

Agreement and Animacy in ‘Auxiliary Pronoun Possessives’ in Middle and Early Modern Dutch¹

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1. Introduction

The Germanic languages display remarkable variation in the extent to which they underwent deflexion and loss of case marking; however, it is not clear why some of these languages, which experienced a similar degree of deflexion, should develop quite different constructions in response to the loss of case marking. For example, although deflexion affected closely related languages such as English and Dutch in similar ways, the genitive case developed quite differently in these two languages. English (like the less-closely related mainland Scandinavian languages) developed an -s genitive from the old genitive case. In Dutch, however, the -s genitive is limited to use with proper nouns and kinship terms. Furthermore, an ‘auxiliary pronoun possessive’ construction developed in Dutch (as well as other Germanic languages such as German and Norwegian), but not in English. To understand why the Germanic languages appear to have taken such divergent paths in the genitive constructions, it is essential to understand the development of possessive constructions in each of these languages and how these developments relate to deflexion and the loss of case marking. This paper, therefore, represents the first step in a systematic study of possessive constructions in Dutch, and will present early research into the development of ‘auxiliary pronoun possessives’ (APPs). Although very little is known about this construction, some linguists have made claims about the animacy of the possessor and agreement of the auxiliary pronoun with the possessor that may be premature or simply wrong. For this reason, this paper will be structured around the facts concerning these two salient features of APP constructions in Middle and Early Modern Dutch.

This remainder of this paper is organised as follows: Section 1.1 explains the basic features of agreement and animacy in APP constructions in modern colloquial Dutch. Section 2 examines problematic data from previous historical studies of possessive constructions in Dutch. Section 3 looks at the feature of agreement and section 4 focuses on the issue of animacy. In section 5, I present my conclusions.

1.1 Auxiliary Pronoun Possessives in modern colloquial Dutch

In modern Dutch, APP constructions are equivalent to ‘the woman her hat’ (meaning ‘the woman’s hat’), in which the animate possessor precedes the possessed item and the possessive pronoun agrees with the gender of the possessor. Examples of APPs are given in (1) - (6) below:

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- (1) de vrouw d'r hoed
the woman her-APP hat
'the woman's hat'

- (2) Stone haar enorme aantrekkingskracht
Stone her-APP immense attractiveness
'(Sharon) Stone's immense attractiveness'
(Norde 1997:57, ex. 10a, from *Marie Claire* 07-95)

- (3) de man met die gekke bril z'n caravan
the man with those funny glasses his-APP caravan
'the man with those funny glasses's caravan'
(Weerman and De Wit 1999:1171, ex. 39c)

- (4) Cees zijn beslissing
Cees his-APP decision
'Cees' decision'
(Norde 1997:57, ex. 10b, from *NRC* 02-05-95)

- (5) de mensen hun eigen schuld
the people their-APP own fault
'the people's own fault'
(Norde 1997:57, ex. 10c, from a Dutch novel)

- (6) Wie z'n auto is dit?
Who his-APP car is this?
'Whose car is this?'

It is important to note several basic features of auxiliary pronoun possessives in modern Dutch since some historical studies make reference to the present-day features in suggesting possible origins for this possessive construction. APPs are used widely in modern colloquial Dutch and examples of these constructions can be found in the spoken language (examples (1), (3), (6)) as well as in the written language (example (2) is from a fashion magazine, (4) comes from a major Dutch newspaper and (5) is from a recent Dutch novel). In the spoken language, the reduced forms of *zijn* (*z'n*) 'his' and *haar* (*d'r*) 'her' are used; in the written language, the unreduced forms are more frequently used. Moreover, in modern Dutch the possessive pronoun agrees in gender and number with the possessor and the possessor is always animate. Finally, example (3) shows that the auxiliary possessive pronoun is not restricted to following the possessor and can also appear at the end of a noun phrase.

