[REVIEW]

Genitives in Early English: Typology and Evidence

By Cynthia L. Allen, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, xiv+354pp.

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Keywords: *adnominal genitive construction, history of English, typology*

1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that in the history of the English language the possessive marker developed from the genitive inflection *-es* to the clitic-like element *-’s*. The issue of how, when, and why this development took place is subject to further discussion, however, and yet to be satisfactorily resolved. In her book, *Genitives in Early English: Typology and Evidence*, Cynthia L. Allen tackles this issue by empirically investigating aspects of the development of AGCs (adnominal genitive constructions) from OE to EModE against a typological/comparative background.¹ Focusing her investigation on ME texts as reliable sources of linguistic evidence, she maintains that the relationship between deflexion and changes in AGCs is only indirect. Following the basic tenet of Allen (1997), specifically, she puts forward her main claim that the clitic-like *-’s* did not develop from the so-called *his* genitive or what she calls “SG (separated genitive),” but out of the genitive inflection (contra previous studies such as Janda (1980), Lightfoot (1999), and Weerman and de Wit (1999) among others). As the arguments and evidence are intentionally presented in a theory-neutral man-

* I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their valuable comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this review. I am also grateful to Robert F. Oliver and Martin C. Connolly for stylistic improvements. Of course, all remaining inadequacies are my own.

¹ The following are the standard abbreviations of the historical periods in the development of English: OE (Old English: 700–1100), EME (Early Middle English: 1100–1350), LME (Late Middle English: 1350–1500), EModE (Early Modern English: 1500–1700), LModE (Late Modern English: 1700–1900), and PDE (Present-day English: 1900–). Occasionally, the terms EME and LME are combined into a simple term: ME (Middle English).

ner (but see below), the book under review here should be of great interest not only to scholars/students of the history of the English language, but also to those who are interested in philology and diachronic syntax/morphology.

The book consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction setting the primary goal of the research and providing information concerning the genitive case and the typology of case marking. Based on the overviews of some AGCs in the modern Germanic languages presented in Chapter 2, Chapters 3 and 4 investigate various types of AGCs in OE and ME. Chapter 5 takes up the PDC (possessor doubling construction) in the modern Germanic languages, laying out the background for Chapter 6, where the development of the SG and the origin of *-s* are extensively discussed. Chapter 7 completes Allen's research by examining the co-occurrence of possessives with determiners in the history of English. Chapter 8 summarizes the major empirical findings and touches upon some implications as well as sketching future avenues of research.

2. Overview

2.1. Primary Goal of the Research and Background Information

Chapter 1 lays out the aims and the primary goal of the book, followed by an argument on the necessity to draw on a typological approach. Allen goes on to present the theoretical position to be assumed when her approach is not theory-neutral: a version of Lexical Functional Grammar advocated by Bresnan (2001). Although she adopts the DP-hypothesis within this framework, she uses the term "NomP (nominal phrase)" to refer to nominals when the distinction between DPs and NPs is not at issue. Thus, the structure of, for example, *the man's book* can be schematized as in (1), where the possessive marker *-s* does not head D, but forms a constituent with the possessor phrase (i.e. *the man*):²

- (1) [_{NomP} [the man's] [_{Nom'} **book**]] (cf. Allen's (1–2), p. 10)

This chapter also clarifies the status of the case marking system: Allen explicitly states that morphological categories can only be assumed if there is some formal (morphological) distinction supporting a category distinction. Under this approach, the genitive case is considered to be determined by grammatical functions (i.e. structurally) and associated with the position

² In what follows, examples are represented with the element(s) denoting a possessor boxed and the one(s) denoting a possessum boldfaced.

carrying the POSSESSIVE function. This mode of case distinction has not changed throughout the history of English. The change took place in the locus where the genitive case morphology is attached: in OE, it was attached to the head of the possessor phrase, inducing phrase-internal agreement; in PDE, it is attached to the edge of the possessor phrase.

