constantines sones fur ssolde fle  
 that he Constantine-G sons-G fire should flee  
 'that he should flee Constantine's sons' fire' (Rob. Glo. 2892 (c. 1300))

These examples are amenable to an analysis either as an inflection or as a clitic. The general lack of case agreement within the NP/DP makes a clitic analysis possible for most ME examples, and forms (found especially in later texts) like *mennes*, 'men's', in which the genitive marker is added to an inflected form, are easily amenable to a clitic analysis. On the other hand, an analysis of the genitive as an inflection is also still possible; nonagreement by modifiers with an inflected noun is certainly possible and plural forms like *þe mennes* are easily dealt with in a framework which allows *men* to be listed in the lexicon with the information that it carries plural number and *-(e)s* to be listed as a suffix which attaches to noun stems and carries genitive case.<sup>3</sup>

How are the EME genitives best analysed? I first examine the evidence that the genitive in EME retained some inflectional features and then look at the evidence which has been presented to support the idea that it was impossible for the genitive to remain an inflection in EME because of the deflexion which had taken place.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, we need some way to prevent normal plurals from having both the plural inflection and the possessive marker, but this problem does not bear on the question of whether the genitive marker can be treated as an inflection. For a discussion of how to deal with plural possessors in PDE, see Zwicky (1987).

### 3.2.1 *Inflection-like attributes of EME genitives*

3.2.1.1 *Morphology*. Even in the EME texts with the most advanced syncretism of case forms, we find irregular genitive forms (alternating with regular *-(e)s*). Let us look at the situation in the *Ormulum* (Northeast Midlands) of c.1180. In Orm's dialect, there has been complete dative/accusative syncretism as far as nouns are concerned and the demonstrative *þe* no longer inflected for case. Most nouns inflect for the genitive with *-(e)s*. But some nouns still show irregular inflection for genitive case. This usually consists of a lack of inflection (a holdover from OE, where the same nouns lacked overt inflection), but there are a few words which have the OE irregular inflection in the genitive plural, as in (7):

- (6) Hiss a3henn broþerr wif  
His own brother wife  
'his own brother's wife' (Orm 19601 (c.1180))
- (7) For 3ho iss allre shaffte cwen  
For she is all-G-PL creatures-G-PL queen  
'for she is queen of all creatures' (Orm 2159)

These irregular genitives did not die out in EME; they are still found to some extent in the fourteenth century, although by this time the regular genitive was becoming an alternative for the irregular form for all nouns:

- (8) þat vorfretap menne limes  
that devours man-G-PL limbs  
'that devours men's limbs' (Rob.Glo. (c. 1300) 186)

Irregular inflection is more typical of an inflection than a clitic, according to Zwicky and Pullum's (1983) criteria, and the EME situation with the genitive plural seems to be similar to the PDE situation with (nongenitive) plurals: there is a general inflection which is used with most nouns, but some words inflect irregularly. The irregular genitives do not show that a clitic genitive did not exist in EME or later ME, but they do indicate that a clitic was not the only possibility.

A second piece of evidence that an inflectional genitive still existed in the EME stage is the fact that there was still some residual agreement with genitive<sup>4</sup> case in the quantifiers even in texts with widespread syncretism:

- (9) Off nanes manness e33e  
of no-G man-G fear  
'of the fear of no man' (Orm 16137)

It is usually assumed that such agreement is indicative of a morphological case category. This agreement only lasts into the early stage of EME, but it shows that people managed

<sup>4</sup> In the *Ormulum*, there is also residual agreement with a general object case (no dative/accusative distinction). This object case is not overtly marked on nouns. If we take this as evidence for a three-way system of nominal cases in this dialect, then the *Ormulum* examples do not show the continued existence of genitive case as part of a two-case system, although they show that a clitic-only analysis of this text is not possible, which bears on the question of the treatment of appositives; see section 3.2.2.2.

to construct grammars in which there was no formal distinction between nominative, accusative, and dative nouns, but there was nevertheless a genitive case.

A final bit of morphological evidence for the suffix status of the genitive in ME was suggested by Plank (1985). The genitive marker conditioned the voiced stem just as the plural suffix did in words like *wives* in late ME, when this voicing alternation had ceased to be a purely phonological process. Such morphophonemic conditioning is a characteristic more expected of inflectional affixes than of clitics. However, it must be admitted that the continued use of the <v> in the possessive form in ME might simply be conservative spelling; the <v> spellings are still common in the *Barrington Letters* of the seventeenth century, long after the group genitive had become standard.

3.2.1.2 *Syntax*. There is also syntactic evidence, albeit of the negative sort which is always tricky when dealing with a corpus, that the genitive of EME was not like the PDE genitive. If the genitive was an inflection until near the end of the ME period, it would explain the complete lack of group genitives in the texts until towards the end of the fourteenth century. Until this time, the possessive marking is always adjacent to the possessor noun. This does not mean that speakers and writers were unable to use a prenominal possessive with a syntactic group in which the possessor was not the last member. They could do this by using a construction which I refer to as the ‘combined genitive’,<sup>5</sup> in which the PP which would otherwise prevent the possessive marker from being adjacent to the possessor noun was placed in an extraposed position:<sup>6</sup>

- (10) þurh þæs arcebisopes gearnunge of Cantwerbyrig  
 through the-G archbishop-G desire of Canterbury  
 ‘through the desire of the archbishop of Canterbury’ (PC 1114.34)

An analysis of the genitive marker as a clitic at the end of the possessor NP/DP in EME would predict that group genitives should have been possible.

It must be noted that proponents of a clitic in EME have in fact proposed a possible explanation for the long gap between the syncretism of most case distinctions and the appearance of the group genitive. Kroch (1997: 134), supporting the idea that the loss of case distinctions forced the reanalysis of the inflection as a clitic, argues that the late appearance of the group genitive is not very good evidence against a clitic analysis, commenting ‘[i]t is quite possible that the construction arose before, even a long time before, the first knockdown examples’. The construction to which Kroch is referring is the clitic genitive and the ‘knockdown’ examples are ones in which the possessive marking is clearly on the end of the NP, rather than on the possessor, i.e. the group genitives. The idea is that the texts are conservative, and the group genitive was probably found in speech as soon as nominal deflexion became general.

<sup>5</sup> This construction is frequently referred to as the ‘split genitive’, an unfortunate term because it is also used for appositives such as *Edwardes sunu kyninges* ‘King Edward’s son’, which were found in OE. I have used ‘combined genitive’ for the new ME construction because it combines the possessive marker and the *of* possessive. See Allen (2002) for a discussion of the appositives and also Allen (1997: fn. 4).

<sup>6</sup> Norde (1997: 86) gives examples of a similar construction from Early Modern Swedish.

A general problem with any argument of this sort is that we can claim anything about what was going on in (unrecorded) speech. In general, if we have one account which seems plausible but which is not supported by the written record, and another which seems equally plausible and which does account for the recorded facts, we should favour the latter. It is not unreasonable to believe that the group genitive was used in speech before it appeared in the texts. However, we must remember that the English of the EME period was a socially inferior language which lacked anything more than regional standards. It was used mainly to be read by those who could not read Latin or French. While the written language was probably always more conservative than the spoken language, it is likely that the written language was closer to the spoken language in EME than in any other period.

But even assuming that the group genitive did enter speech considerably before it entered the texts, it does not follow that the group genitive arose as soon as the other nominal cases had syncretized, as must be assumed by those who want to say that the group genitive appeared because deflexion made it impossible to maintain the genitive as a case. If we assume a time lag between the appearance of the group genitive in speech and its appearance in the texts, we are surely justified in assuming that there was also a lag between the syncretism of the nongenitive cases and the disappearance of these case forms in the texts. Hypercorrection in OE and EME texts gives good evidence that scribes were conservative in trying to use some distinctions in case forms that probably were not part of their speech. The texts may not give us an accurate *absolute* dating of the group genitive, but they probably give us a pretty good *relative* timing of case syncretism and the appearance of the group genitive. The texts show a long gap between the syncretism of the nongenitive cases (early twelfth to mid thirteenth centuries) and the appearance of the group genitive (late fourteenth century), and it seems reasonable to assume a similar gap in speech.

