



# **EUROTYP**

## **Working Papers**

Theme 7: NOUN PHRASE STRUCTURE  
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Frans Plank  
ON DETERMINERS  
1. ELLIPSIS AND INFLECTIONS  
2. CO-OCCURRENCE OF POSSESSIVES

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# **EUROTYP**

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## Ellipsis and inflection of determiners and modifiers in coordinate NPs

Frans Plank

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If two (or more) conjuncts of a coordinate NP are accompanied by the same determiners and/or modifiers, it may or may not be possible for any of these identical items to be omitted in all but one conjunct. Their omission may or may not be subject to the condition that the two (or more) coordinate nouns form some kind of referential unit. (For example, in ‘my cousin and my friend’ the omission of the second possessive, giving ‘my cousin and friend’, may be conditional upon the two coordinate NPs referring to a single person.) If any such item is in principle omissible under identity, it may or may not be required to share all inflectional properties with the corresponding item in the other conjunct. If any such item is omissible even without sharing all inflectional properties with the corresponding item in the other conjunct, the inflectional properties of that latter, remaining item may be determined by the nearest conjunct, by the final (and most distant) conjunct, by the combination of the inflectionally relevant properties of both conjuncts, or by some general or language-particular principles of resolving inflectional conflicts (such as feature hierarchies).

To illustrate these possibilities:

### (A) Inomissibility despite full identity

Spanish      la pluma y la tinta  
                 the.FemSg pen and the.FemSg ink  
                 fi \*la pluma y Ø tinta

### (B) Omissibility only under full inflectional identity

German      mein-em Hund und mein-em Kanarienvogel  
                 my-DatSgMasc dog and my-DatSgMasc canary  
                 fi mein-em Hund und Ø Kanarienvogel  
                 mein-em Hund und mein-er Katze  
                 my-DatSgMasc dog and my-DatSgFem cat  
                 fi \*mein-em Hund und Ø Katze

Note that it is categorial, rather than purely formal, identity which is required here:

mein-e Hunde und mein-e Katze  
my-Nom/AccPlMasc dogs and my-Nom/AccSgFem cat  
fi \*mein-e Hunde und Ø Katze

Ellipsis may, however, marginally be possible with categorially distinct but formally identical items:

ihr-e Gestalt und ihr-e unverkennbar schön-en Züg-e  
her-Nom/AccSgFem figure and her-Nom/AccPlMasc unmistakably  
beautiful-Nom/AccPlMascDef trait-Nom/AccPl  
fi ihr-e Gestalt und Ø unverkennbar schön-en Züg-e  
(example from J. v. Eichendorff, *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, I, 7)

(C) Omissibility despite (partial) inflectional non-identity

(Ca) Inflection determined by the nearest conjunct

French ton père et ta mère  
your.MascSg father and your.FemSg mother  
fi ton père et Ø mère / \*ta père et Ø mère

(Cb) Inflection determined by the final (and most distant) conjunct

Low German bi jeed-en Wind un jeed-er Wedder  
at each-OblSgMasc wind and each-OblSgNeut weather  
fi bi jeed-er Wind un Ø Wedder/??bi jeed-en Wind un Ø Wedder

(Cc) Inflection determined by combination of conjuncts

French ton père et ta mère  
fi tes père et Ø mère  
your.Pl father and Ø mother

(Cd) Inflection determined in accordance with principles of conflict resolution

a fictitious example

ta mère, ton père et ta sœur

your.FemSg mother, your.MascSg father and your.FemSg sister

fi ton mère, Ø père et Ø sœur

(on the assumptions that Masculine ranks higher than Feminine

on the Gender hierarchy, and the conflict is here resolved in terms of

that hierarchy)

It remains to be seen whether there are further possibilities in addition to those six. A possibility of type C, with inflection being allegedly determined by the ‘most important’ conjunct, is sometimes alluded to in grammars of languages such as Latin and Greek; possibly this might be subsumed under Cd.

Individual languages may allow more than one possibility for a particular class of items. Thus, the inflection of French possessives may be determined by the nearest conjunct (Ca) or combinatorily (Cc). If there are such alternatives, one may be preferred over the other.

Different kinds of determiners and modifiers may behave differently in such situations. What should minimally be distinguished are indefinite and definite articles, demonstrative and possessive pronouns as typical kinds of determiners and attributive adjectives as the prototypical kind of modifier.

