

【論文】

Some Notes on the Development of
the Genitive *-s* Marker
in English

KISHIDA, Naoko

英語属格の発達についての覚書

岸 田 直 子

【abstract】 The genitive *-s* marker in present-day English should best be regarded as a kind of clitic rather than a genitive case suffix. This article examines the development of the genitive *-s* marker from a case suffix to a clitic.

0. Introduction

English is a language with advanced syncretism. Thus the verb ending *-s* assumes a triple function. This morpheme indicates person (third), number (singular) and tense (present). Syncretism is also advancing in the nominal case inflection, where the distinction in form remains only between a common case and a genitive case. The noun ending *-s* functions as a genitive and/or a plural marker. To be more precise, the genitive marker disappears immediately after the plural *-s* marker. For example see (1). This marker also disappears in some foreign words and proper names ending in *-s*. This is called haplology. See (2).

(1) I respect (a) the teachers (: plural).

(b) the teacher's' (:singular genitive) power.

(c) the teachers' (:plural genitive) power.

cf. the mice's tails

(Halpern 1995:103)

(2) (a) Each of these different birds will respond to its own species' song.

(:Latenite nouns)

(Stemberger 1981:793)

(b) Gus' house (:proper names)

(Stemberger 1981:793)

The purpose of this article is to discuss some problems about the origin and the development of the genitive *-s* marker.

In present-day English the genitive *-s* marker is separated from its stem noun and placed immediately after the entire possessive noun phrase². This marker should be regarded as a kind of clitic rather than a case suffix. The plural *-s* marker, on the other hand, is a true suffix. Therefore this suffix cannot be separated from its stem noun. See the contrast below in (3) ~ (6).

(3) Group genitive:

I respect (a) [the Queen of England]'s power. (: singular)

(b) *the [Queen]'s of England power. (: singular)

(c) [the Queens of England]'s power. (: plural)

(d) *the [Queens]'(s) of England power. (: plural)

(4) Plural noun:

I respect (a) the [Queen]s of England.

(b) *[the Queen of England]s.

(5) Possessive NP containing a relative:

This is (a) [the boy I saw]'s hat.

(b) *the [boy]'s I saw hat.

These are (c) [the boys I saw]'s hats.

(d) *the [boys]'(s) I saw hats.

(6) Plural NP containing a relative :

These are (a) the [boy]s I saw.

(b) *[the boy I saw]s.

Scholars cited below all agree that the genitive -s morpheme is not a case suffix.

... the English genitive is in fact no longer a flexional form; the *s* is rather to be compared with those endings in agglutinating languages like Magyar, which cause no change in the words they are added to, and which need only be put once at the end of groups of words; or to the empty words of Chinese grammar. (Jespersen 1993:317)

English has a genitival particle which marks this relationship (= the expression of possession³) when the possessor is a person, animal, or period of time: *John's hat; the man's umbrella; the Mayor of Boston's wife; a day's journey*. (Hockett 1958:187)

The (=genitive⁴) -s ending is not a case ending in the sense which applies to languages such as Latin, Russian, and German. It can be more appropriately described as an 'enclitic postposition': *ie.* its function is parallel to that of a preposition, except that it is placed after the noun phrase. (Quirk et al.

1985:328)

1. Problems on the Development of the Genitive *-s* Morpheme

1.1 The Opposite Direction of Development

It is usually supposed that the genitive *-s* morpheme in present-day English has its origin in an inflectional case ending *-es* (masculine, singular, genitive case) in Old English (hereafter OE). This *-es* form spread into all kinds of nouns in Middle English (hereafter ME), finally ending up as *-s* (a separable clitic).

This direction of development from affix to clitic, if it really happened, is very unusual, as is remarked by the following scholars.