Kroch also suggests that part of the reason for the lack of examples of the group genitive in the earlier texts is that we cannot expect a corpus of this size to provide many examples which would require an analysis as a group genitive; most of the examples of possessives in the texts involved simple NPs which do not provide evidence deciding between a clitic or an inflection of the possessor noun. Kroch speculates that the group genitive would be 'infrequent' even in PDE texts.

However, the fact is that group genitives are not unusual in texts from c. 1450–1550 (see next section). So the complete lack of group genitives in the first period and the scarcity of them in the second period cannot be attributed to a mere gap in the data caused by insufficient corpus size. Furthermore, the EME texts by no means lack examples in which we might have expected the group genitive, but instead the writer uses the combined genitive. In the texts of this investigation, we find that of 18 texts written prior to 1350, none have the group genitive, but 10 have combined genitives. The combined genitive first appears in English texts in the second half of the eleventh century, which is when we find the first examples of unambiguous *of* genitives like *the king of France*. This means that the combined genitive must have been accepted

as suitable for writing pretty much as soon as it appeared in the language. Now the *of* genitive is at least to some extent due to French influence, but the combined genitive itself was not borrowed from French, but was an English invention. The writers of the EME period showed no prejudice against using this construction which combined a French genitive and an English genitive. Therefore, I think it would be rather surprising if the scribes had balked at using the group genitive in writing if it had been current in speech, so our gap must be considered significant.

### 3.2.2 Arguments for a clitic in EME

3.2.2.1 *The typological argument.* The view that the possessive marker was already similar to the marker in PDE is based more on a typological claim than on empirical evidence. This typological claim is that it is impossible for a language to have a two-case system which consists of genitive versus other. Janda (1981: 65) comments: ‘And it seems that no (other) language opposes a genitive case-inflection to a general case-inflection that conflates all of the possible cases (nominative, accusative, etc.).’ Janda argues that it was the reanalysis of *-es* as the possessive determiner *his* that was responsible for the preservation of the morpheme /-iz/ (1981: 249), since it could not have been maintained as a case inflection.<sup>7</sup> In a similar vein, Lightfoot (1999: 120) assumes that the changes which took place to the case-marking system in EME meant that children in the thirteenth century had a ‘new, caseless grammar’ and were unable to interpret *-es* as a genitive case suffix. Again, the assumption is that genitive case cannot be opposed to a single other case. Lightfoot’s analysis of a phrase like *the cyninges godsunu* ‘the king’s godson’ from the thirteenth century onwards is that the possessive marker was a clitic which case-marks the element in the specifier of the containing DP, schematically:

$$(11) \text{DP}_{[\text{Spec}[\text{the cyning}]] \text{D}_{[\text{L}[\text{es}]] \text{NP}_{[\text{godsunu}]}}$$

This analysis of prenominal possessives for PDE has been pretty standard since it was proposed by Abney (1987) that the possessor NP and the possessive marker are not sisters within a Possessive Phrase, as assumed in earlier analyses. In Abney’s analysis, the possessor is part of a Determiner Phrase (DP) which is the Specifier of a larger DP, and the possessive marker itself is the Determiner of this larger DP. By Lightfoot’s analysis, there was one sudden shift between OE and ME, and ME and PDE prenominal possessives are to be analysed in the same way.

Finally, Weerman and de Wit (1999: 1182) propose a case hierarchy by which it is impossible to have a genitive case when there is no evidence for a distinction between dative and accusative case, and argue that neither Dutch nor EME could maintain the genitive case as an inflection once this distinction was lost.

<sup>7</sup> It is problematic for this assumption that Swedish has also developed a group genitive from the old *-s* inflection, but according to Norde (1997: 91, 2001: 255) there is no evidence that Swedish ever had a *his*-type genitive, which seems indispensable as an intermediate stage for Janda’s hypothesis.

The main problem with the typological argument is that it simply seems not to be true that it is impossible for a language to oppose a genitive case to a single other case.<sup>8</sup> For example, apparently just this system is found in Megleno-Romanian, judging by the discussion of Atanasov (1990: 195–7, 203) and Capidan (1925: 145–50, 154). In some varieties of this close relative of Romanian,<sup>9</sup> the dative case has disappeared; instead one must use a preposition and a noun in the common case. Nouns themselves are no longer generally inflected for case. However, the genitive case still remains in the inflection of the suffixal determiner for singular feminine nouns, which is inflected for genitive versus other.<sup>10</sup> Also, the relative pronoun has a special genitive form which is opposed to a general form for the other cases. It therefore appears that while an opposition of genitive to a general other case is unusual, it is not impossible.

We simply haven't got enough information yet about what sorts of case-marking systems exist in the world's languages to make pronouncements about a genitive versus other system being impossible. Anderson (1999: 65) comments that 'careful descriptions of the range of types of case systems that are evidenced' have yet to be offered.<sup>11</sup>

None of those who have claimed that it is impossible to have a system in which genitive case is opposed to a single other case in the nominal system have backed up this idea with references to any typological studies supporting their claims. It does seem that such a system is unusual, but this is not sufficient reason for assuming that ME could not have had such a system. Note that this sort of system is not without logic as far as the distinctions that it marks are concerned. A language with this kind of system has one case for arguments of a predicate, which can be differentiated in their functions by word order, and another case which marks nouns which are dependents of other nouns. And in fact, it has been argued that the genitive case is generally more resistant to syncretism than other cases are. For example, Plank (1980) suggests that

<sup>8</sup> The typological claims in question must exclude the pronominal forms as evidence for (morphological) genitive case, or else even PDE would have a three-way morphological case system.

<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Timothy Curnow for suggesting that Romanian dialects might be the place for me to look, and to Martin Maiden for pinpointing the dialect I needed and very kindly supplying references, as well as to Laura Daniliuc for translating the Romanian of the crucial bits of Capidan for me. Thanks also to Victor Friedman for helpful comments made concerning my interpretation of these references. Any errors I might have made in representing the Megleno-Romanian facts of course remain my own.

<sup>10</sup> Atanasov, who did his fieldwork in the 1970s, gives a slightly different account from Capidan, but interestingly, the major difference is that Atanasov seems to suggest that this special genitive form can be found in plurals also. It is not at all clear that this represents an extension from an earlier situation, but certainly it does not appear that there has been any move towards abolishing the genitive/other distinction. It should be noted that Atanasov refers to this form as genitive/dative, but he indicates that it is essentially never used in a dative function. Atanasov's and Capidan's use of traditional case terminology, which is not based on the categorial distinctions which are formally made, illustrates one of the difficulties which must be overcome by any typological study of possible case systems.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Blake (1994) only surveys the most common types of systems, and does not venture to pronounce on impossible types. Also, Blake treats PDE as having a genitive case, unlike e.g. Janda's articles, illustrating the difficulties stemming from the fact that different linguists use different criteria to determine whether a language has a particular case. Nakamura (1997) focuses on ergative/absolutive versus nominative/accusative systems and has nothing to offer on our question.

languages generally are more tolerant of ambiguous coding of subject and direct object than they are of nondistinctive coding of the nonclausal relation of an attributive term to its head.

In summary, it appears not to be true that no language has a genitive versus other system of case marking for nouns. At any rate, we have insufficient evidence to assume this. We should reject this purely theoretical reason for assuming there was no genitive case in ME and rather judge the matter according to the available evidence for ME.