2.2. Historical Development of Various Types of AGCs

Chapter 2 offers an overview of some AGCs in the modern Germanic languages, laying out the groundwork for Chapters 3 and 4. As background for analyzing the modern Germanic AGCs, a brief introduction of the historical development of the genitive case in Common Germanic, the ancestor of the modern Germanic languages, is provided. In particular, Allen examines the *-s* genitive (i.e. the Saxon genitive) of AGCs in PDE, Swedish, German, Dutch, Low Saxon (a.k.a. Low German, East Dutch, etc.) and Faroese. In light of the criteria suggested by Zwicky and Pullum (1983), both the PDE and Swedish *-s* genitives may come out as more clitic-like than affix-like. Moreover, the German, Dutch and Low Saxon *-s* genitives may also seem to be assigned syntactic positions as functional heads, since the possessors with the *-s* genitive, which can only be either proper nouns or kinship terms, behave like phrases in these languages. Although she concedes the verity of these conclusions, she emphasizes that the *-s* genitives in those languages mentioned above still have inflection-like characteristics and cannot be treated simply as syntactic elements, suggesting that a single reanalysis of old genitive inflections as clitics cannot be warranted nor can it do justice to the facts of the different stages of ME.

Chapter 3 provides background concerning the AGCs in OE which is required in consideration of their development in later English. The information begins with a look at the nature of the texts used in her survey, dividing them into EWS (Early West Saxon) and LWS (Late West Saxon) texts. Allen goes on to consider the genitive case in OE. Pointing out that the nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative were still healthy categories in LWS as they had been in EWS, she shows that the prototypical use of the genitive case was not only to express a relation of possession between two nouns but also to mark the NomPs playing the role of object of a verb or a preposition and the ones functioning as the complements of some adjectives. She assumes structural case assignment for the prenominal and postnominal AGCs and lexical case assignment for the (postnominal) partitive and for non-AGCs (non-adnominal genitive constructions). The prenominal AGCs are classified further into two types: the “genitive agree-

ment” type as in (2a) and the “low prenominal” type as in (2b):

- (2) a. to þæs cyninges untruman **bearne**
 to the-M/GEN/SG king-M/GEN/SG sick child-N/DAT/SG
 ‘to the king’s sick child’
 (cocathom1, ÆCHom_I, 8: 245.127.1497 / Allen’s (3–15), p. 76)
- b. To swilcum sleacum cwæð se
 to such slack said the-M/NOM/SG
hiredes **ealdor**
 household-M/GEN/SG head-M/NOM/SG
 ‘to such slack workers the head of the house said ...’
 (cocathom2, ÆCHom_II, 5: 45.122.969 / Allen’s (3–18), p. 80)

In the genitive agreement type, the possessor phrase (e.g. *þæs cyninges* in (2a)) is a maximal projection, with the determiner agreeing in gender, case, and number with its genitive head. In the low prenominal type, on the other hand, the possessor (e.g. *hiredes* in (2b)) has genitive case, but any preceding determiner (e.g. *se*) agrees not with it, but with the head of NomP (e.g. *ealdor*). Other AGC types attested in OE are postnominal non-partitive genitives, partitive genitives, dislocated genitives, and split genitives,³ which are exemplified below as (3a–d), respectively:

- (3) a. of ðære foresædan **cýrcan**
 of the-F/DAT/SG aforesaid church-F/DAT/SG
þæs eadigan Stephanes
 the-M/GEN/SG blessed-M/SG Stephen-M/GEN/SG
 ‘from the aforementioned church of the blessed Stephan’
 (cocathom2, ÆCHom_II, 2: 12.14.263 / Allen’s (3–21a), p. 83)
- b. Gif ure **ænigum** sum ungelimp become
 if I/PL/GEN any-DAT/PL some mishap comes
 ‘If a mishap befalls any of us’
 (cocathom2, ÆCHom_II, 35: 267.234.6022 / Allen’s (3–24), p. 85)
- c. Sum **dæl** eac þæs sædes befeoll
 some part also the-N/GEN/SG seed-N/GEN/SG fell
 ‘A part of the seed also fell’
 (cocathom2, ÆCHom_II, 6: 52.10.1069 / Allen’s (3–32), p. 89)

³ Split genitives were the norm when the possessor phrases involved coordination, and they were also likely when the possessor phrases involved apposition, as in (3d).

