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12 External possessors in West Germanic and Romance: Differential speed in the drift toward NP configurationality

Abstract: This paper inquires into the external possessor in West Germanic and Romance. Against other accounts in the literature, it argues that the distribution of the dative external possessor can be explained neither by reference to Standard Average European nor by direct substrate influence. Instead, it argues that its diachronic decline is better explained as the result of increased configurationality or a tighter structure of the noun phrase. Although the emergence of a tight NP structure may itself be traced back to language contact factors, substrate influence on the diachrony of the external possessor is shown to be more indirect than what is suggested in the literature. The increase in configurationality can be considered a case of constructional grammaticalization (i.e. constructionalization), as the slots for determination and modification become progressively more fixed. One of the main claims here is that this grammaticalization process proceeds at different rates in cognate languages.

1 Introduction

This paper is concerned with external possessors of the type presented in (1) and (2), which are often referred to as "dative external possessors". As the construction also occurs in languages that have given up the morphological distinction between accusative and dative, the term "indirect object external possessor" is more apt.

(1) German
Die Mutter wäscht dem   Kind die Haare.
the mother washes the.DAT child the hair
'The mother is washing the child's hair.'   (König and Haspelmath 1998: 526)

(2) Spanish
No le   he   visto la cara.
not 3SG.DAT have.1SG seen the face
'I have not seen his face.'   (Lamiroy and Delbecque 1998: 29)

The construction can be safely reconstructed for Proto-Germanic, but it has been losing ground both in West Germanic and in Romance, especially in English, which is often claimed to have lost it almost completely (e.g. Haspelmath 1999: 124). The distribution of the construction in West Germanic, and its absence in English in particular, is often explained as follows: the external possessor is an areal feature of a Sprachbund commonly called Standard Average European (SAE) and since English, as opposed to German, is outside the nucleus of the SAE Sprachbund, the feature is better entrenched in German than in English. In such an analysis, the Romance data are normally not taken into consideration at all. As will be shown in the present paper, this explanation does not hold up under closer scrutiny, nor do accounts which attribute the near-absence of the external possessor in English to substrate influence. An alternative explanation will be proposed: the distribution of the construction, both in West Germanic and in Romance, is the outcome of the differential speed at which the languages have changed. More specifically, we will claim that the retention of the external possessive inversely correlates with the increased configurationality of the NP. An important caveat here is that we do not consider increased grammatical-ization of the NP as the only factor at play, nor language contact as totally irrelevant. Indeed, the increased configurationality of the NP itself is likely to be due to language contact effects. What we do claim, however, is that extant language contact explanations for the diachrony of the external pos-sessor are naïvely simple, in that they often have a myopic interest in English and fail to take into consideration the situation in Romance, on the one hand, and because they do not take sufficiently into account the internal structure of the NP, on the other.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we introduce the difference between internal and external possession. Section 3 discusses the distribution of external possessors in West Germanic and Romance. Section 4 presents earlier explanations for the distribution of the external possessor and offers arguments against them. In Section 5, an alternative explanation is proposed. Section 6 presents the conclusions.

2 Internal and external possessors

The semantic relation between a possessee and its possessor can be encoded in various ways. A major distinction is that between external and internal possessor constructions (König and Haspelmath 1998).

Let us start with the latter. The following four constructions can be distinguished for non-pronominal possessors in the West Germanic languages:[1] (i) the *s*-possessive or – in the English tradition – Saxon genitive, exemplified in (3) and (4); (ii), the concordial genitive, exemplified in (5); (iii) the post-modifying possessor or PP possessor, exemplified in (6) to (8); and (iv) the prenominal periphrastic possessive (also called resumptive possessive pronoun or possessor doubling construction), exemplified in (9) to (11).[2] For Romance the situation is simpler. The internal possessor can be expressed by a possessive adjective or pronoun in all three languages studied, but non-pronominal possessors have to be expressed by post-modifying PPs, as in (12) to (14). Historically, there was also a morphological genitive in Latin, as in (15), which already started to decrease in Late Latin, and Old French also had a prepositionless possessive as in (16), which survives only in a few totally lexicalized expressions such as *l'hôtel Dieu* (lit. 'God's hostel') 'the hospital' in Modern French, and has been replaced by *de* + NP (for more examples see Ramat 1986: 586 and for a detailed analysis see Carlier et al. 2013).

(3) *my father's book*[3]

(4) Dutch
 mijn vaders   boek
 my   father.POSS book
 'my father's book'

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1 In this article, we focus on English, Dutch, German, French, Italian and Spanish, ignoring other West Germanic (e.g. Afrikaans, Frisian, Yiddish) and Romance languages (e.g. Portuguese, Romanian).