3.2.2.2 *Appositives as evidence for a clitic*. One bit of evidence which has sometimes been adduced (e.g. by Kroch, 1997) to argue for a change to a clitic possessive marker at the EME stage is the fact that appositives began to work differently then. In OE, nouns in apposition to each other normally agreed with each other in case:

- (12) Se wæs Ælfredes cyninges godsunu  
 He was Alfred-G king-G godson  
 'He was King Alfred's godson' (ASC(A) 890.4 (Bately, 1986))

But early in EME, we find examples with nonagreement, although agreement is still occasionally found:<sup>12</sup>

- (13) (a) Upponn Herode kingess da33  
 Upon Herod-U king-G day  
 'In King Herod's day' (Orm 257)
- (b) Daviþess kingess kinnessmann  
 David-G king-G kinsman  
 'King David's kinsman' (Orm 13528)

This change to nonagreement is consistent with a treatment of the possessive marker as a clitic, but we have seen (section 3.2.1.1) that the evidence suggests that the genitive still existed as an inflectional category in the *Ormulum*. Also, a clitic analysis is not the only possible one for dealing with these appositives. Space does not permit a discussion of other possible analyses; see Allen (2002) for a detailed discussion of ME appositives to genitives. But they cannot simply be treated as 'group' genitives; Plank (1992: 45) points out that in German, only one appositional noun normally carries the genitive case:

- (14) Schriften König(\*-s) Alfred-s  
 writings King(\*-G) Alfred-G  
 'King Alfred's writings' (Plank, 1992: 45)

This contrasts with modifiers of nouns, which have to agree in case with the noun:

- (15) Söhne Karl-s d-es Groß-en  
 sons Karl-G the-G great-G  
 'Charlemagne's sons' (Plank, 1992: 47)

<sup>12</sup> Generally, the state of agreement in appositives depended on the state of agreement of modifiers. See Allen (2002).

The facts are rather complex and German differs from ME in that English never went through a stage where prenominal possessives were limited in the way they are in German (and Dutch), as was shown in section 3.2.1, but the important point is that German shows that it is possible for a language to have a genitive case which normally causes agreement of the modifiers but does not always demand (or allow) a genitive marker on more than one noun per phrase. It appears that some rather complex titles can sometimes be treated as though they were unitary proper nouns; Plank shows that these sorts of titles pattern with proper nouns in German in being allowed to appear as prenominal possessives, and de Wit (1997: 84) makes a similar demonstration for Dutch.

It seems plausible that the group genitive of English started with this sort of treatment of names with more than one element as a unit for the purposes of inflection. The conclusion must be that the lack of agreement on appositive nouns in ME does not prove that the possessive marker was just like the PDE one.

3.2.2.3 *The separated genitive as evidence for a clitic*. Evidence for the clitic status of the genitive ME has been adduced from the existence of examples such as (16),<sup>13</sup> for example by Janda (1980, 1981).

- (16) ðe was adam is sune  
who was Adam GEN son  
'who was Adam's son' (Gen. & Ex. 493 (a1325, c.1250))

The idea is that the old inflection was reanalysed as a possessive determiner; this reanalysis was facilitated by the dropping of initial 'h' in some dialects, which made the unstressed possessive *his* identical in sound to the old genitive marker.<sup>14</sup> By the analysis of (11), *is* would be the head D (also the position of the PDE clitic). Such an analysis is given for the periphrastic genitives found in other Germanic varieties, such as colloquial Modern Dutch *Jan z'n boek* 'Jan's book', literally 'Jan his book'; see for example Delsing (1998) and Weerman and de Wit (1999), who argue that the ME separated genitives are to be analysed in a similar way.

The construction of (16) has been called by various names, including the '*his* genitive', 'prenominal periphrastic genitive', etc. I will refer to these ME genitives as 'separated genitives' to avoid implying a particular analysis. It is hard to know exactly what to make of the separated genitives found in the EME period, but they do not offer evidence that the inflectional genitive had disappeared. Let us consider the facts concerning the separated genitive in EME. First, it was quite unusual, compared with frequent use of what I will refer to as the 'attached' genitive, in which the possessive marker is not written separately from the possessor N. It is only found in this period

<sup>13</sup> Wyld (1953 [1920]: 315) comments of this example, 'the suffix *is* already separated, although joined to the Noun by a hyphen'. However, manuscripts of this time did not use hyphens in this way; the hyphens in the edition used by Wyld are purely editorial. This particular hyphen does not appear in Arngart's (1968) edition.

<sup>14</sup> Jespersen (1894: 248–55) assumed that this phonological fact led to the reanalysis of 's as a reduction of *his*, but that this reanalysis belonged to a much later period (late fifteenth century). By Jespersen's account, the *his* genitive was originally a different genitive from the inflectional genitive of ME.

in two texts which I examined.<sup>15</sup> It is frequently pointed out (e.g. Wyld 1953 [1920]: 315) that the early texts which have the separated genitive also show clear evidence of ‘h’ dropping, which would have facilitated the confusion of *-(e)s* and unstressed *his*. But there are also (rather later) texts in which the evidence for ‘h’ dropping is even more extreme, but which do not have the separated genitive, e.g. Robert of Gloucester’s *Chronicle*. The phonetic similarity of the two forms does not seem to have prevented most speakers from distinguishing between them.

Second, the separated genitive was nearly completely restricted to masculine proper nouns in the EME period. In *Genesis and Exodus*, there are only six undisputed examples, and five of them involve masculine proper nouns.<sup>16</sup> See Furnivall (1865) for figures on the Otho manuscript of the *Brut*. If this separated genitive represents a prenominal periphrastic possessive, it seems most likely that this was a construction which was primarily used with proper nouns, with an occasional extension to other nouns. The declension of proper nouns, particularly foreign ones, had always presented difficulties, and this construction could have been a way of dealing with them. Alternatively, this way of writing the possessive marker could simply have been an orthographical variant which was particularly used with proper nouns (as suggested by Carstairs, 1987: 156, and others before him, e.g. Furnivall, 1865). Either way, it seems unlikely that the separated genitive represented a wholesale reanalysis of the genitive inflection as a clitic. That the inflectional genitive remained in EME in the texts that have some separated genitives is indicated by the common retention of irregular genitive plurals such as *sustrene* ‘sisters’ in the Otho manuscript of the *Brut*, for example.

Finally, it should be noted that there are no examples at all in this early period like (17), which shows that the separated genitive of Dutch follows the end of an NP/DP, rather than specifically the possessor noun.

- (17) de man met die gekke bril z’n caravan  
 the man with those funny glasses his caravan  
 ‘the man with those funny glasses’s caravan’ (Weerman & de Wit, 1999 39c)

<sup>15</sup> Waldron (1991: 64–5) notes that the separated genitive is a specifically Southwestern feature at the end of the fourteenth century, as evidenced by Dot Map 1188 of the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (LALME), edited by MacIntosh et al. (1986). The Otho manuscript fits the picture of the separated genitive starting in the Southwest and spreading at a later date to other dialects. However, the *Genesis and Exodus* manuscript seems to be written in a West Norfolk dialect (LALME vol. 1: 25), making the separated genitives in this manuscript surprising. There are only six clear examples of the separated genitive in *Genesis and Exodus*, all of them spelled *is* (a possible spelling for the possessive determiner, in variation with *his*), while the separated genitive is more frequent in the Otho *Brut* and is usually spelled *his*. It should also be noted that the Southwestern dialect is not one which shows advanced case deflexion at an early stage, and if the separated genitive is simply a result of deflexion, we would expect to find the earliest examples in say, the *Peterborough Chronicle* or the *Ormulum*.

<sup>16</sup> The proper nouns are *ysac*, *adam*, and *abr(ah)am*. Uninflected *abram* occurs elsewhere in the text as a possessor, and we also find the regular *ysaces*. The example with a common noun is *fellen bi forn ðat loured is fot* ‘fell before that lord’s foot’ at l.2272. There is another, disputed example at l.1295, rendered *ðat dune is siðen* and translated as ‘the hill’s side’ in Arngart’s edition. But Buehler (1974) suggests that *siðen* means ‘later’ here, and that *is* is simply an error. See also Appendix, Table A, footnote a.