- d. &

þæs	opres	eorles
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broþer
 and the-M/GEN/SG other-M/GEN/SG earl-M/GEN/SG brother
 Ohteres],
 Ohtor-M/GEN/SG
 ‘and the brother of the other earl, Ohtor’
 (cochronA-2c, ChronA_[Plummer]: 918.11.1242 / Allen’s (3–36), p. 92)

One of the intriguing findings in this chapter, which is not pointed out in the previous literature, is that some of the constructions which later became obsolete were already on the decline by the late OE stage. In particular, prenominal genitives, including both the genitive agreement type and the low prenominal type, were favored as AGCs while the structurally assigned postnominal genitives were already rare in LWS.⁴ Allen argues here that the postnominal genitive might have disappeared in English even if the deflexion of ME had never occurred. Since the case category distinction was still robust in LWS, the decline of the postnominal genitive could not have been triggered by the loss of case distinctions. Allen suggests that this change in progress was motivated by functional factors such as ease of processing and can be regarded as part of a general trend which relied on word order to determine grammatical relations. In passing, she also concludes that possessor phrases and genitive pronouns in OE should be treated as having a determiner function rather than an adjectival function, rejecting the argument that English changed from an adjective-genitive language to a determiner-genitive language.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the discussion of the AGCs in ME, paying particular attention to the most reasonable analysis of the ME *-es* genitive and pointing out the fact that some of the AGC types attested in OE were lost while GGs (group genitives; e.g. *the king of France’s daughter*) arose during this period. Again, the discussion begins with a careful and lengthy examination of ME texts, dividing them into EME and LME texts. The EME texts are further divided into categories A (inflection-rich texts), B (case-rich

⁴ Note that the partitive genitive case in AGCs was lexically assigned, hence still remaining in the postnominal position against the general tendency in LWS. Also note that the frequency of the dislocated genitive dropped in LWS while instances of the split genitive increased in this period.

but inflection-poor texts), and C (case-impovertished texts).⁵ Concerning the LME texts, Allen concludes that they all lack an accusative/dative distinction or any productive case agreement. By the end of the ME period, around 1400, the *-es* genitive case for masculine and neuter singular nouns had become a possessive marker for all nouns in both the singular and plural. Allen finds that in what she terms “pre-group” ME period where GGs had not yet taken hold, the *-es* genitive was already a clitic-like element. She takes as a piece of evidence for her finding the rise of what she calls “NAPAs (non-agreeing possessive appositives)” in this period, where the “once-only” possessive marking appears on only prenominal appositive phrases, but not on postnominal phrases:

- (4) for þes eorles sunu Rotbert of Normandi
 for the-M/GEN/SG duke-M/GEN/SG son Robert of Normandy
 ‘because of the son of Duke Robert of Normandy ...’
 (CMPETERB, 45.122, annal 1124.19, First Continuation / Allen’s
 (4–11), p. 140)

NAPAs like (4) appear in both the A texts and the B/C texts of EME, which Allen takes to indicate the clitic-like status (as well as the case/affix status) of the *-es* genitive in the pre-group period, as it is attached to the edge of a possessor phrase. Besides the NAPA, what Allen calls “CGs (combined genitives)” like (5) also took hold in this period,⁶ where the prenominal possessor phrase appears in the *-es* genitive form while the postnominal possessor phrase appears as a PP.

- (5) þurh þæs arcebiscopes gearnunge
 through the-M/GEN/SG archbishop-M/GEN/SG request
 of Cantwerbyng
 of Canterbury
 ‘through the request of the archbishop of Canterbury’
 (PC 1114.34 / Allen’s (4–7), p. 137)

⁵ More specifically, the A texts of EME substantially retain case distinction and agreement between determiners and nouns; the B texts retain an accusative/dative distinction while they no longer show regular agreement; the C texts retain little case inflection and few agreement forms.

