

A diachronic perspective on the semantic and syntactic attributes of possessive expressions in Swedish and Danish

Alicja Piotrowska

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

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In discussing the semantic notions of possession linguists traditionally employ the prototype approach (Langacker 1995; Taylor 1995). Central members of the category, such as the concepts of *ownership* and *kinship*, are considered to be prototypically possessive. These concepts differ greatly from each other, but as they most commonly share a human, often topical possessor and a concrete possessum, they are often regarded as the core of possession (Stassen 2009:11; Taylor 1995:202). Other notions, e.g. *part-whole*, *attributive*, *local* or *temporal* possessives are described as peripheral, since they lack some of the semantic attributes of the prototype, most notably the human possessor. The differences in syntactic attributes suggest that separate expressions may be dedicated for prototypical and peripheral notions of possession (Neset & Enger 2002).

Research on attributive possessive expressions in Old Scandinavian languages places a great focus on the genitive case, which later developed into a clitic-like s-genitive (Delsing 2001; Herslund 2001; Norde 1997; Perridon 2013). Little attention is given to other expressions, such as possessive pronouns (regular and reflexive) or emerging possessive prepositional phrases of the type *the king of Sweden*. Old Swedish and Old Danish share the use and distribution of the aforementioned constructions, but their development has not been studied in detail. The aim of this project is to trace the development of possessive expressions in Old Swedish and Old Danish with the focus on their semantic and syntactic attributes. One of the questions that I hope to address is whether possessive expressions can be said to have specific domains, i.e. whether a given construction is used predominantly for a particular concept of possession.

The study is based on a self-made corpus of Swedish and Danish texts written between 1250 and 1700. The texts chosen for the corpus represent four genres: legal prose, chronicles, religious and profane prose. The corpus consists of ca. 125 000 words. The texts are manually tagged using tailor-made software designed for corpus analysis in this project, which enables comparisons and in-depth analysis of tagged possessive expressions. Among the variables that are taken into consideration in the present project is animacy and definiteness of the possessor (which functions here as a proxy for topicality, cf. Börjars et al. 2013), as well as the length of the NP.

Preliminary results indicate that the genitive construction is predominant with human and semantically definite possessors, which coincides with the research on genitive variation in present-day English (Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi 2007; Rosenbach 2005) and in present-day Swedish (Piotrowska, ms). The few emerging cases of possessive prepositional phrases are mostly used with an inanimate possessor (in 74% of examples). Overall, animate possessors are much more frequent in the material (65% of all of the possessors expressed by a full NP). In the presentation I hope to address the following questions:

1. Do animacy, definiteness and length influence the choice of a possessive construction in Old Swedish and Old Danish?

2. Does the semantics of possession in Old Scandinavian languages evolve from prototypical possession (*ownership, kinship*) to more vague and abstract relations (*part-whole, control*)?
3. Are there any notable differences between Swedish and Danish possessives in the material?

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