The lack of such examples of course does not prove that the EME separated genitive did not have this potential, particularly since the scarcity of examples makes a data gap possible, but it means there is no evidence to force an analysis like that needed for Dutch.

### 3.2.3 *Summary*

There is nothing to prevent us from analysing the genitives of EME, at least the attached genitives, as inflections, and there is good reason to believe that they require a different analysis from PDE genitives. It is interesting to ask why the productive genitive inflection should have been kept in ME but lost in Dutch. Weerman and de Wit argue that the genitive in both Dutch and English was doomed as a case once sufficient deflexion took place, pointing out that it is impossible to account for the loss of the genitive in Dutch as a result of phonological erosion, the explanation given for the loss of the other cases, since the genitive case was the most salient one phonologically. They are quite correct in this, but their assumption that prenominal genitive case was lost in Dutch and English because of deflexion offers no answer to the question of why prenominal genitive case has died out in Icelandic, just as in the Germanic languages which underwent case deflexion. The problem is that Modern Icelandic still has a very healthy case-marking system in which four cases are distinguished for nouns and their modifiers.<sup>17</sup> Genitive case has not died out in Icelandic, and it is perfectly ordinary to have a postnominal possessive in the genitive case:

- (18) þetta hús mannsins  
this house man-G-the-G  
'this house of the man' (Delsing, 1998: ex. 32b)

But prenominal genitives have similar limitations to those found in Dutch. Since the proffered explanation for the loss of the prenominal genitive in Dutch does not work for Icelandic, we must doubt its explanatory power for Dutch, as we would like to have a similar explanation for all the Germanic languages which have reduced prenominal genitives pretty much to names, kinship terms, and pronouns.

I have no explanation to offer for why the loss of prenominal genitive case has been so widespread in Germanic, but I think the explanation for the difference between English and Dutch might lie in the fact that the genitive inflection proper to the masculine *a*-stems (viz. *-es*) started invading other noun classes in OE and had become pretty regular by the beginning of the EME period. When the inflection became almost completely regular, it was as easy for ME speakers to use it as it is for PDE speakers to use the plural inflection. But in Middle and Early Modern Dutch, where grammatical gender was retained, the genitive inflection was much more irregular. It would therefore have been attractive to Dutch speakers to use alternative constructions, either the periphrastic

<sup>17</sup> Delsing (1998: 88) indicates that prenominal possessives in Icelandic are best if they are proper nouns and only marginal with ordinary nouns.

Table 1. *Complex possessors in earlier English*

Period	Texts	Texts w/Gp Gen.	Texts w/Comb. Gen
Pre-1350	18	0	10
1375-1429	9	2	5
1430-1570	16	9	10
1579-1718	10	6	0

genitive or the construction which used the preposition *van* (similar to the *of* genitive in English).

### 3.3 *The genitive in later ME (1300–1500)*

In later ME, the morphological evidence for an inflectional analysis of the attached genitive is lessened as agreement disappears from the texts, but the syntactic evidence, i.e. the sole use of the combined genitive as the prenominal genitive used to modify complex NPs, remains until the late fourteenth century. Table 1, based on the results given in the Appendix, shows how the group genitive first starts to appear and then ousts the combined genitive.

It is significant that the first group genitives show up just when the regular genitive ending *-es* had become a possibility for all nouns, as pointed out by Jespersen (1942), Mustanoja (1960), Carstairs (1987), and Allen (1997). At the time when the first group genitives appear in the texts, we still find some examples of irregular genitives. However, by this time, all nouns had the option of using the regular marker *-(e)s*. This timing makes sense if we assume that once the regular genitive affix had become a possibility with all nouns, it became possible for speakers to treat it as a clitic. The fact that the group genitive and the combined genitive coexisted for a long period is most easily accounted for if we assume that speakers now had two ways of analysing the genitive: either as an inflection, or possibly a clitic with a very specific host (i.e. the possessor N) or as a ‘full-blown’ clitic which attached to the end of the NP/DP.

It should be noted that Norde (2001: 254) suggests that the English chronology ‘may be purely accidental’, basing this comment on the fact that she presents examples (2001: 251–2; see also Norde, 1997: 135–7) in earlier Swedish which she claims show that *-s* was already a ‘phrase marker’ at a time when the other cases marked nouns, not NPs. Norde says that the *-s* appears at the end of the NP, rather than on the possessor N in these examples. However, Norde’s examples are unconvincing; all of them are also amenable to an interpretation as having a noun in the genitive case (with failure of agreement by modifiers). It is true enough that the *-s* is on the last word of the NP in all these examples, but in all but one of these examples, this is in fact the possessor N. The only example which has an uninflected possessor is *fadhir mins hws*

'my father's house', but Norde (1997: 100) notes that the general oblique form of *r*-stem nouns is sometimes identical with the nominative singular. *Fadhir* is in fact found as an oblique form in the text from which this example is taken (e.g. *til sin fadhir* 'to his father' at p. 31.30). This suggests that Norde's example could be interpreted as having covert genitive case for the noun, with *min* having the ordinary agreement of possessive adjectives with the nouns they modified, rather than *min* followed by a clitic.

In a footnote, Carstairs (1987: 154) mentions the possibility that genitive case allomorphy remained after the appearance of the group genitive in Southern English. However, this lingering (and only occasional) allomorphy is unproblematic for an account in which the general lack of agreement allowed a reanalysis because it worked for most examples, but the new analysis and the old one coexisted for a long period.

The separated genitive becomes considerably more common in later ME, although it is always less common than the attached genitive, and we have better evidence concerning its properties. One thing which becomes clear is that the separated genitive was not a colloquial construction in later ME, as it is in modern Dutch and German.<sup>18</sup> For example, it is found quite frequently in Trevisa's translation of 1387 of the *Polychronicon* of Ranulf Higden, where I found 28 examples of separated genitives in the first 201 pages in volume I of this work (all with proper nouns). While it might be argued that the separated genitive is rare in EME texts because it represented a colloquial periphrastic construction, it is clear that by the end of the fourteenth century it was quite respectable for literature aimed at a highly literate audience (albeit one not educated in Latin).

The separated genitive always has the same distribution as the attached genitives, although it is more common with proper nouns than with common nouns. That is, in the period before the late fourteenth century, it is always found directly adjacent to the possessor noun, just as the attached genitive is. See the Appendix for the data supporting this claim. After this period, it participates in the group genitive, just as the attached genitive did:

- (19) my seid lorde Bysshop of Exeter is commaundement  
'my said Lord Bishop of Exeter's commandment' (Shillingford 47.10 (1447))
- (20) as for the matter of my Lord of Canterbury ys cortte  
'as for the matter of my Lord of Canterbury's court' (Cely 153.24 (1482))

It is important to note that these examples do not antedate examples of group genitives in which the possessive marker is attached, and therefore did not serve as a model for the group genitive. Examples like (19) and (20), with a clitic-like genitive written separately, are unsurprising under the assumption that the practice of writing the possessive marker separate was a reflection of its clitic status. It is more surprising

<sup>18</sup> Norwegian is a modern Germanic language which has a prenominal periphrastic genitive (using the reflexive pronoun, which does not agree in number and person). Lars-Olaf Delsing (p.c.) informs me that this construction is not at all colloquial in Norwegian.

under this assumption that the separated genitive, like the attached genitive, also occurs in combined genitives:

- (21) Dame Phylippe, the kyng ys daughter of Fraunce (Gregory 78.17 (c. 1452))

Such examples are rather difficult to explain if the *ys* is a possessive determiner, but make sense as an orthographical variant of the inflectional genitive.