Although quite common in the colloquial language, it should be noted that APPs are not the main means of signalling relationships within a noun phrase in Dutch. The most common possessive construction is formed by the preposition *van* + NP:

- (7) de hoed van de vrouw
the hat of the woman
'the woman's hat'

Furthermore, as stated above, the only remnant of the old genitive case (-s) is quite restricted in modern Dutch, its use being limited to proper nouns and kinship terms:

- (8) moeders hoed
mother -S hat
'mother's hat'

2. Problems with previous historical studies of Auxiliary Pronoun Possessives

We know very little about the history of this construction in Dutch and one major problem with previous studies is that none have been carried out systematically. It is possible to find references to this construction in the handbooks (cf. Duinhoven 1988, Geerts 1966, Weijnen 1968), but only a handful of studies exist which discuss this construction in any detail and these studies have focused on different time periods, different dialects and different text types as illustrated in table 1 below:

Table 1: Historical studies which refer to APPs in Dutch

Study	Period/Text type	Dialect
De Wit (1997)	14th-15th century city chronicles	Bruges, Dordrecht
Weerman and De Wit (1998, 1999)	14th-15th century city chronicles	Bruges, Dordrecht
Burridge (1990)	14th - 16th century medical texts	Hollands, Brabants
Koelmans (1975)	16-17th century primarily one journal	Hollands

Even more problematic is the fact that the examples used to discuss APPs in several studies are not even APP constructions. Examples (9)-(11) have been used to claim that non-agreement of the possessive pronoun with the possessor in Middle Dutch was possible. In fact, these examples are the only ones ever cited to back up this claim.

- (9) die keiserinne zijn moeder
the empress his-APP mother
'the empress' mother' (De Wit 1997:99, ex. 92b.)

- (10) mevrouwe zine gheselneide
 madam his-APP companion
 ‘madam’s companion’ (De Wit 1997:99, ex. 92a, Weerman and De Wit 1998:33, ex. 42a and 1999:1173, ex 42a)
- (11) myn vrouwe van Oorlyens zyn zuster
 my wife from Oorlyens his-APP sister
 ‘my wife from Oorlyens’ sister’ (Weerman and De Wit 1998:33, ex. 42b and 1999:1173, ex 42b)

Example (12) has been used to show that the possessor could be inanimate in Early Modern Dutch:

- (12) den boom zijn vrucht
 the tree his-APP fruit
 ‘the tree’s fruit’ (Geerts 1966:157, Ponelis 1992:285 and 1993: 243, ex. 328d)

When examples (9)-(12) are placed in their broader context as in (13)-(16), it is immediately apparent that none of them, in fact, are APP constructions. Examples (13) - (15) are appositives and (16) is a dependent clause with an inverted subject followed by a direct object.²

- (13) Ende dat binnen 12 daegen dat men uut was, strijdende die van Dordt voor hertoge Willem van Beyerens jegens *die keiserinne zijn moeder*, maer zy wan dese strydt... (Dozy: 88, italics my own)

‘And all that within 12 days that one was out, those from Dordt fighting for Duke William of Bavaria against *the empress, his mother*, but she won the fight...’ (translation and italics my own)

- (14) Int jaer MIIJ^c IIIJ^{xx} ende viere, so quam de hertoghe Philips metsgaders *mervrouwe zine gheselneide*, ervachtige vrouwe van Vlaenderen, eerstwaerve visiteren zijn land... (Diegerick: 274, italics my own)

‘In the year 1384, so the Duke Philips came with *milady, his wife*, heiress of Flanders, for the first visit of his land...’ (translation and italics my own)

- (15) ...doe quam mynen heere van Ravesteyn ter Cruuspoorten in, met *myn vrouwe van Oorlyens zyn zuster*, met 150 peerden ende... (Carton: 68-69, italics my own)

‘...then my lord from Ravesteyn came in through the Cross gates with *milady of Oorlyens, his sister*, with 150 horses and...’ (translation and italics my own)

²Although *den* ‘the’ in *den boom* ‘the tree’ looks like ACC/DAT case marking, Geerts (1966:157) notes that Coornhert does use *den* in subject functions.