Different kinds of inflectional categories (e.g. inherent categories of nouns such as gender on the one hand, and categories assigned to the whole NP such as case on the other) might likewise behave differently. Ideally, therefore, the several relevant categories would have to be considered individually.

I am not aware of any large-scale survey of such patterns which would enable one to generalize about the popularity and unpopularity of the possibilities outlined above, about permissible alternatives within individual languages, about differences between different subclasses of determiners and modifiers, about analogies with NP-external agreement, about relationships between the choices a language takes on this count and other structural properties, and perhaps further questions of this kind. It would, thus, seem desirable to extend Table 1 by collecting relevant information for a whole lot of further languages with NP-internal agreement.

Language	indefArt	defArt	Dem	Poss	Adj
Classical Greek	-	Ca	Ca	Ca	Ca
Latin	-	-	Ca	Ca	Ca
Italian	A?	A?	A?	A?	?
French	A?	B/Ca/c	Ca/c	Ca/c	Ca/c
Spanish	A?	A?	A?	A?	?
(High) German	B	B	B	B	B
Low German	<u>B</u> /Cb/c	<u>B</u> /Cb/c	<u>B</u> /Cb/c	<u>B</u> /Cb/c	<u>B</u> /Cb/c
English	(B)	(B)	B	(B)	(B)
Russian	-	-	Ca/c	Ca/c	Ca/c
Hungarian	(B)	(B)	B	(B)	(B)

Table 1: Ellipsis potentials of different kinds of determiners and modifiers

Notes on the Table:

-	the language lacks that class of items
(B)	omissible item does not inflect
Ca/ <u>c</u>	both alternatives are possible but option Cc is preferred
Ca?	information is questionable
?	no information available

In Tagalog, not included in Table 1 because the relevant items hardly qualify as definite articles in the strict sense, there are different particles with a relational plus thematic function accompanying common nouns and proper names (to simplify matters); these are mentioned here, however, because of their unusual divergent behaviour. The common-noun particle *ang* is omissible under full identity, i.e. must remain if the first conjunct is accompanied by the proper-name particle *si* — thus exemplifying B:

ang babae at ang lalaki  
the woman and the man  
fi ang babae at Ø lalaki

si Juan at ang lalaki  
 the Juan and the man  
 fi \*si Juan at Ø lalaki

If both conjuncts have the proper-name particle *si*, the second instance is omissible, but the number inflection of the remaining item is then determined by combining the conjuncts — thus exemplifying Cc:

si Juan at si Ben  
 the Juan and the Ben  
 fi \*si Juan at Ø Ben  
 fi sina Juan at Ø Ben  
 the.Pl Juan and Ø Ben

One tentative generalization that can be induced from Table 1 is that, if there are differences in omissibility between the items considered, omissibility increases from left to right, given the ordering of items in Table 1. It is striking, though, that, on the present evidence, the different subclasses of determiners and adjectives in general appear to behave quite uniformly.

Another generalization is that, if any item shows variable behaviour, the alternatives are preferably ones here subsumed under heading C, one option always being the combinatorial determination of the inflection of the remaining item (Cc). Exceptional in this respect are definite articles in French (apparently allowing option B) and all items in Low German (where option B, however, is generally the preferred one).

The paramount question of course is **why** particular languages choose the strategies which they are seen to choose, and to this there is no answer in sight.

#### Acknowledgments:

I am grateful to Edith Moravcsik and Grev Corbett for comments and information. The peculiar distant-conjunct agreement pattern of Low German, apparently not restricted to set phrases, is described in a forthcoming paper by Günter Rohdenburg.