Examples like (21) show that the separated genitive was not used simply to have some way of making a possessive from a complex NP/DP such as *the king of England*, and a scrutiny of just about any text using the separated genitive confirms this observation. For example, although Trevisa frequently used the separated genitive with proper nouns, especially those ending in *s*, his usual way of making the possessor in a complex NP possessive was the combined genitive (with the genitive written attached). There are ten examples of this construction in the portions I examined. Trevisa did not commonly use the group genitive; I found only one example, and it is an attached genitive:

- (22) but þe kyng of Fraunces men weren i-slawe  
 ‘But the king of France’s men were slain’ (POLYCH, VIII,349.380)

These facts seem best explained as follows. For Trevisa, the separated genitive had the same syntax as the attached genitive, that is, they can be considered variant forms of the same morpheme (either an inflection or a invariant possessive determiner), although the form *his* was disproportionately frequent with proper nouns (as was a lack of inflection). The genitive was usually more inflection-like than clitic-like. However, it could occasionally be treated as a ‘real’ clitic, occurring at the end of the NP/DP.

The assumption that the separated genitive had the same analysis as the attached genitive immediately explains the fact that it uniformly did not agree with the possessor in gender at this stage, but is invariant, being some variant of (*h*)*is*. It is found with both feminine and plural<sup>19</sup> possessors, as in (23) and (24).

- (23) and the queen ys modyr  
 ‘and the queen’s mother’<sup>20</sup> (Gregory 232.27 (c. 1452))  
 (24) . . . to your hurt and othyr men ys grete avaylle  
 ‘to your great hurt and other men’s great avail’ (J. Paston I 53.8 (1458))

This makes the late ME separated genitive different from colloquial German or Dutch, where the possessive determiner agrees with the possessor. However, it must be noted

<sup>19</sup> Janda (1981: 82) states that ‘there do not seem to be any examples – in either ME or EME – of genitive constructions of the form *plural* (possessor) noun(-phrase) + *his* + (possessed) NP’, although he cautiously notes that this could be an artifact of the small sample. Such genitives are found when we look for them in texts which contain a reasonable number of separated genitives, illustrating the limitations of writing the history of a construction like this from handbooks. It should be noted that while (24) is not the only example of a plural *his* genitive which I have found in the late ME period, they are not at all common, presumably because of the preference to use the separated genitive only with proper nouns.

<sup>20</sup> I have checked to make certain that this is not an appositive ‘the queen, his mother’.

that the fact that this possessive marker did not agree in gender with the possessor does not prove that it could not have been a possessive determiner. In Afrikaans there are different possessive pronouns for different genders, but the standard possessive construction is a periphrastic construction which uses a single form *se*, generally thought to come historically from an unemphatic form of *sy[n]* 'his' (Donaldson, 1993: 98):

- (25) Dit was die vrou wat so pas hier was se kind  
It was the lady that just here was POSS child  
'It was the lady who was just here's child' (Donaldson ex. 146)

It should finally be noted that the fact that this genitive marker is written separately does not necessarily show that it was not an inflectional affix, because it was not unknown for clearly inflectional affixes to be written detached from the words which they inflected in ME. In particular, the past participle was often written as though it were two words:

- (26) *y yove* at London  
'given at London' (Chanc. Indent. 234.14 (1426))

The *y* here is the ME reflex of the prefix *ge-* which was optionally attached to the past participle in OE. It must be admitted, however, that inflectional suffixes were not normally written detached from the stem.

### 3.3.1 Summary

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the group genitive makes its appearance. The facts suggest that at this period, there were two types of genitive: a more clitic-like one, used in the group genitive, and a more inflection-like one, found in the combined genitive. Most examples are ambiguous between the two. If the more clitic-like genitive is to be treated as a possessive determiner, it is clear that speakers did not simply think of it as the same as *his*, since the separated genitive did not agree in gender with its head. The attached and separated genitives require the same analysis in later ME and cannot be equated with the more inflectional and the more clitic-like genitive, respectively.

Alternatively, we could suggest a uniform analysis by which the possessive marker was a clitic even at the EME stage, but at that stage it was one which required a very specific host, unlike the PDE possessive marker. Then in later ME, this clitic became less selective in its host, attaching either to the possessor N or the NP/DP containing it. Such an analysis seems inconsistent with treating this clitic as a possessive determiner, i.e. the head D. Either way, if we want to say that there was a change from OE to EME in the status of the possessive marker, we must say that there was a further change in later ME when the group genitive appeared.

The separated genitive becomes much more common at the end of the fourteenth century than it was earlier, and it is not restricted in register. It could be that the writing of the genitive separately from the possessor noun was a reflection of

the language-user's feeling that the genitive ending was in some sense less closely associated with its host than other inflections were, although the near-restriction of the separated genitive to proper nouns in all periods is puzzling if it is simply to be equated with the clitic-like genitive of PDE. The data of the Appendix show no correlation between the existence of the separated genitive in a given text and the existence of group genitives in the same text, nor do they support the idea that the separated genitive served as a model for the group genitive. Rather, it seems likely that the generalization of the genitive inflection to all nouns in this period made a reanalysis of an inflection-like genitive as a clitic possible.

#### 4 EModE

If we treat the combined genitive of ME as involving an inflectional affix and the group genitive as involving a clitic, then the complete ousting of the combined genitive by the group genitive in EModE represents the final stage of deflexion in English.

The other development in EModE in prenominal genitives is the appearance of agreement of the separated genitive with the possessor. It has often been noted that this agreement is a late phenomenon in English (e.g. by Wyld, 1953 [1920]: 316; Janda, 1980: 249; Allen, 1997: 117; etc.). However, so far as I know, no systematic study into exactly when this agreement started and whether it co-occurred with nonagreement and how long it lasted has been carried out previously.<sup>21</sup> The results of my own investigation show that the first examples of agreement with a possessor which is not third-person masculine appear in the late sixteenth century:

- (27) but in his absence one Curio a gentleman of Naples of lyttle wealth and lesse witte haunted *Lucilla hir company* (Lyly, *Euphues*, 1578 (Bond ed. 237.8))
- (28) *Beauty & agilitie their fame*, hath their delyte  
'The fame of beauty and agility have their delight' (QE Bo. Pr. III.ii.32)

I found no examples of nonagreement past 1552, but agreeing examples are rare because the separated genitive was only used with masculine singular possessors by most authors. I think that the agreeing genitive of EModE texts was essentially a learned reanalysis, as suggested by Carstairs (1987: 156). Janda (2001: 303) comments that the *his* genitive 'shows hypercorrective hallmarks suggesting an origin among a much more numerous body of barely, or even non-literate speakers'. While I agree that the periphrastic genitive of EModE shows hypercorrective hallmarks, there is no

<sup>21</sup> The matter is complicated by the fact that some clearly spurious examples of early agreement have been introduced into the literature, as well as some dubious examples, e.g. Mustanoja's (1960: 160) example *Felice hir fairnesse*, which is amenable to an analysis as left dislocation, rather than a possessive, when we look at the context. See Allen (1997: 126–8) for a thorough discussion of these examples, which are repeated from one work to another without scrutiny. Jespersen's (1894¶18.1, 1942: §17.9) discussion of the origins of the construction contains many insights, but suffers from an acceptance of these examples as early examples of a periphrastic construction. It is possible that left dislocation served as a model for the periphrastic construction, as it is structurally ambiguous. But it is only by rejecting the possibly left-dislocated examples that we can tell a coherent story about agreement of the separated genitive.

reason to assume that the hypercorrection stems from an earlier periphrastic genitive with an invariant possessive determiner; rather, the timing seems to suggest that the hypercorrection stems from a reanalysis of the group genitive. I think it is no coincidence that the agreeing periphrastic possessive appeared in English just when it did. By the late sixteenth century, the evidence that the possessive marker was a syntactically separate entity had become quite clear because the group genitive had nearly completely swept the field and displaced the combined genitive.<sup>22</sup> The timing makes sense if we assume that it was only when the possessive marker had clearly become a clitic that literate people started to interpret this clitic as identical to the masculine singular possessive determiner and began substituting the ‘correct’ agreeing form after feminine and plural possessors.