2 A few remarks are in order here. Following Weerman and De Wit (1999), we make a distinction between the *s*-possessive and the genitive, though, historically, the former has evolved from the latter. As regards the s-possessive, its syntactic behavior varies across the West Germanic languages, especially with respect to the NP to which it attaches as a phrasal clitic, which can appear with post-modifiers or without. Though it is not regularly found in Standard German, it does occur in informal communication (e.g. *mein Vaters Buch*, see Scott 2014). As regards the resumptive possessive pronoun construction, it is absent from Present-day English, but earlier stages of the language still had it (pace Allen 2008, who doubts that the English construction is cognate to the German one). Finally, we will not discuss the distribution of these constructions, as it is subject to many factors, including animacy, information status and syntactic weight (see Wolk et al. 2013).

3 All examples without explicit source indication are constructed examples. We only use constructed examples for straightforward structures, i.e. where there is no discussion about their grammaticality.

(5) German
meines Vaters   Buch
my.GEN father.GEN book
'my father's book'

(6) *the book of my father*

(7) Dutch
het boek van mijn vader
the book of my father
'the book of my father'

(8) German
das Buch von meinem Vater
the book of my   father
'the book of my father'

(9) Dutch
mijn vader zijn fiets
my   father his bike
'my father's bike'

(10) German
meinem Vater sein Buch
my   father his book
'my father's book'

(11) Middle English
Æthelstan his tente
Æthelstan his tent
'Æthelstan's tent'   (Allen 2008: 187)

(12) French
le   livre de mon père
the book of my   father
'the book of my father'

(13) Italian
il   libro di mio padre
the book of my father
'the book of my father'

(14) Spanish
el libro de mi padre
the book of my father
'the book of my father'

(15) Latin
in fīnes Bellovacōrum
in territory Bellovaci.GEN
'in the territory of the Bellovaci' (Iulius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*)

(16) Old French
la fille son oste
the daughter his guest
'the guest's daughter' (Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec* 744, 12th century)

Pronouns can be used "internally" as well, either in pronominal position or in the PP post-modification construction, as illustrated in (17) to (22). The former are called possessive pronouns or possessive adjectives. The latter are personal pronouns (or possessive pronouns in the case of English).

(17) German
mein Buch / das Buch von mir
my book / that book of me
'my book'

(18) Dutch
mijn boek / dat boek van mij
my book / that book of me
'my book'

(19) *my book / that book of me[4] / that book of mine*

(20) French
mon livre / ce livre à moi
my book / that book to me
'my book'

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4 The use of the personal pronoun in a post-modifying PP to mark possession is unidiomatic. The grammaticality of such uses is multifactorially driven.

(21) Italian

il mio libro / questo mio libro
the my book / that my book
'my book'

(22) Spanish

mi libro / este libro mío
my book / this book my
'my book'

External possessor constructions, on the other hand, are those in which the possessor is not expressed in the same constituent as the possessee, but functions as a separate constituent at clause level. In (1) and (2), the possessor *dem Kind/le* and the possessee *die Haare/la cara* are encoded as indirect object and direct object respectively. The range of constructions that fall under this heading depends on the definition, however. Some scholars, such as Payne and Barshi (1999: 22 fn. 5), would hesitate to qualify (23) to (28) as external possessor constructions on the grounds that the clauses are also grammatical without the expression of the possessee and that the external possessor is thus not encoded as an otherwise unlicensed, extra-thematic argument, which they consider a definitional criterion (Payne and Barshi 1999: 3). In Payne and Barshi (1999), the construction in (23) to (28) goes under the name "possessor splitting" (König 2001: 971).

(23) *. . . a school of aggressive, seven-foot bull sharks, one of which bit him in the foot.* (COCA)

(24) Dutch

Een van hen beet haar in het been.
one of them bit her in the leg
'One of them bit her in her leg.' (Internet example)[5]

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5 The source indication "Internet example" refers to examples taken from the Internet, used as a corpus (all examples were gathered through Google; date of access: May–June 2011 and February 2013). We are of course aware of the fact that using internet examples may be dangerous, in that one cannot control for the regional or social background of the language user, and if external possessors are subject to lectal/diatopic variation, these dimensions remain hidden in data retrieval via Google. However, this increased variation in fact only strengthens our main point here, namely that categorizing languages into "having external possessors" (e.g. German) and "not having external possessors" (English), is not a clear dichotomy. Moreover, newspaper corpora usually do not mention their writers' regional provenance either.

