

# Changes in the Left Periphery of Nominal Expressions

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0. Nominal expressions witnessed a number of changes throughout the history of German, concerning their left periphery in particular. In the present paper, I will argue that the respective changes can be derived from a single change affecting the relationship between head noun and determiner.

1. Nominal expressions in Old High German and Present-Day German exhibit a different distribution regarding the definite determiner: While the definite determiner is restricted to sortal concepts in Old High German, the definite determiner lacks in cases where the head noun refers to functional concepts that are inherently unambiguous (Löbner 1985). In Present-Day German, definite determiners are used with both pragmatic and semantic definites, indicating that the definite determiner is licensed on semantic grounds in Old High German, and on morphological grounds in Present-Day German.

## (1) Old High German and Present-Day German

- a. *ir gisehet himil offanan*
- b. *ihr seht den Himmel offen*  
'you will see heaven opened'

2. Noun phrases marked for genitive case act as modifiers within nominal expressions in early stages of German, mainly occurring in prenominal position, cf. (2). In Present-Day German, the prenominal position is semantically restricted to proper names and kinship terms establishing a possessive relation to the head noun in question. Syntactically, prenominal nouns marked for genitive case rather pattern with determiners than with other modifiers (as opposed to OHG, any modification of the genitive noun exhibits ungrammatical results, they have to precede adjectival modifiers, they never co-occur with (in)definite determiners, etc.) suggesting that they have lost their phrasal status throughout the history of German. Genitive phrases in postnominal position, however, behave as phrases (i.e. they may contain modifiers themselves) and do not show any semantic restrictions.

## (2) Old High German and Early New High German

- a. *dhera gotliihhun christ-es chiburdi*  
the holy Christ-GEN birth
- b. *Dieser Tagen seyn allhie [NP der Evangel. Fürsten vnnnd Städt/ [CP so zu*  
these days are here the Protestant sovereigns and cities that at  
*Schwäbischen Hall jüngst beysamen gewest/] Abgesandte alher komen*  
Schwäbisch Hall recently together been envoys here come

## (3) Present-Day German

- a. *Anna-s altes Auto - \*altes Anna-s Auto*  
Anne-GEN old car - old Anna-GEN car
- b. *\*Oma-s aus Hamburg Besuch*  
granny-GEN from Hamburg visit
- c. *der Besuch der Oma aus Hamburg*  
the visit the.GENgranny from Hamburg

3. Possessive pronouns behave as adjectival modifiers in older stages of German, whereas they pattern with determiners in Present-Day German. Evidence comes from nominal expressions comprising a possessive pronoun as well as a demonstrative determiner (4-a). More support for a modifier analysis of possessive pronouns is provided by word order facts, such as adjectival

modifiers preceding possessive pronouns (4-b).

(4) **Early New High German**

- a. *bey dieser vnserer Versicherung*  
with this our affirmation
- b. *die vorige jhrige Confession*  
the previous their confession

4. The demonstrative pronoun *solch* 'such' may have both a sortal or an individual reading in older stages of German allowing for singular count nouns to occur without determiner (5). In Present-Day German, *solch* is restricted to a sortal interpretation and exhibits classical diagnostics for adjectiveness in contrast to demonstrative pronouns as *dieser* 'this' (Demske 2005).

(5) **Middle High German and Present-Day German**

- a. *i-ne-bin solch küchenmeister niht, daz ich die spise künne sagn, diu*  
I-NEG-am such cook not that I the dish could name that  
*dâ mit zuht wart für getragn.*  
there with decency was served
- b. *Ich habe nie \*(einen) solchen Koch getroffen*  
I have never a such cook met

5. The distribution of adjectival inflection types is semantically governed in Old High German, i.e. definite determiners trigger weak adjectival inflection, whereas indefinite determiners call for strong adjectival inflection (6-a). In Present-Day German, however, the distribution of inflection types is morphologically governed: If grammatical features are overtly marked by the determiner, the following adjective instantiates the weak inflection type, otherwise the adjective exhibits strong inflection.

(6) **Old High German and Present-Day German**

- a. *ein-emo diur-emo merigrioz-e*  
a-SG.DAT valuable-STRONG pearl-SG.DAT
- b. *ein-em herausragend-en Cellisten*  
an-SG.DAT outstanding-WEAK cellist

6. In my view, all changes sketched above are best accounted for by assuming a reinterpretation of the relationship between head noun and determiner: Turning from a semantically to a morphologically motivated relation, the reinterpretation gives rise to the functional category  $D^{\circ}$  hosting the grammatical features of the nominal expression. Consequently, the prenominal possessive genitive as well as the possessive pronoun become exponents of the functional head  $D^{\circ}$ , whereas the demonstrative pronoun *solch* 'such' gets restricted to its use as an adjectival modifier.

**References**

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