## ADDENDA

Language	indefArt	defArt	Dem	Poss	Adj
Classical Greek	-	Ca	Ca	Ca	Ca
Latin	-	-	Ca	Ca	Ca
Italian	A?	A?	A?	A?	?
French	A?	B/Ca/c	Ca/c	Ca/c	Ca/c
Spanish	A?	A?	A?	A?	?
(High) German	B	B	B	B	B
Low German	<u>B/Cb/c</u>	<u>B/Cb/c</u>	<u>B/Cb/c</u>	<u>B/Cb/c</u>	<u>B/Cb/c</u>
English	(B)	(B)	B	(B)	(B)
Old Irish	-	Ca		Ca	Ca
Russian	-	-	Ca/c	Ca/c	Ca/c
Hungarian	(B)	(B)	B	(B)	(B)

Table 1: Ellipsis potentials of different kinds of determiners and modifiers

### Notes on the Table:

-	the language lacks that class of items
(B)	omissible item does not inflect
Ca/c	both alternatives are possible but option Cc is preferred
Ca?	information is questionable
?	no information available

### Info on Old/Middle Irish:

Ó Gealbháin, Séamas (1991). The double article and related features of genitive syntax in Old Irish and Middle Welsh. *Celtica* 22: 119-144. [135f]

## On the co-occurrence of possessives with articles and demonstratives

Frans Plank  
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### 1. POSSESSIVES AND ARTICLES

1.1. In English a possessive determiner may not co-occur with an article:

- (1) a. \*the my house
- b. \*a my house

An NP with a possessive adjective being definite, it would seem to be redundant to add a definite article and contradictory to add an indefinite article. (Interestingly, the natural position of the articles, if there could be any, appears to be in front of, rather than after, the possessive: *\*\*my the/a house*.) This cannot be the whole story, however, since at least an indefinite article co-occurs with a possessive in a prepositional construction, and more marginally perhaps also a definite article:

- (1') a. ?the house of mine (which you referred to)
- b. a house of mine

There are many languages which resemble English in these respects, including German (2), French (3), and, lacking an indefinite article, Welsh (4):

- (2) a. \*das mein Haus
- b. \*ein mein Haus
- (2') a. das Haus von mir
- b. ein Haus von mir (lit. the/a house of me, with a personal pronoun rather than, as in English, a possessive)
- (3) a. \*la ma maison
- b. \*une ma maison
- (3') a. ?la maison à moi
- b. une maison à moi
- (4) a. \*y fy dy / \*yr yn dy (*fy* being the traditional written and *yn* the spontaneous spoken Welsh 1st person singular possessive determiner)

French, however, is a little less strict than English, German, or Welsh insofar as it marginally permits combinations at least of indefinite articles or other indefinite determiners with possessives, which then appear in the tonic form:

- (5) b. une mien frère 'a brother of mine', un mienne cousine 'a cousin of mine',  
     quelque mienne rhapsodie (Voltaire) 'some rhapsody of mine'

In Italian, on the other hand, a possessive determiner must generally be preceded by an article:



- (6) a. la mia casa (also with possessive and noun reversed for emphasis: la casa mia)  
 b. una mia casa / una casa mia

It is only with singular nouns denoting central family relations (excepts the hypocoristics *mamma* and *babbo*) unmodified by an adjective that a possessive must not be accompanied by a definite article, and with some kin nouns, especially *nonno* and *nonna* ‘grandfather, grandmother’, the definite article in front of the possessive is optional:

- (7) a. (\*il) mio fratello ‘my brother; but: i miei fratelli ‘my brothers’, il mio caro fratello ‘my dear brother’  
 (8) a. (il) mio nonno

Indefinite articles in front of possessives are possible with these nouns as well:

- (7) b. un mio fratello / un fratello mio  
 (8) b. un mio nonno / un nonno mio

The definite article is also lacking in certain prepositional phrases where the possessive follows the noun; nor is an indefinite article likely to be used here, owing to the set character of such phrases:

- (9) a. a (\*la) casa mia ‘at my house, at home’  
 b. ??a una casa mia ‘at a house of mine’

Among the languages which resemble Italian in these respects are Portuguese, Rumanian (with suffixed or enclitic definite article: *carte-a mea* book-the my, \**carte mea* book my; also with independent definite article: *a mea carte* the my book; analogously with possessive genitive-dative of the personal pronoun: *carte-a lui* book-the of=he, *a lui carte* the of=he book; there is no indefinite article), Old French (as reflected in later usages such as (4) above), Old Spanish, and Classical Greek (with both genuine possessives—where the article may even occur twice, as with other adjectives: ο οίκος ο ἐμός the house the my—and genitives of personal pronouns; there is again no indefinite article).