(25) German
Er hat ihn   in den Hals gebissen.
he has 3SG.M.ACC in the neck bitten
'He bit him in his neck.'   (Internet example)

(26) French
On l'   a   blessé à la jambe.
one 3SG.M.ACC has injured at the leg
'They injured his leg.'

(27) Italian
L'   hanno   ferito   alla   gamba.
3SG.M.ACC have.3PL injured to.the leg
'They injured his leg.'

(28) Spanish
Lo   han   herido en la pierna.
3SG.M.ACC have.3PL injured in the leg
'They injured his leg.'

There is also some debate about whether (29) to (33) really count as external possessors. This type, which is sometimes called "implicit possessor" construction (see König and Haspelmath 1998: 526–527, 573–581; König 2001: 971; König and Gast 2009: 119–120), can be analyzed as an external possessor that collapses with the subject (see Lamiroy and Delbecque 1998: 32 and Payne and Barshi 1999: 23 fn. 5, referring to work by Velázquez-Castillo). However, they are different from other cases of external possessors, as the coreferentiality of the subject and the possessor is of a pragmatic nature: in (30), the hands are not necessarily the subject's own body parts.[6]

(29) Dutch
Bestuurders hieven de handen in onmacht.
directors   raised the hands in impotence
'Directors threw their hands in the air in helplessness.'   (Internet example)

(30) German
Ich zeigte ihm die Hände.
I   showed him the hands
'I showed him my hands.'   (Internet example)

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[6] We owe this observation to Volker Gast (p.c.).

(31) French
Les enfants   lèvent   la   main.
the children raise   the hand
'The children raise their hands.'

(32) Italian
I   bambini alzano   la   mano.
the   children raise   the   hand
'The children raise their hands.'

(33) Spanish
Los niños   levantan la   mano.
the children   raise   the   hand
'The children raise their hands.'

While taking a restrictive approach to external possession may be adequate for wide-ranging typological surveys (as in Payne and Barshi 1999), we see no principled reason to leave examples like (23) to (28) out of consideration. The close connection between "proper" external possessors, with an (unlicensed) dative possessor, and "improper" external possessors of the type exemplified in (23) to (28), with a (licensed) accusative possessor, is clear from the fact that, in German and Spanish, the pronoun occurs in the dative as well as in the accusative:

(34) German
Er hat ihm   in den Hals gebissen.
he has 3SG.M.DAT in the neck bitten
'He bit him in his neck.'   (Internet example)

(35) Spanish
… que la víbora le   había mordido en la   pierna izquierda.
… that the snake 3SG.M.DAT had   bitten   in the leg   left
   'That the snake had bitten him in the left leg.'   (Internet example)

Moreover, the split between internal and external constructions is not as clear-cut as the above examples suggest. The prenominal periphrastic possessive in (9) and (10) in particular is actually less internal than the constructions in (3) to (5). It probably developed from a *dativus commodi* construction (Havers 1911:

296; König and Haspelmath 1998: 586).[7] "Bridging contexts", allowing both readings (see Heine 2002 for this term), are exemplified in (36) and (37), with data from Dutch (see De Vooys 1967: 317–318 and Ramat 1986).

(36) 17th-century Dutch

En ried   de ridderschap en   al de groote steên
and advised the knighthood and all the big   cities

te roepen om den vorst zijn' moedwil   te besnoeien.
to call   to the king his   fickleness to prune
'And advised to gather the knighthood and all the big cities to curtail the king's fickleness.'

(37) Present-day Dutch

Ze   hebben mijn broer   z'n fiets afgenomen.
they have   my   brother his bike taken
'They took my brother's bike.' / 'They took the bike from my brother.'

Both in German and in Dutch, the *dativus commodi* left a visible trace. In German, the prenominal periphrastic possessor still requires dative case marking in many varieties:

(38) German

kennengelernt habe ich sie durch meinem kumpel   seine freundin.
acquainted   have I   her by   my.DAT friend.DAT his   girlfriend
'I met her through my friend's girlfriend.'
(Van de Velde 2009a: 69, Internet example, *Kleinschreibung* in original)

Persistence of the old *dativus commodi* construction is still visible in Dutch as well, as illustrated in the following examples, where the possessor is separated from the possessee. Separation is not normally allowed for premodifiers in the NP. Yet, although the construction in (41) is generally considered ungrammatical in Standard Dutch, Van der Lubbe (1958: 125) did find an example in a small

