

The diachrony of possessive expressions in Danish and Swedish

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In the discussion of attributive possessive expressions in Old Scandinavian languages a great focus is placed on the genitive case, which later grammaticalized into a clitic-like *s*-genitive (Börjars 2003; Delsing 2001, Herslund 2001; Norde 1997; 2001; Perridon 2013). Little attention is given to other constructions, such as possessive pronouns (regular and reflexive), slowly emerging prepositional phrases or zero-marking used in the case of inalienable nouns (see examples 1–4 respectively). Old Swedish and Old Danish share the use and distribution of the aforementioned constructions, but their development has not been studied in detail. A study encompassing the distribution of all the main possessive expressions used in Swedish and Danish across ca 500 years can show how these expressions have come to interplay with each other and how the contexts, in which the given expression has been productive, have changed.

The aim of the present study is to trace and describe possessive expressions in Old Swedish and Old Danish (1250–1550) as well as in Older New Swedish and Older New Danish (1550–1700). The distribution of the possessive expressions will be analysed with regard to the factors of animacy and definiteness of the possessor phrase as well as the syntactic function of the possessive NP (following the studies on English genitive variation by Rosenbach 2002; 2005; and by Hinrichs and Szmrecsanyi 2007). Statistical tools such as cross tabulations and chi-square tests are used to ensure the statistical significance of the presented data.

The study is based on the corpora of Swedish and Danish texts written between 1250 and 1700. That period is divided in three epochs as follows: I. classical (1250–1350), II. old (1350–1550) and III. middle (1550–1700). The texts chosen for the corpus represent three genres: legal prose, religious and profane prose. The texts are obtained via open access websites such as *Fornsvenska textbanken*, *Renæssancens sprog i Danmark* and *Middelalder og Renæssance*. The corpus consists of ca 200 000 words.

The preliminary results of the study of the Old Swedish corpus (1250–1550) are presented in Table 1 below, showing the frequencies of possessive expressions in general and the frequencies of the expressions used in inalienable contexts (i.e. kinship and body part nouns). It is clear from the preliminary data that possessive pronouns were used in Old Swedish almost as often as the genitive case, whereas the use of possessive prepositional phrases was very scarce. It is thus worthwhile to look deeper into the patterns of distribution of these two constructions. Further, we can see that possessive pronouns altogether were used in 82% of inalienable NPs in the preliminary data. Considering that in present-day Swedish body part nouns are largely expressed by zero-marking (with a definite article instead of a possessive construction), it will be valuable to trace the development of marking inalienable nouns in later periods as well. In the presentation I hope to address the following issues:

1. Does animacy, definiteness or syntactic function influence the choice of a possessive construction in written Swedish or Danish from the periods between 13th and 17th century?
2. How does the marking of inalienable nouns change across centuries?

3. Does the semantics of possession in Old Scandinavian languages evolve from prototypical possession (OWNERSHIP, KINSHIP) to more vague and abstract relations (PART-WHOLE, CONTROL)?

Examples:

- (1) **myn** fader het-er weland (OSw, Did_21)
 my.POSS father be called-PRS weland
 ‘my father is called Weland’
- (2) vpskåra **sit** skin a axl-om-in (OSw, Jart_181)
 cut his.POSS.REFL skin on shoulder-DAT-DEF.SG
 ‘cut his skin on the arm’
- (3) thz gren-a-na **aff** the storo grane-ne (OSw, SVM_22)
 the branch-PL-DEF of the big-WK.ADJ spruce-DEF.SG
 ‘the branches of the big spruce’
- (4) tha bar keysar-in vp **hand-en-a** (OSw, ST_25)
 then hold.PST emperor-DEF up hand-DEF-ACC
 ‘then the emperor held up his hand’

Table 1. Possessive expressions in Old Swedish – all examples vs. inalienable possession.

| | | Genitive | Possessive pronoun | Reflexive possessive pronoun | Prepositional phrases | Zero-marking (def. art.) | Total |
|------------------------|---|----------|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| All examples | N | 460 | 409 | 305 | 40 | 18 | 1232 |
| | % | 37.34% | 33.19% | 24.76% | 3.25% | 1.46% | 100.00% |
| Inalienable possession | N | 16 | 116 | 75 | 8 | 18 | 233 |
| | % | 6.87% | 49.79% | 32.19% | 3.43% | 7.72% | 100.00% |

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