Modern Spanish is kind of intermediate between the two groups. Normally a possessive determiner, occurring prenominal, is incompatible with an article:

- (10) a. \*la mi casa  
 b. \*una mi casa

Such NPs without article are definite, as in English (*mi casa* ‘my house’). Articles are required, however, if the possessive is postnominal in special constructions:

- (10’) a. la casa mía (emphatic)  
 b. un casa mía ‘a house of mine’

1.2. In English the forms of possessives used as nominals are partly distinct from (*mine, yours, hers, ours, yours, theirs*) and partly identical to (*his, its*) the forms of possessives used in determiner function; like determiner possessives, however, nominal possessives do not permit articles:

- (11) a. \*the mine
- b. \*a mine

In German, on the other hand, nominal possessives, differing from determiner ones only in inflection, permit, but do not require, definite articles; indefinite articles, however, are as impermissible as with determiner possessives:

- (12) a. das meine, meines (Nom/AccSgNeut)
- b. \*ein meines
- (12') b. eines von mir (cf. 2'b)

In Welsh, where genitives of dependent personal pronouns are used as possessive determiners, the nominal possessives formed from the stem *eiddo* 'property', characteristic of a formal style, may likewise occur with (as in the formula *yr eiddoch yn gywir* 'the your in true 'yours truly') or without definite article.

In all other languages considered in §1.1 nominal possessives likewise take definite articles, regardless of whether determiner possessives permit them (as in Italian (13), where there is no formal difference between the two uses anyway) or prohibit them (as generally in French (14), where tonic forms serve as nominal possessives).

- (13) a. la mia
- (14) a. la mienne

The definite article is generally omissible when such possessives are used as predicate nominals (e.g. Italian *Questa casa è mia* 'this house is mine'). Nowhere do nominal possessives seem to show any great inclination to co-occur with indefinite articles.

## 2. POSSESSIVES AND DEMONSTRATIVES

2.1. In English a demonstrative pronoun is as incompatible with a possessive determiner as is an article:

- (15) \*this/\*that my house

Such NPs are again grammatical if the possessive is in a prepositional construction:

- (15') this/that house of mine

In former times this co-occurrence restriction was looser; one occasionally encounters examples such as these:

- (16) a. Both of them used to talk pleasantly of this their first journey to London. (James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 1791)
- b. Granting that the White Whale fully incites the hearts of this my savage crew, ... (Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, 1851)
- c. He told them that the house of theirs to which he alluded was this their church in which he now addressed them for the first time. (Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers*, 1857)

German, a language aligned with English on the criterion of the incompatibility of possessives and articles, is considerably more liberal as to the co-occurrence of possessives and demonstratives (especially the proximal one):

- (17) dieses/ ?jenes mein Haus

While many speakers would perhaps prefer a prepositional possessive construction in the presence of a demonstrative (as in (17'), parallel to (2')),

- (17') dieses/jenes Haus von mir

others use NPs like (17) quite naturally, among which Chancellor Kohl — cf. his notorious *in diesem unserm/unseren Lande* 'in this our country'. Apropos of this Kohl phrase, it should be noted that the possessive determiner preceded by a demonstrative, while usually taking the case-number-gender inflections peculiar to possessives (*in unser-em Land(e)*), may in the dative adopt those of the weak (definite) declension of attributive adjectives (*in diesem schön-en Land(e)* 'in this beautiful country'); this second alternative probably suggests that possessives, while usually functioning as determiners, may be able to acquire modifier status. [See the Postscript for further discussion.]

Modern French, while more liberal than English, appears to be more restrained than German; demonstratives preceding (the tonic form of) possessives, or also a noun followed by a (tonic) possessive, seem to be as marginal or old-fashioned as combinations of articles and possessives like those mentioned above in (5):

- (18) ce mien camarade, cette mienne oreille, cette aventure mienne  
'this comrade, ear, adventure of mine'

In Welsh it likewise used to be possible to have a possessive determiner preceding and a demonstrative following a noun; but constructions such as (19) seem now archaic.

- (19) fy mab hwn my son this (Luke xv. 24)

In Modern Spanish the presence of a demonstrative, like that of an article, is (I believe) conditional upon the possessive being in postnominal position:

- (20) \*esta/\*esa/\*aquella mi casa
- (20') esta/esa/aquella casa mía (emphatic)

Italian freely permits the combination of demonstrative and possessive determiner, even with kin nouns which in the singular prohibit the definite article in this position:

- (21) questa/quella mia casa, questo mio fratello

Portuguese, Rumanian, Old French, Old Spanish, and Classical Greek align with Italian on this count.