A discussion of the disappearance of these periphrastic genitives in English would require a separate paper and goes beyond the topic of the effect of deflexion on the development of the English genitive. However, some mention must be made of the sociolinguistic status of this construction, as this bears on the idea (which I have argued against) that PDE genitive can be seen as a continuation of these genitives. It appears that the hypercorrect periphrastic genitive has never taken very strong hold in English, and it must be emphasized that it cannot be regarded as colloquial; example (28) suggests that it was quite literally the queen’s English, and one of the texts which shows the greatest use of the separated genitive is Lyly’s *Euphues*, which is so noted for its ornate and artificial style that there is a word *euphuism* which means ‘an affected style in imitation of that of Lyly’. Some writers seem to have regarded the separated genitive as solemn. In the *Barrington Letters* of the early seventeenth century, most of the writers do not use the separated genitive at all. However, the construction is found in most of John Barrington’s letters (twelve times). This is a relatively high frequency, but it turns out that this writer uses a separated genitive always and only when referring to God:

(29) to God his protection (Barr. Let. 46, p.77.2 (John Barrington, 1629))

(30) to the lord his protection (Barr. Let 116, p. 135.2 (John Barrington, 1630))

John Barrington uses the separated genitive with *lord* only when the lord in question is God. Otherwise, he writes *lord(’s)*. The separated genitive seems to have had religious connotations for this writer, perhaps brought on by the use of *for Jesus Christ his sake* in *The Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>23</sup> We also have the comment of Joseph Addison in issue 135 (1711) of the *Spectator* that *his* (which he believed to be the origin of *’s*) was still retained ‘in writing and in all the solemn offices of our religion’.

<sup>22</sup> The fact that I found no examples in the seventeenth-century texts which I looked at (but did find group genitives) is indicative of how infrequent they had become, but see Altenberg (1982: 61–2) for a very few seventeenth-century examples.

<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested that the purpose of the separated genitive in this phrase in the *Prayer Book* was to indicate that the vowel of the genitive marker was to be pronounced for the correct cadence; see Jespersen (1894: 327 n.1) and also Brook (1965: 57).

The evidence from English dialects suggests that a periphrastic genitive was never part of colloquial English, as it is in Dutch and German.<sup>24</sup> If it had been, we would expect it to be mentioned in Wright (1905), but it is not. It is true that some influential prescriptive grammarians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were at pains to tell their readers that *’s* did not represent a reduction of *his*, as many well-educated people believed, but it is not likely that prescriptive grammarians would have managed to extirpate from all dialects a construction that had its roots in colloquial speech, any more than the prescriptive grammarians of Dutch and German. Prescriptive grammarians may have been responsible for the disappearance of the prenominal periphrastic genitive from literature and solemn language, but if so, they had an easy job, because the fact that English had long had a widely accepted prenominal possessive in *(-e)s* meant that the periphrastic construction offered no advantage. In contrast, in Dutch and German, where the *-s* genitive has been restricted essentially to proper nouns and kinship terms, the periphrastic construction has an obvious function in allowing the use of more complex NP/DPs as prenominal possessives.

## 5 Conclusions

In this article, I have presented data to give a firm empirical basis for discussion concerning the best analysis of the development of the prenominal genitive from OE to PDE. I have not argued for a specific analysis but have presented facts which suggest that the transition from EME to PDE is easiest to deal with in a framework which makes no sharp distinction between clitics and inflections. If we want to treat the PDE possessive marker as a clitic, it seems best to say that it went through a stage intermediate between a typical inflection and a typical clitic. A promising treatment of the ME genitive is as an edge-located inflection which was quite selective about its host: it must be a noun, and furthermore it must be the possessor noun. By the fifteenth century, it was still selective in that the host is always a noun, but the noun does not need to be the possessor anymore. The role of deflexion here seems to have been to

<sup>24</sup> This statement is rather at odds with Jespersen’s (1894: 327) comment that he is presenting examples ‘from Chaucer down to the vulgar speech or burlesque style of our days’. Jespersen only gives two post-Shakespearean examples, with the example from W. S. Gilbert, in a verse in which the *his* is clearly used for humorous effect to save the metre by adding an extra syllable, representing the ‘burlesque’. The example which Jespersen presumably thought of as reflecting ‘vulgar’ speech is from Thackeray’s *Pendennis*, where a housekeeper is made to say ‘in King George the First his time’. By ‘vulgar’, Jespersen probably meant ‘hypercorrect’ here. Concerning this example, Phillipps (1978: 119) says, ‘To suggest bucolic overtones when a rustic guide conducts a party over a stately home, the novelist revives that Tudor phenomenon, which Jespersen . . . calls the quasi-genitive, as in John Smith his mark.’ A single example from a writer trying to convey a way of speaking other than his own is untrustworthy evidence. Against Jespersen’s comment (which is removed from his 1942 (§17.9) discussion although the list of examples stays the same), we have the evidence that prescriptive grammars of the early nineteenth century did not find it necessary to warn their readers not to use the *his* genitive. Cobbett’s grammar of 1823 mentions that there are different opinions concerning the origin and the proper use of *’s*, but does not mention the *his* genitive. Most grammars of the very late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, such as Murray’s influential grammar of 1795, do not even mention the origin of *’s*.

create structurally ambiguous strings which were liable to reanalysis, rather than to force reanalysis. We can discern these stages in ME and EModE:

(31) Stages of ME and EModE

1. Possessive marker is always adjacent to the possessor noun; occasionally written separate from this noun after c.1250 (c.1150–c.1380)
2. Possessive marker still usually adjacent to the possessor noun, but ‘group genitives’ become increasingly common at the expense of the combined genitive; separated genitives are reasonably common (but less common than attached) and do not agree with the possessor (c.1380–c.1550)
3. Combined genitive disappears. Separated genitive unusual but (always?) agrees with the possessor (c.1550–1700)

There is no empirical basis for the view, based on an unproven typological hypothesis, that once sufficient deflexion had occurred the only way the old genitive marker could survive was to be reanalysed as a clitic. In contrast, there is good evidence that the genitive did not become like the possessive of PDE as soon as deflexion took place, but went through a long stage in which it retained inflectional characteristics.

We must be cautious in our application of typological knowledge to historical linguistics. If all other things are equal, we would value a historical analysis assuming typologically common stages over one which assumed a stage which was typologically unusual, or worse, unknown. However, all other things are rarely equal. When it comes to case-marking systems at least, our typological knowledge is not so great as to outweigh other considerations. We are not in a position yet to say that certain types of case-marking systems are never found in human languages. Strong textual evidence for a particular system must carry greater weight than the fact that such a system is unusual.

A final point concerns the use of evidence from other Germanic languages to elucidate ME syntax. Since Modern Dutch in particular is so similar in many ways to ME, it is only natural to look to it to fill in some of the data gaps which are inevitable in the study of ME, as is done, for example, by Kemenade (1987) and Los (1999). This is enlightening in many instances, but caution is needed. We cannot simply assume that if Modern Dutch has a construction which looks similar to a construction found in earlier English, those constructions had the same properties or arose in the same way. In the case of the agreeing prenominal periphrastic genitive, there is good evidence that the construction arose in EModE and earlier Dutch in different ways as well as having quite different sociolinguistic profiles.