It is important to notice that here historically attested facts show us in the most unequivocal way a development--not, indeed, from an originally self-existent word to an agglutinated suffix and finally to a mere flexional ending, but the exactly opposite development of what was an inseparable part of a complicated flexional system to greater and greater emancipation and independence. (Jespersen 1993:318)

If NE (= Modern English) *-s* is historically derived from OE *-es* ...then this historical development represents a change whereby a morphological element (one below the word-level) became a syntactic element (one bound only at the phrasal level, as a clitic). This innovation thus demonstrates that, however overwhelmingly more common it may be for syntactic elements to become morphological ones (e.g. for clitics to become inflections) than vice-versa, the opposite directionality of change is nevertheless possible. (Janda 1980:246)

1.2 The Role of *his* Genitive in the Development of Possessive *-s*

The English language used to have another way of marking the possessive NP;

i.e. the *his* genitive construction, in which the possessive pronouns (a kind of clitic) were placed immediately after the possessive NP. This construction is so called because among all possessive pronouns, *his* was mainly used regardless of person, number and gender of the head noun of the possessive NP. See (7)–(9) for examples.

(7) be John Paston is⁵ (=by John Paston's) wordys; (PL022008)⁶

(8) to defende othir men is (=other men's) causis. (PL093014)

(9) I dide myn maisteress youre moder is (= my mistress, your mother's) erandis, (PL552037)

We can infer that this construction complemented the function of the genitive inflection in case the latter was not available for some reason or other. Kellner (1956:189–90) assumes that the *his* genitive construction was originated in OE “in order to make up for the want of the genitive inflection.” Gorlach (1991:81) says that “in the 16th century it appears to have spread into ‘respectable’ prose, but largely restricted to the form *his* following words ending in sibilants”.

See the quotation below for further details of the development of this construction.

This use (=“His” instead of the Genitive Case⁷) may be traced back to OE, where other possessive pronouns are found after proper nouns, in order to make up for the want of the genitive inflection.

Ǿær Asia and Europe hiera landgemircu togædre liega (where the boundaries of Asia and Europe lie)--Orosius,8/10.⁸

In the first period of Middle English the same use is to be found mostly in proper nouns.

Argal his broðer--Layamon,i.279/14

...

But the second version of Layamon's *Brut* exhibits a few instances of *his* replacing inflectional *s*.

Min hem his mochele mod (=mine uncle's).--Layamon i.375/2(B).

...

Modern English. The sixteenth century makes a large use of *his=s*, it occurs in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and has not died out even in our own time. (L.Kellner 1956:189-90)

1.3 The Decline of a Split Genitive

When the possessive NP consists of a group of NPs in apposition, NE uses a group genitive construction, such as (10). How did OE and ME cope with this situation? These languages had recourse to a peculiar way of splitting these NPs. See (11) below for examples. The appositive NP *your husbonde* is post-posed after the possessed NP *tyme*. The governing word (= the head noun of the possessed NP) must be a single word, not a phrase in this construction. This construction was named 'Split Genitive' by Ekwall (1943).

(10) the mayor of Boston's wife (Hockett 1958:187)

(11) in my lordes tyme your husbonde, (in my lord your husband's time)
(PL726016)

Why was it necessary to split these NPs in OE and ME? There seems to have been a restriction on the position of the genitive *-es* marker; that is, the case suffix *-es* should always be adjacent to the governing word. Thus in (11) the appositive NP *your husbonde* would be an obstacle to this requirement of adjacency if it were pre-posed and placed between *my lordes* and *tyme*.

2. The Genitive Marking in the *Paston Letters*

The *Paston Letters* (hereafter PL) are a collection of the letters written by and to the members of the Paston family in the 15th century. Private letters are excellent tools with which we can analyze the colloquial speech in the times past. Let us examine the use of possessive NPs in PL.

2.1 The Omission of the *-s* Marker

The genitive *-s* marker was omitted more often than in present-day English. See below.

(a) after proper names

(i) those ending in *-s*

dyuerys of the Lord Moleynys men (= diverse of the Lord Moleyns' men)
(PL132006)

Thomas Denys dethe (= Thomas Denys' death) (PL161013)

cf. cause of Thomas Denyssys dethe (= Thomas Denys's death) (PL162004)

(ii) others

Wichingham men thretyn hem(= Wichingham's men threaten them) (PL132036)

cf. Ser Thomas Todenhamys men and Heydonys (=Sir Thomas Todenham's and Heydon's men) (PL138011)

(b) kinship terms

of myn vnkyll men (= one of my uncle's men) (PL139011)

after your fader dysseys (= after your father's decease) (PL143008)

she wold have hyr broder ad-vice (= her brother's advice) (PL160018)

cf. in hys fadyrys lyue (= in his father's life) (PL157011)

(c) group genitives

Myn Lord Awbry hathe weddit þe Duke of Bokyngham dowter, (= My Lord Awbry has wedded the Duke of Buckingham's daughter) (PL089044)

cf. the parson of Sparrammys dowter (= the parson of Sparharm's daughter) (PL132067)

2.2 *his* genitives

The form *his* is used irrespective of person, gender and number. See above (8) and (9). We can see how *his* genitives complement the absence of the *-s* morpheme. See below.

