

Old French possessives and ellipsis

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Sáez (2011), to account for Spanish definite articles in ellipsis contexts, such as *el libro y el [e] de Juan* ‘the book and Juan’s’, proposes the Stress Condition on Remnants (SCR), which disallows unstressed syntactic elements to be anaphoric, while allowing definite articles to license empty categories. The focus of this paper is Old French (OF) possessives that we first describe. OF had a more extensive inventory of possessive constructions than Modern French (MF): lexical genitives, pre-nominal possessives, and lexical and possessive ellipsis constructions. We then present an analysis based on Arteaga & Herschensohn’s (2010, A & H) proposal for lexical genitives. Finally, we argue that two diachronic changes led to a difference in licensing of possessives: definite articles became clitics (in OF they could be stressed) and thus became subject to the SCR, and the pre-nominal nP domain (Carstens 2003) became a clitic zone that prohibited pre-nominal stressed possessives.

OF had three lexical genitive constructions, the genitive with *à* (1), with *de* (2), both of which resemble **genitive structures** in MF, and the **juxtaposition genitive** (JG) (3): (1) *La suer a mon seigneur* the-f-sg-NOM sister-f-sg-NOM to my-m-sg-OBL lord-m-sg-OBL ‘My lord’s sister’ (Dole 5041; Herslund 1980:84) (2) *le cuer de son amy* the-m-sg-OBL heart-m-sg-OBL of his-m-sg-OBL friend-m-sg-OBL ‘His friend’s heart’ (Palm 1977:63) (3) *la niece [K] le duc* la-f-sg-NOM niece-f-sg-NOM the-m-sg-OBL duke-m-sg-OBL (La Chasteleine de Vergi 376; Foulet 1982:14) ‘The duke’s niece’ The possessors are in the oblique case, in accordance with the two-case (nominative/oblique) system of OF, licensed by an overt preposition *à-de* or a null one/[K] (Delfitto & Paradisi 2008, A&H 2010).

All three allowed ellipsis ([e] in (4)-(6)), licensed by the phi features and case of the **antecedents** and carried by the **definite article**. (4) *les armes au soudanc de H [...] les [e] au soudanc de B* the-f-pl-NOM weapons-f-pl-NOM to the-m-sg-OBL sultan-m-sg-OBL of H [...] the-f-pl-NOM to the-m-sg-OBL sultan-m-sg-OBL of B ‘the weapons of the sultan of H and those of the Sultan of B’ (Joinville, Gamillscheg 1957:58). (5) *ne poursuite de compaignon se la [e] de Dieu* nor pursuit-f-sg-OBL of companion-m-sg-OBL except for the-f-sg-OBL [e] of God-m-sg-OBL (Galeran de Bretagne, 4200-2; Foulet 1982 §70) (6) *defension fors sol la [e]/[K] Deu.* protection-f-sg-OBL except only the-f-sg-OBL [e] ‘No pursuit of a companion other than God.’ (Livre des rois; Anglade 1965:149)

OF also evinced two possessive forms, an **unstressed definite determiner** (7) and a **stressed possessive** (8)-(11), both pre-nominal: (7) *Il est munté sur sun destrier.* he is-3sg mounted on his-m-sg-OBL horse-m-sg-OBL ‘He mounted his horse.’ (Eliduc 283; Moignet 1988:114). The stressed version had to be accompanied by a determiner ([+/-def] article, a demonstrative, or a quantifier, evidence that it did not carry the feature [+/-def]) (8) *li miens cuers* the-m-sg-NOM my-m-sg-NOM heart-m-sg-NOM ‘my heart’ (Saint Alexis 445; Jensen § 369) (9) *un sien compere* one-m-sg-OBL his-m-sg-OBL friend-m-sg-OBL (La male honte 16-17; Foulet 1982:166) ‘one of his sons’ (10) *ceste meie barbe* this-f-sg-OBL my-f-sg-OBL beard-f-sg-OBL (Roland 1719; Moignet 1988:120) ‘this beard of mine’. The stressed forms—but not the unstressed ones that are subject to the SCR—can also license ellipsis (11): (11) *La lor terre [...] a la nostre [e]* the-f-sg-OBL their-f-sg-OBL land-f-sg-OBL [...] to the-f-sg-OBL our-f-sg-OBL [e] ‘Their land and ours’ (Couronnement 77; Jensen 1990:179).

To account for the distribution of possessives in OF, including elliptical structures, we follow A&H’s proposal for lexical genitives (1)-(3) framed within the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 2001, 2008), adapting their DP shell (12) (cf. Carstens 2003, Pereltsvaig 2007): (12) [_{DP} D [_{nP} POSS [_{nP} [_{NP} N₁ [_{PP} [_{DP} D [_{nP} [_{NP} N₂]]]]]]]]. Lexical genitive and pre-nominal possessive ellipsis constructions (4)-(6), (11) license ellipsis through the stressed definite article that agrees in gender-number-case with the repeated

noun copy deleted at spell-out [e]. As for the stressed and unstressed possessives, they can potentially be projected in one of the iterated nPs that D takes as complements (to account for functional projections such as numerals, gender, quantifiers, etc.). Using a probe-goal framework, we propose that a stressed possessive has a [*u*def] feature that must get checked off by a [+/-def] D. Since it's stressed, it is not subject to the SCR but requires an article. In ellipsis cases, the null head nouns are licensed by the definite article whose interpretable [+def] feature and oblique case check gender, number and case features of the null anaphor (A&H 2010). The nominal features match and delete uninterpretable features. The nP shell pre-nominal zone (Carstens 2003, D&P 2009, A&H 2010) in OF allows both clitic and stressed items, whose features and case are transparent. In contrast to the stressed possessive in the nP shell, the unstressed possessive has a [+def] feature and raises to D. Because it is unstressed, it is subject to the SCR, prohibiting it from serving in ellipsis contexts.

Diachronic changes in definite articles and the nP shell pre-nominal zone, caused by morpho-phonological erosion, led to loss of the JG (D&P 2009, A&H 2010), the loss of N ellipsis, and the specialization of strong possessives as pronouns. Loss of oblique case and the weakening of definite determiners to clitics reduced their ability to license through overt features, whereas their status as clitics violated the SCR. The pre-nominal zone became almost exclusively clitic (except for earlier merged prenominal adjectives as *la belle dame*), obviating pre-nominal strong possessives. The convergence of morphological leveling and phonological loss of final consonants led to syntactic changes that have rendered MF lack of N ellipsis quite distinct from other Romance languages.

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