⁶ Although the AGC type as in (5) has traditionally been referred to as the split genitive, Allen (2003: 6, fn. 5) intentionally avoids this term and uses an alternative term “combined genitive” for this construction: the AGC type in question is a new construction which emerged in EME and it is syntactically/morphologically different from the “true” split genitive. Thus, the term “split genitive” is exclusive to the AGCs involving apposition or coordination.

While the NAPA, the CG, and the GG established their grounds during the ME period, the postnominal and partitive AGCs disappeared during this period. Those changes vis-à-vis AGCs that took place during the ME period can be schematized as follows, side by side with the loss of the genitive objects of verbs and the genitive complements to adjectives/prepositions (i.e. genitives in non-AGCs):

(6)		OE	c1130	c1150	c1200	c1250	c1420	c1500
POSTNOMINAL	<i>B/C texts</i>	----->						
	<i>A texts</i>	----->						
PARTITIVE		----->						
NAPA			----->					
CG			----->					
GG							----->	
GENITIVE OBJECT	<i>C texts</i>	----->						
	<i>A texts</i>	----->						

(cf. Allen's Table 4.8, p. 182)

Since the timing of the loss of the genitive object/complement in non-AGCs differs from that of the loss of the postnominal AGCs, Allen concludes that the latter change cannot be triggered by the loss of the genitive case as a distinct morphological category. Rather, she suggests that the loss of agreement (morphology) within the NomP gave a final blow to the postnominal AGCs: although the “decline” of the postnominal AGCs in OE is associated with some functional factors and the general word order tendency, as mentioned above, their “loss” in ME is attributed to the loss of agreement within the NomP. When there is agreement with the determiner and the possessor N within the postnominal genitive, it is easy to process the NomP since the postnominal genitive signals the edge of the NomP; when the agreement within the postnominal genitive is lost, however, it becomes difficult to close off the NomP since there is no signal. Allen argues that this processing difficulty in the absence of agreement within the NomP eventually led to the loss of the postnominal AGCs.

2.3. Rise of the SG and the Origin of -s

Chapter 5 is the only chapter in which English is not the focus. SGs such as (7), whose historical development is the main topic of the following chapter, have usually been assumed to be parallel to similar-looking constructions in other Germanic languages in which possessor phrases are doubled by linking pronouns.

- (7) and come into Ethelstan his **tente**
 and came into Æthestan POSS tent
 ‘and came to Æthestan’s tent’

(CMPOLYCH, VI, 437.3201 / Allen’s (5–1), p. 187)

For instance, a Dutch counterpart of English *Jan’s book* is expressed as follows:

- (8) Jan z’n **boek**

Jan his book

(p. 186)

(8) is commonly used in speech as an alternative to *Jans boek* or *het boek van Jan*. The aim of this chapter is to discuss PDCs like (8) in the other Germanic languages (e.g. Low Saxon, Standard German, Dutch including its dialects, Frisian, Afrikaans, and Scandinavian languages) before explicating the similarities to and differences from English in the following chapter. One of the findings here is that the linking pronouns in PDCs agree with the possessor phrases in number and gender whenever possible. Allen ascribes the lack of agreement in some languages or dialects to the origin of the linking pronouns (i.e. the reflexive possessor pronouns) which never indicated gender or number. She concludes this chapter by emphasizing that the loss of the genitive is not a sufficient condition for the rise of PDCs in various Germanic languages.

Chapter 6 turns the focus back to English, tracing the history of the SG and making comparisons with the PDCs discussed in the previous chapter. It is shown that the SGs of the different periods should not be given identical analyses, and that the SGs found in the earliest period of ME present a profile very different from the typical Germanic PDCs while the later ones are more like typical PDCs. Allen begins the discussion by noting that apparent SGs attested in OE are either simple mistranslations or at best amenable to another analysis: there is no evidence for SGs in OE. Clear examples of the SGs in EME are limited to two poetic texts: *Genesis and Exodus* and the Otho manuscript of *Brut*. The following is one of the indisputable early examples attested in the former text:

- (9) Of seth, ðe was adam is **sune**
 of Seth who was Adam POSS son
 ‘Of Seth, who was Adam’s son’

(Gen&Ex (A) 493 / Allen’s (6–1a), p. 223)

Allen points out the following three properties of the EME SGs: (i) the great majority of examples of the separated possessive in this period are found with proper nouns, particularly ones ending with *s*; (ii) the SGs are never as common as the *-es* genitives in these texts; (iii) the distribution of

the separated possessive markers is identical with that of the attached *-es*, and both of them are adjacent to the possessor Ns, with the only difference being that the separated possessive markers are almost (but not quite) completely restricted to (masculine) proper nouns, especially (but not exclusively) ones ending in *s*. Based on these properties, she concludes that the detached possessive marker *his* has affix-like characteristics in EME and may be simply an orthographical variant of the attached *-es*. The SGs in LME do not inflect to agree with the possessor phrases either:

- (10) and the quene ys **modyr**, the lady of Bedford
 and the queen POSS mother the lady of Bedford
 ‘and the queen’s mother, the lady of Bedford’

(CMGREGOR, 232.2443 / Allen’s (6–14), p. 246)

The distribution of the detached *his* is identical with that of the attached *-es* in LME as well, but they are found at the end of the possessor phrases. With regard to this property, Allen notes that the SGs in LME are still different from the modern Germanic PDCs in syntactic behavior. Drawing on the fact that the SGs are found with the CGs as well as the GGs, as in (11), she also treats the detached *his* in LME as an orthographical variant of the attached *-es*.

- (11) a. Alfritha, þe duke his **douȝter** of Devenshire
 Alfritha the duke POSS daughter of Devonshire
 ‘Alfritha, the duke of Devonshire’s daughter’
 (CMPOLYCH, VI, 473.3485 / Allen’s (6–20a), p. 247)
- b. Iames þat was somtyme Paulinus þe archebisshop of
 James that was sometime Palinus the archbishop of
ȝork his **preost**
 York POSS priest
 ‘James, that was formerly Palinus the archbishop of York’s priest’
 (CMPOLYCH, VI, 99.696 / Allen’s (6–26), p. 249)

Note that the attached *-es* also appeared in the GG in this period:

- (12) but þe kyng of Fraunces **men** weren i-slawe
 but the king of France’s/POSS men were slain
 ‘But the king of France’s men were slain’

(CMPOLYCH, VIII, 349.180 / Allen’s (6–25), p. 249))

(12) indicates the clitic-like status of the attached *-es*, bearing the same status of the detached *his*. The SGs came to agree with the possessor phrases in EModE, around 1575, which is typical of the modern Germanic PDCs. The following is the first attested example of the EModE SGs that Allen has found:

- (13) but if Rebecca hir **father** had had a householde so
 but if Rebecca POSS/her father had had a household so
 addressed
 ordered

‘but if Rebecca’s father had had a household of this sort’

(PCEEC BACON, I, 149.115.1958 / Allen’s (6–29), p. 254)

She suggests three possible approaches to analyze the agreeing SGs, which are not discussed here because of space limitations. Based on the fact that the attached *-es* was possible in the GGs in LME, she concludes that the SG is not the origin of the GG. Since the use of the apostrophe came to mark vowel elision in the attached *-es* during the EModE period, what had been the genitive case should be considered as the origin of the clitic-like *-s* in PDE.

2.4. Possessives and Determiners

Chapter 7 completes the study of the history of AGCs in English by examining the co-occurrence of genitives with determiners (i.e. definite articles or demonstratives). In OE, both the construction where a possessor precedes a determiner (i.e. the POSS DET construction) in the presence of an adjective and the one with reversed word order (i.e. the DET POSS construction) were possible. Allen shows that the DET POSS construction and the POSS DET construction are not to be regarded as mere variants made possible by the free word order in this period. The POSS DET construction completely disappeared in EME while the DET POSS construction was absent in the 12th and 13th centuries and re-emerged in LME, which denies the assumption of an unbroken tradition of the DET POSS construction from OE to EModE. In the course of her investigation into the DET POSS construction, Allen reaches the conclusion drawn in Chapter 3, that possessor phrases and genitive pronouns in OE cannot be treated as adjectives. Concerning the loss of the two constructions under consideration in this chapter, she suggests that it is not to be explained in terms of grammatical changes alone, but that changes in style and preferences also play an important role.