2.2. There would generally seem to be little opportunity to use demonstratives with nominal possessives. When forced to construct such phrases, their acceptability should roughly correspond to that of possessive determiners:

- (22) \*this mine (English)
- (23) dieses das meine, dieses meines (German)
- (24) ?cette la mienne (French)
- (25) questa la mia (Italian)

### 3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our basic results about the possible or impossible co-occurrences of possessive determiners (Poss<sub>det</sub>) and nominal possessives (Poss<sub>nom</sub>) with indefinite and definite articles (iArt, dArt) and demonstratives (Dem) are summarized in Table 1.

The majority patterns are for both articles and demonstratives to be either incompatible (English) or compatible (Italian, Portuguese, Rumanian, Old French, Old Spanish, Classical Greek) with possessive determiners. Even when there are conditions on or limitations to such combinations, they tend to be the same in both cases (Modern Spanish, Modern French). It is only in German, and archaically in Welsh, that demonstratives co-occur with possessive determiners while articles do not. There is so far no language on record where the divergence is the other way round, with only articles, but not demonstratives, co-occurring with possessive determiners. Limited though our evidence is at present, it suggests this one-way implication:

- (I) If articles co-occur with possessive determiners,  
then demonstratives do so, too.

It would be interesting to know whether this generalization is confirmed or disconfirmed by more extensive evidence.

Language	iArt+Poss <sub>det</sub>	dArt+Poss <sub>det</sub>	iArt+Poss <sub>nom</sub>	dArt+Poss <sub>nom</sub>	Dem+Poss <sub>det</sub>
English	-	-	-	-	-
Welsh	Ø	-	-	+	-?
Modern French	-?	-?	-	+	-?
German	-	-	-	+	+
Modern Spanish	±	±	-	+	±
Italian	+	+	-	+	+
Portuguese	+	+	-	+	+
Rumanian	Ø	+	-	+	+
Old French	+	+	-	+	+
Old Spanish	+	+	-	+	+
Classical Greek	Ø	+	-	+	+

Table 1: Permissible and impermissible co-occurrences

Explanations:

+	permissible
-	impermissible
±	permissible or impermissible depending upon certain conditions
Ø	category to be combined with possessive is unattested in the language
?	with marginal exceptions

Diachronically, it seems that the co-occurrence constraints between possessive determiners on the one hand and articles and demonstratives on the other tend to tighten (compare the Old and Modern stages of French and Spanish, and note the archaicism of Dem+Poss<sub>det</sub> in Welsh) but not to loosen. According to the generalization just put forward, in the course of such developments possessives ought to prohibit articles before prohibiting demonstratives.

Given the common proximity of definite articles to demonstratives, from which they tend to derive diachronically, the differential co-occurrence potentials relative to possessives provide a syntactic distinctive feature for these two categories of determiners.

Comparing possessive determiners and nominal possessives, if they are not both incompatible (English) or both compatible (from Modern Spanish down to Ancient Greek in Table 1) with the definite article, it appears to be the nominal use of possessives which is more favourable to the definite article (Welsh, German, more marginally Modern French). Our present evidence thus suggests another one-way implication:

- (II) If possessive determiners co-occur with definite articles,  
then nominal possessives do so, too.

Comparing the two right-hand columns of Table 1, there are mostly identical values, except for Welsh and Modern French, which allow dArt+Poss<sub>nom</sub> but, with marginal exceptions, disallow Dem+Poss<sub>det</sub>, suggesting this generalization:

- (III) If possessive determiners co-occur with demonstratives,  
then nominal possessives co-occur with definite articles.

Finally, there are evident differences between definite and indefinite articles with nominal possessives, which, if permitting articles at all, permit only definite ones. Although our present evidence shows no comparable divergences with possessive determiners, one would expect this implication to hold for both uses:

- (IV) If indefinite articles co-occur with possessives,  
then definite articles do so, too.

Since definite, rather than indefinite, articles form a natural class with demonstratives, these should therefore be the items next-most likely to co-occur with possessives.