*Author's address:*

*The Australian National University*

*School of Language Studies*

*Building 110*

*Faculty of Arts*

*Canberra*

*ACT 0200*

*Australia*

*cindy.allen@anu.edu.au*

## APPENDIX: DETAILS OF THE INVESTIGATION

Table A. *Separated, combined, and group genitives in ME and EModE*

Text	Date	Sep.	<i>(h)is</i>		Comb.	Comb- sep.	Gp	Gp-sep.
			only	non-agr <i>(h)is</i>				
PC (Cont.)	c.1131–54	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Vesp. A. xxii	a1150, OE	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Trinity B 14.52	a1225, OE	No	–	–	1 ex.	No	No	No
Lambeth	1185–1225, OE	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Vesp. D. xiv	a1150, c1125	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
V&V	c.1200	No	–	–	1 ex.	No	No	No
Orm	c.1180	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Dialect AB	c.1220–5	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Wohunge	1st half 13thC	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Gen&Ex	a1325, c.1250	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Brut O	s.xiii <sup>2</sup> , post 1189	Yes	Yes	No <sup>a</sup>	Yes	No	No	No
O&N	s.xiii <sup>2</sup> , 1189–1216	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Kentse	c.1275	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
SEL(L)	c.1300	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Havelok	c.1300, 1295–1310	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Rob.Glo.	1300, 1325	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
A3enbite	1340	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Early Ps.	1st half 14thC	No	–	–	1 ex.	No	No	No
Cursor M (Vesp.)	c.1350	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
PiersP	c.1377–81, c.1400	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Chaucer	1368–1400, c.1400–10	rare	Yes	No	Yes	No	3ex.	No
Lon. Eng.	1385–1425	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Trevisa	1387	Yes	Yes	1 ex.	Yes	No	1 ex.	No
Vernon	c.1390	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
BBrut	c.1400	No	–	–	Yes	No	No	No
Sig.HV	1417–1422	No	–	–	No <sup>b</sup>	No	No	No
Chancery I	1384–1429	No <sup>c</sup>	–	–	No	No	No	No
Chancery II	1430–62	2 ex.	Yes	2 ex.	No	No	No	No
JulNor	c.1435, c. 1374	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Mirror (Th)	MS 1430–1440	No	–	–	1 ex.	No	No	No
Kempe	before 1450	No	–	–	Yes	No	Yes	No
Shillingford	1447–50	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Gregory	c.1452	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Stonor	1430–1483	Yes	Yes	2 ex.	1 ex.	1 ex.	1 ex. <sup>d</sup>	2 ex.
Capgrave	b.1398, 1451	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Malory	fl.1475	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
J. Paston II	b.1442, 1461–79	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Cely	1472–88	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Caxton	b.1422(?), 1473–90	No <sup>c</sup>	–	–	1 ex.	No	No	No
Ricart	1479–1506	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	1 ex.

Table A. *Continued*

Text	Date	Sep.	(h)is only	non-agr (h)is	Comb.	Comb- sep.	Gp	Gp-sep.
Elyot	b. ?1490, 1531	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Ascham	b. 1515, 1552–70	Yes	Yes	Yes(1 pl)	No	No	Yes	No
Machyn	1550–5	Yes	Yes	No	1 ex. <sup>f</sup>	No	1 ex.	2 ex.
Lyly	b. 1554(?), 1579	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
QEI	b. 1533, 1593	1 ex.	No (1 pl)	No	No	No	No	No
Shpre	b. 1564, 1603–23	No	–	–	No	No	No	No
Bacon	b. 1561, 1605	1 ex.	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Barrington	1629–30	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Harley	1626–43	2 ex.	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No
Nicholas	1641–60	Yes	No (1 fem)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Haddock	1657–1718	No	–	–	No	No	2 ex.	No
Welwood	b. 1652, 1700	1 ex.	No (1 pl)	No	No	No	2 ex.	No
Addison	b. 1672, 1699–1711	1 ex	Yes	No	No <sup>g</sup>	No	Yes	No

<sup>a</sup> The often-quoted example from a later portion of this text, *for Gwennyfer his loue woman heom leofust* (1.11101), is uncertain because it may mean ‘For Guinevere, his love, woman dearest to him’, rather than ‘for Guinevere’s love, woman dearest to him’. See the entry for **luue n.** in Kurath et al. (1956) for examples showing that ‘love’ was sometimes used in this period to mean ‘loved one’.

<sup>b</sup> But one example which could be called a ‘mixed group’; the possessor has inflection, with no extraposition: *a man of the Ducs of Orliane* Sig.HV 70.4 (1479?).

<sup>c</sup> The example at item 165.7 has been excluded because the Proceedings of Parliament was not included in my investigation.

<sup>d</sup> I also found two examples of ‘group’ possessors without any possessive marker.

<sup>e</sup> One dubious example at Reynard 42.18.

<sup>f</sup> This example has no inflection written: *be-twyn the lord warden(s) servands of Kent* (65.22). The parentheses indicate an editorial emendation in the edition. There are also two examples of mixed groups: *my lord Dakurs of the North doythur* (29.28) and *at the bysshopes of London plase* (77.21). Machyn usually uses no inflection at all instead of either the group genitive or the combined genitive.

<sup>g</sup> But one example with a relative clause postmodifier, rather than a PP.

Note: These results refer only to the portions of the works which I read, as specified below; e.g. no claim is being made that Shakespeare never used the group genitive, but only that it is not found in the two plays read for this investigation. ‘Yes’ for a category means that more than one example was found. I have sometimes specified the number of examples when it is low. Examples of categories:

Sep. = *the king (h)ys daughter/son* (with what looks like a possessive pronoun written separately as a possessive marker).

(h)is only: Yes = *her* and *their* (or variants) are never used as a possessive marker.

non-agr (h)is (non-agreeing his): Yes = *Margery his daughter*, *men his lips*, etc.

Comb.(Combined) = *the kings daughter of France* (N.B. possessive is attached).

Comb-sep.(Combined and separated) = *the king his daughter of France*.

Gp = *the king of Frances daughter* (N.B. possessive is attached). Only possessive NPs containing a PP are counted as group genitives.

Gp-sep.(Group and separated) = *the king of France his daughter*.

### Texts used

When more than one date for a text is indicated, separated by commas, the first date is the presumed date of the manuscript while the second is the presumed date of composition of the text. I have sometimes given an author's birth date instead of/ followed by the date of the work. EETS = Early English Text Society. Where page/line numbers are not noted, I have read the entire work. I have supplemented my reading with searches executed on the first edition of the *Penn–Helsinki Parsed Corpus of Middle English (PPCME)* where a portion of a text is included in that corpus. This corpus is an annotated and somewhat extended version of the ME part of the Helsinki Corpus of English texts created under the supervision of Matti Rissanen at the University of Helsinki. The annotations were carried out under the direction of Anthony Kroch at the University of Pennsylvania.

PC (Cont.) = The First and Final Continuations of the *Peterborough chronicle*. Clark, C. (ed.) (1970). *The Peterborough chronicle 1070–1154*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Vesp. A.xxii = the homilies in Cotton MS Vespasian A.xxii. Morris, R. (ed.) (1867–8). *Old English homilies of the 12th and 13th centuries. First Series*. EETS 29, 34.

Trinity B 14.52 = Morris, R. (ed.) (1873). *Old English homilies of the 12th and 13th centuries. Second Series*. EETS 53.

Lambeth = The homilies and the version of the *Poema Morale* of Lambeth MS 487. Morris, R. (ed.) (1867–8). *Old English homilies of the 12th and 13th centuries. First Series*. EETS 29, 34.

Vesp. D.xiv = The two pieces found in MS Vespasian D.xiv which were composed in the twelfth century. Förster, M. (1925). Die spätaltenglische Übersetzung der pseudo-anselmschen Marien Predigt. *Palaestra* 148: 15–40. Warner, R. (ed.) (1917). *Early English homilies from the twelfth century MS Vesp. D. xiv*. EETS 152. 120–5 (= *Elucidarium* or *Old English Honorius*).

V&V = Holthausen, F. (ed.) (1889, 1921). *Vices and virtues*. EETS 89.

Orm = Holt, R. (ed.) (1878). *The Ormulum: with the notes and glossary of Dr R. M. White*. Vol. II. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dialect AB = two works written in the 'AB' dialect of the early thirteenth century. I read parts I–V of the *Ancrene wisse* and all of *Sawles warde*. Tolkien, J. R. R. (ed.) (1962). *The English text of the 'Ancrene riwle': Ancrene wisse*. EETS 249. Wilson, R. M. (ed.) (1938). *Sawles warde*. Kendal: Titus Wilson.

Wohunge = the 'Wooing' group. Thompson, W. M. (ed.) (1958). *þe wohunge of ure lauerd*. EETS 241.