3. Concluding Remarks

The book under review here is a landmark work in advancing the claim that the clitic-like *-s* possessive marker developed out of what was once the masculine and neuter genitive singular inflection in OE, *-es*. Allen maintains, in a nutshell, that *his* in SGs has nothing to do with the development

of *-ʒ*, but that it is the vowel elision in the clitic-like *-es* accompanied by an apostrophe that caused the rise of the clitic-like *-ʒ*. Although *his* in SGs underwent minor changes in its morphological status, it eventually disappeared in the history of English. Allen's main claim for the development of the clitic-like *-ʒ* is schematized as follows:

As mentioned above, (14) follows the basic tenet of Allen (1997), where the causal relationship between the affix-like *-es* and the clitic-like *-ʒ* is slightly abstracted away. In that paper, Allen rejects the main proposal made by Janda (1980) that the clitic-like *-ʒ* developed out of the pronoun *his* in SGs, which is schematized as follows:

Janda argues that since the initial aspirate in *his* was not pronounced at least in LME, the homophony between the affix *-es* and the possessive pronoun *his* in its non-syllabic pronunciation caused the reanalysis of *-es* as *-ʒ*. Allen (1997) considers (15) untenable on the ground that what is written as *his* in SGs cannot always be identified with the ordinary genitive pronoun *his*: (i) in EME, the separated *his* had exactly the same distribution as the attached *-es*, always adjacent to the possessor N (but not the possessor phrase); (ii) in ME, the SG was used with feminine nouns, but its form was always *his* or a variant of *is*; (iii) there were some cases where the possessum N is not expressed after the separated *his*. Shortly afterwards, Lightfoot (1999) and Weerman and de Wit (1999) independently adopt Janda's (1980) mode of explanation for the development of the clitic *-ʒ*, arguing against Allen (1997). Needless to say, Allen rejects their claims in the book under review here on the ground that the GGs accompanying the separated *his* and the ones accompanying the attached *-es* arose at the same

time: if *his* in SGs were a pronoun, the attached *-es* could not appear in GGs. Note, in passing, that under the explanation advocated by Allen, the affix-like *his* (i.e. an orthographical variant of the affix-like *-es*) in SGs still cannot be the source of the clitic-like *-ʒ*. Allen explicitly states that if this were the case, the reason as to why agreeing SGs appeared so late (i.e. after the wide spread of non-agreeing SGs) would still remain a mystery. Thus, what Allen claims in her book takes the form of a rebuttal against the counterargument to Allen (1997) presented from Lightfoot (1999) and Weerman and de Wit (1999). Moreover, Allen's main claim may pose a resolution to the long-standing issue on the clitic versus affix status of *-ʒ* in PDE, siding with linguists such as Payne (2009) who support the latter view.

Allen's detailed attention to the data-oriented observations is intriguing, providing new findings and posing a challenge to the previous literature: she reveals that some of the AGCs which became obsolete in ME and disappeared eventually were already on the decline by the late OE stage. Her analyses given to the various constructions are also convincing. For instance, the distributional difference of the separated *his* in EME and LME can easily be accommodated by Allen's postulation that the separated *his* in EME is an orthographical variant of the affix-like *-es* while the one in LME is equated with the clitic-like *-es* which appears in GGs. Allen's main claim consists of a set of accurate analyses of her detailed observations, and in this respect, the book under review here is an elegant contribution to an important area of linguistic studies. Since this book not only intensively discusses the development of the English genitives with typological support, but also extensively illuminates various types of AGCs which arose or disappeared in the history of English, it will surely benefit both scholars and students of English historical syntax and morphology.

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[received December 19 2009, revised and accepted April 26 2010]

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