#### POSTSCRIPT

In §5 of his paper on "The syntax of English genitive constructions" (*Journal of Linguistics* 22 (1986) 123-143), Christopher Lyons distinguishes 'determiner-genitive' (DG) and 'adjectival-genitive' (AG) languages, depending on whether genitives, including agreeing possessives, are permitted in determiner (or specifier) position or occupy modifier position. English is a DG language: genitives in determiner position force a definite interpretation (*John's house* 'the house of John/\*a house of John's'), with an alternative, complement construction having to be resorted to to express indefiniteness (*a house of John's*); and possessives thus preempt the use of a definite article (*\*the my house*) and prohibit the use of an indefinite article (according to Lyons "a cardinality expression generated in mod[ifier] position", *\*my a house*). Italian is an AG language: possessives are generated in modifier rather than determiner position and thus neither preempt a definite article in determiner position (*la mia casa*) nor prohibit an indefinite article (*una mia casa*, according to Lyons's reasoning for English presumably also in a modifier position, preceding possessive and adjectival modifiers). Spanish is both a DG and an AG language, with prenominal possessives being in specifier (*(\*la/\*una) mi casa*) and postnominal possessives in modifier position (*la/una casa mía*).

What is difficult to account for in Lyons's scheme are divergences between definite articles and demonstratives, alternative occupants of the determiner position in languages which have these two kinds of words. As outlined above, German (classified as a DG language by Lyons) and archaic Welsh show precisely such patterns.

To accommodate German, one might consider allowing possessives alternatively in the determiner and the modifier position. As determiners, they would preempt the use of definite

articles (*\*das mein Haus*), while, as modifiers, they would permit demonstrative determiners (*dieses mein Haus*). Inflectional variation of determiners and modifiers in German actually has some bearing on this question; but the evidence, though intricate, is overwhelmingly not in favour of such a solution.

Possessive pronouns inflect like the indefinite article (and *kein* ‘no’), as is exemplified for *unser* ‘our’ in Table 2.

	MascSg	NeutSg	FemSg	Pl
Nom	unser-Ø	unser-Ø	unser-e	unser-e
Acc	unser-en	unser-Ø	unser-e	unser-e
Gen	unser-es	unser-es	unser-er	unser-er
Dat	unser-em	unser-em	unser-er	unser-en

Table 2. Inflection of possessives

Adjectives have two sets of inflections, the weak (Table 3) and the strong (Table 4), here exemplified with *schön* ‘beautiful’.

	MascSg	NeutSg	FemSg	Pl
Nom	schön-e	schön-e	schön-e	schön-en
Acc	schön-en	schön-e	schön-e	schön-en
Gen	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en
Dat	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en

Table 3. Weak adjective declension

	MascSg	NeutSg	FemSg	Pl
Nom	schön-er	schön-es	schön-e	schön-e
Acc	schön-en	schön-es	schön-e	schön-e
Gen	schön-en	schön-en	schön-en	schön-er
Dat	schön-em	schön-em	schön-er	schön-en

Table 3. Strong adjective declension

The strong declension is also known as pronominal because demonstratives and certain other pronouns take essentially the same set of desinences. (The single exception is genitive singular, where these pronouns prefer *-es* over *-en*.) Disregarding the numerous homonymies, a comparison of these three tables shows that the desinences of possessives and the indefinite article are largely identical to those of the strong (or pronominal) adjective declension; it is

merely the -Ø desinence for NomSgMasc and Nom/AccSgNeut which is peculiar to possessives and the indefinite article.

The basic rule for the selection of weak or strong adjectival forms is this: An adjective inflects weakly if preceded by an article, pronoun, or numeral with a strong desinence, and strongly otherwise. The adjective in (1), with the NP consisting solely of an adjective and a feminine noun and with the preposition governing the dative, thus inflects strongly, while that in (2) inflects weakly, being preceded by the strongly inflected indefinite article.

- (1) mit schön-er Aussicht 'with beautiful view'
- (2) mit ein-er schön-en Aussicht 'with a beautiful view'

The non-strong zero desinence of Nom(/Acc)Sg masculine and neuter possessives and the indefinite article counts as weak for these purposes; compare (3) to (4), where a strongly inflected demonstrative requires as weakly inflected adjective:

- (3) unser-Ø schön-es Land 'our beautiful country'
- (4) dies-es schön-e Land 'this beautiful country'

Now, if a possessive is combined with a preceding demonstrative, how does it inflect? The answer is (cf. 5): normally like a possessive not preceded by a demonstrative, i.e. itself occupying determiner position.