(a) after proper names

Beronners hys man tellyt me, (=Beroners' men told me) , (PL231055)

Item, Thomas Fauconbrydye hys hed (=Thomas Fauconbridge's head) was yesterdaye sett vpeon London Brydye (PL264043)

(b) group genitives

The Erle of Wylchir is hed (= the Earl of Wiltshire's head) is sette on London Brigge. (PL628019)

The Prioure of Bromhill þat was fermoure his terme is expired, (= The Prior of Bromehill that was farmer's term) (PL667005)

His genitives appear even in split genitives.

the parson ys seruaunt of Blofeld, (= the parson's servant of Blofield) (PL572003)

3. Conclusion

We have seen in PL a rich variety of means to express the possessive NPs. We cannot yet decide how the NE *-s* has developed as clitic. Has it developed from an OE case suffix *-es* or a *his* genitive?

Notes:

¹ Notice that the presence or absence of an apostrophe is not a decisive factor. See below.

(i) *its* (: genitive) vs. *it's* (: the reduction of *it is*)

(ii) There are many Q's and P's (: plural) in this paragraph.

² According to Klavans (1995:59-60), Nida (1946:155) defines clitics as: elements that (1) combine phonologically with words with which they do not form morphological constructions, and (2) do not constitute derivational or inflectional formatives. Notice that the genitive marker does not affect the inside of the word it attaches to. See the contrast below.

spy's (:genitive) vs. *spies* (:plural)

³ The insertion in the parenthesis is my own.

⁴ The insertion in the parenthesis is my own.

⁵ *his* is often weakened to *is*.

⁶ PL stands for the *Paston Letters*, the first three numbers are letter numbers and the rest line numbers in Davis edition.

⁷ The insertion in the parenthesis is my own

⁸ Mitchell (1985:121) says that this sentence is an isolated example, related to similar examples in later periods of English only in so far as the difficulty of inflecting proper names lies at its root.

References

- Davis, Norman. (ed.) 1971. 1976. *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*. (2 vols.) Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Ekwall, Eilert. 1943. *Studies on the Genitive of Groups in English*. in Bulletin de la Societe Royal des Lettres de Lund, 1-104. C.W.K. Gleerup
- Gorlach, Manfred. 1991. *Introduction to Early Modern English*. Cambridge UP.
- Halpern, Aaron. 1995. *On the Placement and Morphology of Clitics*. CSLI Pub., USA
- Hockett, Charles F. 1958. *A Course in Modern Linguistics*. Macmillan.
- Janda, Richard D. 1980. "On the Decline of Declensional Systems: The overall loss of OE nominal case inflections and the ME reanalysis of *-es* and *his* " in Traugott, Labrum, and Shepherd (eds.) 1980: 243-352.

- Jespersen, Otto. 1933. *Progress in Language*. John Benjamins. (New edition with an introduction by James D. McCawley.)
- Kellner, Leon. 1956. *Historical Outlines of English Syntax*. Kenkyu-sha, (reprint of 1892 with an introduction and notes by Kikuo Miyabe)
- Klavans, Judith L. 1995. *On Clitics and Cliticizations*. Garland.
- Mitchell, Bruce. 1985. *Old English Syntax*. Vol.1 Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Nida, Eugene A. 1946. *Morphology: The Descriptive Analysis of Words*. University of Michigan Press.
- Quirk, R., S. Greenbaum, G. Leech and J. Svartvik. 1985. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. Longman.
- Stemberger, Joseph Paul. 1981. "Morphological Haplology" *Language* 57.4. pp.791-817.
- Traugott, Elizabeth Closs, Rebecca Labrum and Susan Shepherd (eds.) 1980. *Papers from the 4th International Conference on Historical Linguistics*. John Benjamins.