- (16) Vintmen ook lidt aant lichaam dat zich zelven leeft? Neen, elck deylt, spreyt en gheeft zijn naaste lide voetsel. Of gheniet *den boom zijn vrucht*, de dieren haar broetsel? Gheen zins... (*Coornhert*: 104, italics my own)

‘Does one also find a part of the body that lives by itself? No, each shares, spreads and gives its closest member nourishment. Or does *the tree* use *its own fruit*, the animals their own brood? Absolutely not...’ (translation and italics my own)

Most of the examples of APP constructions in the literature give only the immediate noun phrases and little, if any, further context. It is therefore impossible to determine whether such examples actually illustrate APP constructions unless the original texts are consulted. Examples (13) - (16) above show that previous work on this topic cannot be relied upon for accuracy and that the broader context must be included in any discussion of these constructions. These problematic examples further underscore the need for a systematic study of APP constructions.

3. Agreement in auxiliary pronoun possessives

At the outset of this paper, I stated that English and Dutch underwent deflexion and case loss to a similar degree, yet with respect to possessive constructions, these languages show quite striking differences. Some scholars believe, however, that historically English and Dutch possessive constructions were fundamentally similar and that the differences we observe in the languages today can be explained in terms of “phonological coincidence” (Weerman and De Wit 1999:1174). The claims of similarity between Middle Dutch and Middle English concern the feature of agreement in APP constructions—that is, whether or not the possessor must always agree with the periphrastic possessive pronoun. Weerman and De Wit (1999:1175) compare Middle Dutch and Middle English APPs³ and state that the possessive pronoun not only did not have to agree with the possessor, but the possessive pronoun was “initially restricted only to one form”—that is, *zijn* or ‘his’. (Weerman and De Wit 1999: 1175. See also Weerman and De Wit 1998: 34-35 and De Wit 1997:100 for similar claims). However, the only Middle Dutch evidence ever cited in these studies to demonstrate that non-agreement was possible has been shown to be invalid (section 2, examples (13)-(15)).

With the exception of the studies by Weerman and De Wit, no other references to non-agreement in Dutch appear in any other sources. In fact, all of the examples of APP constructions in Middle Dutch and Early Modern Dutch reference works show agreement (cf. Van Helten (1883), Stoett (1923), Royen (1947), Geerts (1966), Weijnen (1968), Duinhoven (1988), and Ponelis (1992 and 1993). Koelmans (1975) finds approximately two hundred examples of this construction in the journal kept by *Wouter*, and also discusses examples from other 16th/17th century sources. Although he does not specifically address the issue of agreement, he does mention in a section of the article

³Weerman and De Wit (1998 and 1999) believe that there were, in fact, APP constructions in Middle English. Research carried out by other scholars (cf. Allen 1997), raise considerable doubts about the validity of this position.

devoted to the ‘particulars’ of APP constructions in *Wouter* that “the possessive pronoun is *zijn* or *haer* (feminine and plural)” (Koelmans 1975:442, translation my own).

In my own preliminary research of APP constructions in Dutch, I have also only found examples of agreement. In the interest of space, I will only highlight one example of an APP construction, noteworthy for its early date (1268) and the unambiguous agreement of the possessor (feminine singular) with the feminine singular possessive pronoun *hare* ‘her’:

- (17) Ende al hebbe ic hem ghegeven *die oude Dilf hare port* met the merne...
 And already have I him given *that old Dilf her-APP city* with the wall...
 ‘And I have already given him *that city of Old Delft* with the wall...’
 (NNO: 4, OHZ: 537-43, translation and italics my own)⁴

Finally, although this paper is concerned with APP constructions in Dutch, a few words about the developments in Afrikaans are necessary since frequent comparisons are made in historical discussions of Dutch APPs (cf. Koelmans 1975, Burridge 1990, Norde 1997) with respect to non-agreement in Afrikaans. In modern Afrikaans, invariant *se*, a reduced form of *sijn* ‘his’, is used regardless of person and number of the possessor:

- (18) Heleen *se* benadering
 Heleen POS approach
 ‘Heleen’s approach’ (Ponelis 1993: 239, ex. 312)
- (19) de besoekers *se* vriendelikheid
 the visitors POS friendliness
 ‘the visitors’ friendliness (Ponelis 1993: 240, ex. 318)

It should be noted, however, that this invariant possessive pronoun was quite a late development, the first non-agreeing examples being from the 18th century. Furthermore, evidence of agreement has been attested as recently as the mid-20th century (cf. Ponelis 1992 and 1993: 225-244).

4. Animacy in auxiliary pronoun possessives

The question of whether the possessor had to be animate is directly related to the possible origins of Dutch APP constructions and for this issue, the case of the possessor is important. Due to deflexion and loss of case morphology the possessor in modern Dutch is not overtly marked for case. As late as Early Modern Dutch, however, we have examples of the possessor appearing in the nominative case, the genitive case, or the dative case. In example (20), the possessor is the subject and appears in the nominative case. In (21), the possessor is in the genitive case because the verb *ontcomen* ‘to evade’ takes a genitive object. Finally, the construction in example (22) requires the object possessor to be in the dative case.

⁴*Port* here refers to an area which is likely to have been enclosed by a wall and which has the rights and privileges associated at that time with a city (cf. Verdam 1932:472).

- (20) *Dese clerken haer overcoomst* beoorsaeckte versceyde malcander contrari
tijdinge...(Wouter: 703, 1578, italics my own)

These-NOM clerics-NOM their-APP coming over caused various each other contrary
tidings...

‘These clerics’ coming over occasioned various tidings that contradicted one
another’ (my translation).

- (21) dat hij andere doer goede godlicke ende eerlicke middelen ontcompt *deser*
boeser haer tyrranie, ofte dat hij... (Wouter: 11, 1572, italics my own)

...that he others through good godly and honest means evades these-GEN
evil ones-GEN their-APP tyranny, or that he...

‘that he through good godly and honest means enables others to evade the evil ones’
tyranny, or that he...’ (translation my own)

- (22) Die Heer sij *desen zijn ziel* genadich. (Wouter: 39, 1573, italics my own)

The Lord be this one-DAT his-APP soul merciful.

‘May the Lord be merciful unto this one’s soul.’ (translation my own)

Some linguists have put forth explanations as to what the model for APP constructions in Dutch was: the genitive case (cf. Van Helten 1883, Duinhoven 1988) or the dative case (cf. Koelmans 1975, Burridge 1990). Only Burridge’s dative case theory will be discussed here, however, since it is her theory which requires the possessor to be an animate noun phrase; Koelmans (1975) also believes that the dative case was the model for APP constructions, but does not go into any further detail.

Using 14th-16th century Dutch medical texts, Burridge looks for the origins of Dutch APPs in the various uses of the traditional dative case which “share the same intrinsic meaning: namely, the non-active involvement of a person in an event” (1990: 39). Central to her thesis is the fact that all the types of sentence datives examined show “some sort of relationship between an animate NP and some other nominal in the sentence” (1990: 42-3). In fact, Burridge sees the modern Dutch restriction to only animate possessors in APPs as directly ascribable to the fact that Dutch APP constructions “evolved out of the original personal dative, a construction which could only ever involve animate (or at least personified) entities, i.e., those capable of showing personal interest/involvement in an event.” (1990:42). In short, Burridge’s theory requires not only an animate possessor, but it also sees the origins of the APP construction in Dutch in double object (indirect/direct object) constructions.