- (5) a. dies-es unser-Ø Land 'this our country' (Nom/AccSg Neut)
- b. dies-e unser-e Heimat 'this our native land' (Nom/AccSg Fem)

If possessives were here in modifier rather than determiner position, they should inflect like adjectives do in this environment, i.e. weakly; but this they categorically do not:

- (5') a. \*dies-es unser-e Land

(Feminines do not distinguish weak and strong for Nom/Acc/GenSg; thus the weakly inflected possessive would be *unser-e*, as in (5b).) In fact, there exist possessive adjectives, derived by suffix -ig, and probably more popular in the South than in the North, and these do inflect like adjectives:

- (6) a. dies-es unsrig-e Land
- b. dies-e unsrig-e Heimat

However, in the dative singular, and nowhere else, post-demonstrative possessors do have a choice of inflecting strongly (7), like they do without demonstratives, or weakly (7'), like ordinary adjectives would do in this environment:

- (7) a. in dies-em unser-em Land
- b. in dies-er unser-er Heimat
- (7') a. in dies-em unser-en Land
- b. in dies-er unser-en Heimat



It is, however, still the weakly inflected, unadjective-like possessives which are generally preferred here. Of thirty informants consulted by means of a questionnaire, twenty-six judged (7) to be better than (7'), with (7) mostly receiving grade 1 (perfectly grammatical) or at least grade 2 (near-grammatical) and with (7') mostly receiving grades 3 (near-ungrammatical) or 4 (ungrammatical), and rarely grade 2. Only three informants preferred (7') to (7), and one preferred (7'a) to (7a) while preferring (7b) to (7'b).

The adjective-like inflection of possessives under these circumstances, second choice for most speakers, might be taken to indicate that they are actually occupying a modifier rather than a determiner position. What would of course remain a mystery on this assumption is why they are able, alternatively, to acquire this unaccustomed status under precisely these circumstances—dative singular—and under no others. There are in fact other instances of adjectives being able to choose between (expected) strong and (unexpected) weak inflections in the dative singular, but they are not entirely analogous insofar as they are restricted to masculine and neuter. Thus, if two masculine or neuter adjectives, not preceded by an article, pronoun, or numeral requiring that they be weakly inflected, are asyndetically coordinated, the first must be strongly inflected, but the second may take the strong (8) or the weak (8') form:

- (8) a. mit schön-em weit-em Blick (*Blick* 'view' being masculine)
- b. mit schön-er weit-er Aussicht (*Aussicht* 'view' being feminine)
- (8') a. mit schön-em weit-en Blick
- b. \*mit schön-er weit-en Aussicht

Similarly if an adjective follows a personal pronoun:

- (9) a. dir arm-em Schlucker 'you poor wretch'
- b. dir arm-er Sünderin 'you poor sinner (Fem)°'
- (9') a. dir arm-en Schlucker
- b. ??dir arm-en Sünderin

In the case of possessives, there are also speakers who accept the weak dative form after a demonstrative more readily with masculines and neuters than with feminines. Of the thirty informants consulted, eleven judged (7'a) to be better than (7'b); only four judgements were the other way round; and the rest saw no difference.

In German the choice between strong and weak inflections of determiners and modifiers is consistently determined from left to right: no element normally interferes with this choice for an element preceding it. Possessives following demonstratives are apparently the only exception to this rule: when in turn followed by an adjective (as in (10/10')), the likelihood of the possessive to inflect weakly increases considerably.

- (10) a. in dies-em unser-em schön-en Land
- b. in dies-er unser-er schön-en Heimat
- (10') a. in dies-em unser-en schön-en Land
- b. in dies-er unser-en schön-en Heimat

Of my thirty informants, twenty judged (10') to be better than (7'), ten marginally so (difference of one grade), ten significantly so (differences of two or three grades); four saw no difference; four found (10') to be marginally worse than (7'); and of the remaining two, one preferred (7'a) to (10'a) but (10'b) to (7'b), and the other (10'a) to (7'a) but (7'b) to (10'b).