Gen&Ex = Arngart, O. (ed.) (1968). *The Middle English Genesis and Exodus*. Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup.

Brut O = the Cotton Otho C.xiii version of Lazamon's *Brut*. Brook, G. L. & R. F. Leslie (eds.) (1963, 1978). *Lazamon: Brut*. EETS 250, 277. Lines 1–3,000.

O&N = the Cotton Caligula A.ix version of *The owl and the nightingale*. Stanley, E. G. (ed.) (1972). *The owl and the nightingale*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Kentse = the *Kentish Sermons*. Hall, J. (ed.) (1920). *Selections from Early Middle English 1130–1250*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 214–22.

SEL(L) = Horstmann, C. (ed.) (1887). *The early South-English legendary; or, lives of saints*. EETS 87. 1–150.

Havelok = Smithers, G. V. (ed.) (1987). *Havelok*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Rob.Glo. = Wright, W. A. (1965) [1887]. *The metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*. Rolls Series 86. London: Kraus Reprint. Vol. I of the 'A' MS (Cotton MS Caligula A.xi) version.

Azenbite = Gradon, P. (ed.) (1975). *Dan Michel's Azenbite of inwyt or Remorse of conscience*. Vol. I: *Text*. Oxford University Press.

- Early Ps. = Bülbring, Karl D. (ed.) (1891). *The earliest complete English prose psalter*. EETS. 97. 1–150.
- Cursor M (Vesp.) = The first two volumes of the Vespasian A.iii version of the *Cursor mundi*. Morris, R. (ed.) (1874, 1876). *Cursor mundi*. EETS 57, 59.
- PiersP = The 'B' version of *Piers Plowman*. Schmidt, A. V. C. (ed.) (1978). *The vision of Piers Plowman*. London: Dent.
- Chaucer = various works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Benson, L. D. (ed.) (1987). *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3rd edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. The pieces read were *The Book of the Duchess*, *House of Fame*, and books I and II of *Troilus and Cressida*.
- Lon.Eng. = Daunt, M. and R. W. Chambers (eds.). (1967) [1931]. *A Book of London English 1384–1425*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Trevisa = John Trevisa's translation of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*. Lumby, J. R. (ed.) (1876). *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, monachi Cestrensis: English translations of John Trevisa and of an unknown writer of the fifteenth century*. Rolls Series 41. 1–201 of vol. 1 and 1–201 of vol. 2 (English is every other page) and PPCME selections.
- Vernon = the version of the *Mirror of St Edmund* in the Vernon MS. Horstmann, Carl (ed.) (1895). *Early Yorkshire writers*. Vol. I. London: Swan Sonnenschein. 219–40.
- BBrut = Brie, F. (ed.) (1906). *The Brut, or the chronicle of England*. EETS 131. 1–16.17, 28.9–217.5 and the PPCME selections.
- Sig.HV = The signet letters of Henry V. Fisher, J. H., M. Richardson & J. L. Fisher (eds.) (1984). *An anthology of chancery English*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Chancery I = The later Signet letters and other Privy Seal letters and Indentures through 1429 found in Fisher et al. (see Sig.HV).
- Chancery II = the later Privy Seal letters and Indentures from 1430 found in Fisher et al. (see Sig.HV).
- JulNor = Beer, F. (ed.) (1978). *Julian of Norwich's revelations of divine love. The shorter version*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.
- Mirror (Th) = The Thornton MS version of the *Mirror of St Edmund*. Perry, G. G. (ed.) (1921) [1866]. *English prose treatises of Richard Rolle de Hampole*. EETS 20.
- Kempe = Meech, S. & Hope E. Allen (eds.) (1940). *The book of Margery Kempe*. EETS 212. 100–60 and PPCME selections.
- Shillingford = Moore, S. A. (ed.) (1965) [1871]. *Letters and papers of John Shillingford, mayor of Exeter 1447–50*. Camden Society NS 2. New York. 1–32, 35–40, 43–60 and 66–8 plus PPCME selections.
- Gregory = Gairdner, J. (ed.) (1876). *Gregory's chronicle: the historical collections of a citizen of London in the fifteenth century*. Camden Society NS 17 Westminster: Officers of the Society.
- Stonor = Kingsford, C. L. (ed.) (1919). *The Stonor letters and papers, 1290–1483*. Camden Society Third Series 29, 30. London: Officers of the Society. I have excluded items which are not letters.
- Capgrave = Munro, J. J. (ed.) (1910). *Lives of St Augustine and St Gilbert of Sempringham and a sermon*. EETS 140.
- Malory = Field, P. J. C. (ed.) (1990). *The works of Sir Thomas Malory*. 3rd edition. Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press. 7–152.
- J. Paston II = Davis, N. (ed.) (1971). *Paston letters and papers of the fifteenth century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. I have confined my investigation to the letters of John II.
- Cely = Hanham, A. (ed.) (1975). *The Cely letters, 1472–1488*. EETS 273.
- Caxton = Crotch, W. J. B. (ed.) (1956). *The prologues and epilogues of William Caxton*. EETS 176. Blake, N. F. (ed.) (1970). *The history of Reynard the fox. Translated from the Dutch original by William Caxton*. EETS 263.

- Ricart = Smith, L. T. (ed.) (1872). *Ricart's kalendar: the maire of Bristowe is kalendar*. Camden NS 5. I read only the parts which were by Ricart himself.
- Elyot = Elyot, T. (1970) [1531]. *The book named the governor, 1531*. Menston, England: Scolar Press. 1–60.
- Ascham = *The Scholemaster and A discourse on the affaires of the state of Germanie*. Wright, W. (ed.) (1904). *Roger Ascham: English Works*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Machyn = Nichols, J. G. (ed.) (1848). *The diary of Henry Machyn, citizen and merchant-taylor of London. From A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563*. Camden Society NS 42. London: J. B. Nichols & Son. I read the entries for 1550–1555.
- Lyly = Bond, Richard W. (ed.) (1902). *The complete works of John Lyly*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- QE1 = the prose parts of Queen Elizabeth I's *Boethius*. Pemberton, C. (ed.) (1899). *Queen Elizabeth's Englishings*. EETS 113.
- Shpre = Two plays by William Shakespeare. Pafford, J. H. P. (ed.) (1963). *The Winter's Tale*. Arden Shakespeare Paperbacks. London: Methuen. Fraser, R. (ed.) (1963). *The Tragedy of King Lear*. New York: Signet Classics.
- Bacon = Book I of Francis Bacon (1605) *The twoo bookes of the proficiencie and advancement of learning*. 1970 facsimile of original edition. Amsterdam and New York: Da Capo Press.
- Barrington = Searle, A. (ed.) (1983). *Barrington family letters, 1628–1632*. London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society University College London. 1–160.
- Harley = Lewis, T. T. (ed.) (1854). *The letters of Lady Brilliana Harley*. Camden Society NS 58. London: J. B. Nichols & Sons. 1–110.
- Nicholas = Warner, G. F. (ed.) (1920). *The Nicholas papers: correspondence of Sir Edward Nicholas*. Vol. IV: 1657–1660. Camden Society Third Series 31. London: Officers of the Society. I excluded letters which are extracts made nearly a century later in a modernized spelling.
- Haddock = Thompson, Edward Maunde (ed.) 1881. *Correspondence of the family of Haddock*. Camden Society NS 31. London: Camden Society. The tables concerning naval battles on pp. 31–5 were not included in the investigation.
- Welwood = *Memoirs of the most material transactions in England, for the last hundred years, preceding the revolution in 1688, by James Welwood*. London: T. Goodwin. 1–75 of 2nd edition (1700; the 1st edition was also published in 1700).
- Addison = Letters 1699–1705 and pieces from the *Spectator* in 1711. Graham, W. (ed.) (1941). *The letters of Joseph Addison*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. I read the letters designated 'TLB'. Bond, Donald F. (ed.) 1965. *The Spectator*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. I read the first thirty pieces by Addison in each of volumes I and II.

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