Burridge’s theory of a dative possessive as the model for Dutch APP constructions appears quite plausible at first glance, but this theory also raises a number of questions. For instance, why do we find examples of inanimate possessors in the historical data from periods both before and after those that Burridge investigated? Example (17) above, not

only illustrates agreement of the possessor with the possessive pronoun, but it also represents an early Middle Dutch example of an inanimate possessor. Examples (23) - (25) below show inanimate APP constructions from the Early Modern Dutch period. It is also worth noting that all of the examples of inanimate possessors presented in this paper are clearly not double object constructions but represent one syntactic unit.

- (23) *van veel dorpen haer benautheyt* opende hij ons... (*Wouter*: 384, 1574, italics my own)
 from many villages their-APP anxiety released he us
 ‘he released us from many villages’ anxiety’ (translation my own)
- (24) Hier toomt de geest *het vlees zyn dartelheden*. (*Vondel*, late 16th century, as cited in *Royen 1947*: 169, italics my own)
 Here curbs the spirit the flesh his-APP playfulness
 ‘Here the spirit curbs the flesh’s playfulness’ (translation my own)
- (25) Tot dat hy’t ander proeft, en dat het niet en scheelt van’t *eerste [bedd] zijn gemack* (*Huygens*: 15, 1653, italics my own)
 Until he the other tried, and that it not differ from the first [bed] his-APP comfort
 ‘Until he tried the other, and that it did not differ from the first’s comfort’
 (translation my own)

Furthermore, the restriction to animate possessors, which we find in modern Dutch, appears to be a feature of the standard language. In a study of case morphology in Dutch, *Royen (1947:172)* notes two examples of inanimate possessors in APP constructions—one from the 19th century and one from the 20th century:

- (26) *Moeder zat bij de theestooft z’n neuriënd water*. (*Van Deyssel*, 1880s)
 Mother sat next to the teastove his-APP humming water.
 ‘Mother sat next to the teastove’s humming water.’ (translation my own)
- (27) *Het vuurken zijnen pikanten smoor bleef in het kot hangen*. (*Timmermans*, 1932)
 The little fire his-APP pungent heat remained in the pen hanging.
 ‘The little fire’s pungent heat remained hanging in the pen.’ (translation my own)

Finally, as in the discussion of agreement of the possessor in APP constructions, Afrikaans is frequently mentioned with respect to the animacy of the possessor as a contrast to modern Dutch (cf. *Koelmans 1975*, *Burridge 1990*, *Norde 1997*) because the invariant possessive marker *se* is used regardless of whether the possessor is animate or inanimate.

- (28) *die Kaapkolonie se berge*
 the Cape Colony POS mountains
 ‘the mountains of the Cape Colony’ (*Ponelis 1993*: 240, ex. 314)
- (29) *Juliemaand se koue*
 July month POS cold
 ‘the cold of July’ (*Ponelis 1993*: 240, ex. 316)

This comparison leads one to believe that Afrikaans differs considerably from Dutch, but, as is clear from the discussion above, there is evidence in Dutch of inanimate possessors that spans several hundred years.

5. Conclusions

Understanding APP constructions in Dutch is not only crucial to our understanding of possession in Germanic, but also for our understanding of the development of possessive constructions in the Germanic languages. Although APPs were quite common in the Germanic languages, these constructions do not appear to have developed in the same way in each of the languages. In this paper, I have attempted to show that we know very little about APP constructions in Dutch. In fact, I believe that until a comprehensive and systematic study of these constructions is carried out, the only claims we can make with any certainty concerning the feature of agreement is that to date, only examples of the auxiliary possessive pronoun agreeing with the possessor have been found. Furthermore, with respect to the animacy of the possessor, to date the data shows that the possessor could be an inanimate noun phrase. The fact that some linguists have already begun to make claims about the features of APP constructions such as agreement and animacy raises concern about the quality of data used to further our understanding of language change. Theories of language change must be motivated by the data; in the case of auxiliary possessive pronoun constructions in Dutch, we can only speculate about what might be the facts since a comprehensive and systematic study of APPs in Dutch is long overdue.

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