Although I have so far been unable to confirm this, it seems to me that the strongly inflected possessives in (10) may even be followed by strongly inflected adjectives:

- (11) a. in dies-em unser-em schön-em Land
- b. in dies-er unser-er schön-er Heimat

The resemblance with the pattern of two asyndetically coordinated adjectives in (8) perhaps suggests that the possessives here indeed are adjective-like modifiers. If the strongly inflected possessives were obligatorily categorized as pronouns, it would be against the above left-to-right rule for a following adjective to be strongly inflected.

Furthermore, if a post-demonstrative possessive is followed by an adjective, it need not be in the dative singular to accept the ordinary adjectival weak desinences. Although this is again so far unconfirmed by informants, (12'a) should receive higher grades than strictly ungrammatical NPs such as (5'a):

- (12) a. dies-es unser-Ø schön-es Land
- (12') a. dies-es unser-e schön-e Land

The two weakly inflected elements after a strongly inflected demonstrative would be in accordance with the normal rules if both were categorized as adjectives or adjective-like modifiers in an asyndetic coordination. Thus, compare (12'a) with (13):

- (13) dies-es weit-e, schön-e Land 'this wide, beautiful country'

In conclusion, what inflectional evidence there is in German for assuming that possessives are modifiers rather than determiners, it is peculiarly limited to a particular case (dative) and number (singular) and to NPs where possessives are followed by adjectives. This conclusion seems odd enough to suggest that there might be other explanations for the inflectional indeterminacies of possessives.

Acknowledgment:

I am grateful to Steffi von Mende for reminding me of Lyons (1986).

## ADDENDA

differentiate: obligatory co-occurrence (article required whenever there is a possessive; is never the case with iArt or Dem) vs. optional co-occurrence

### Old Germanic

dArt - N - Poss is frequent in Gothic (but questionable whether there is a genuine dArt, since no formal distinction from demonstrative), also in Old High German, rarely in Middle High German (where postnominal Poss is already archaic)

when Poss precedes N, dArt (thus: dArt - Poss - N) is rare in Gothic, but frequent in Old, Middle, and early Modern High German (das sein schieff, den unsern berg, aller der iren lewth)

a modern formation is similar: die Ihre Nation, die Ihrigen Wünsche (Italian influence?)

iArt - Poss - N occurs occasionally in Old High German, frequently in Middle High German, is found attested until 17th century (einen seinen diener, einen seinen fürnehmsten Rath) (result of Konstruktionsmischung: ein helfaere + siner helfaere ein [partitive]?)

source: Otto Behaghel, Deutsche Syntax, vol. I, 119-120, Heidelberg: Winter, 1923.

### References:

Manzelli, Gianguido. 1990. Possessive adnominal modifiers. In: Toward a typology of European languages, ed. by Johannes Bechert, Giuliano Bernini, Claude Buridant, 63-111. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Vincent, Nigel. 1988. Latin. In: The Romance languages, ed. by Martin Harris and Nigel Vincent, 26-78. London: Croom Helm [quote p54, see Manzelli p75]

Language	iArt+Poss <sub>det</sub>	dArt+Poss <sub>det</sub>	iArt+Poss <sub>nom</sub>	dArt+Poss <sub>nom</sub>	Dem+Poss <sub>det</sub>
English	-	-	-	-	-
Welsh	Ø	-	-	+	-?
Modern French	-?	-?	-	+	-?
German	-	-	-	+	+
Modern Spanish	±	±	-	+	±
Italian	+	+	-	+	+
Portuguese	+	+	-	+	+
Rumanian	Ø	+	-	+	+
Old French	+	+	-	+	+
Old Spanish	+	+	-	+	+
Classical Greek	Ø	+	-	+	+
Gothic	Ø	+/ Ø			+
Old English	+/ Ø	Ø			+
Middle High German	+	+			+
Dutch					+
Icelandic	Ø	+			
Norwegian (Bokmål)		+			
Romansch		+			
(Old Upper Engadinese)					
Catalan		+			
Modern Greek		+			
Albanian		+			
Bulgarian		+			
Macedonian		+			
Erzya Mordvinian		+			
Hungarian		+			
Maltese		+			
Basque		+			

Table 1: Permissible and impermissible co-occurrences

Explanations:

- +
  - 
  - ±
  - Ø
  - ?
- permissible  
impermissible  
permissible or impermissible depending upon certain conditions  
category to be combined with possessive is unattested in the language  
with marginal exceptions