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7 Some scholars have doubts about this diachronic account (see Allen 2008: 187–189 and Hendriks 2012 for references), although they cannot really disprove the *dativus commodi* origin. What may have happened is that the reanalysis of the *dativus commodi* was strengthened by the phonetic similarity between the genitive *-es* suffix and the possessive pronoun (see Fischer 1992: 231). Such issues of "multiple source constructions" are fairly common (see De Smet et al. 2013). In this paper, we adhere to the traditional view that the resumptive prenominal possessor developed out of the *dativus commodi*.

written corpus, and it is perfectly normal in some dialects (e.g. Haegeman 2003: 222). The possibilities for separation of possessor and possessee in Dutch are of course limited, but note that, in the other internal possessor construction, separation is completely ungrammatical, as (42) shows.[8]

(39) Dutch

Die werkgever van de OM,   die Tonino's vrijsprak …
that employer of   the prosecutor who Toninos acquitted

die moeten ze   ook z'n pc nakijken.
that must   they also his pc check

'They should also check the PC of that employer of the prosecutor who acquitted T.'   (Van de Velde 2009a: 71)

(40) Dutch

die collega   van mn vader die zn vrouw
that colleague of   my father that his wife

'that colleague of my father's wife'   (Van de Velde 2009a: 72)

(41) Dutch

vader al z'n sigaren
father all his cigars

'all of father's cigars'   (Van der Lubbe 1958: 125)

(42) Dutch

*de auteur wiens de autoriteiten (het) boek uit de
the author whose the authorities the book out the

handel genomen   hebben
store   withdrawn have

'the author whose book the authorities have withdrawn'

In sum, the West Germanic prenominal periphrastic possessive seems to occupy a middle position, in between the external and internal possessor constructions, although, in Present-day West Germanic, it is closer to the internal possessor construction than to the external one.

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8 Separation of the post-modifying possessor PP from its possessee is also possible, but this is true for all post-modifiers of the NP. The phenomenon goes under the term of extraction (leftward) or extraposition (rightward). For a discussion of what this means for the dependency/constituency relations in the NP, see Van de Velde (2009a: Ch. 3, 2012).

3 The different status of the external possessors in West Germanic and Romance languages

This section takes a closer look at the distribution of the external possessor in the West Germanic languages English, Dutch and German and the Romance languages French, Italian and Spanish. It gives a more fine-grained picture of the situation than the categorical black and white picture that is sometimes sketched in comparative work. The literature, for instance, disagrees on the existence of an external possessor in Dutch (see Haspelmath 1999 versus Van Pottelberge 2001), but this disagreement can be resolved if we accept the gradient nature of this syntactic feature.

3.1 West Germanic

At least since Van Haeringen dedicated a lengthy publication on the topic in 1956, it has been recognized that Dutch occupies a position in between its West Germanic neighbors, English and German, both geographically and linguistically. His line of work has been extended in recent publications such as Hüning et al. (2006) and Vismans et al. (2010). Van Haeringen (1956) and the papers in the aforementioned volumes discuss a wide range of topics, from lexical over morphological to syntactic matters, but – with the exception of Lamiroy (2003) – possessor constructions have never been examined from this perspective. Yet, a look at the facts clearly shows that there is a telling correspondence between the internal/external possessor division and the areal and linguistic configuration of the languages. The external possessor is well established in German, less so in Dutch and least so in English whereas the best established internal possessor constructions can be found in English (ignoring the problematic status of the concordial genitive for the moment).[9] Interestingly, as we will show in Section 3.2, a similar cline holds for Romance: the external possessor is well-established in Spanish, less so in Italian and least of all in French. Moreover, in West Germanic, the "mid-position" prenominal periphrastic possessive is the default construction for (animate) premodifying possessors in Dutch – though eschewed in formal written Dutch – while it seems to be used less often

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9 The concordial genitive is strongest in German, but note that it is acquired late in child L1 acquisition and can be argued to be obsolescent.

in (Standard) German (e.g. the surprisingly low number of attestations in informal German, see Scott 2014: Ch. 6) and it is absent in Present-day English.

In what follows, we will present examples that show that Dutch indeed takes up a position in-between English and German (see also Lamiroy 2003).

The absence of external possessors in English is not absolute. First of all, the possessor splitting constructions exemplified in (23) to (25) are widely attested in Dutch and in English, as (43) and (44) show, and so are implicit possessors, as in (45) and (46).[10] Still, for reasons mentioned earlier, one could reject them as "improper" external possessor constructions. König and Gast (2009: 114), for example, do not immediately dismiss them, but argue that they are "very different from the German constructions".

(43) *He kissed her on the forehead.*   (Haspelmath 1999: 121)

(44) Dutch
      Hij kust   haar op het voorhoofd.
      he kisses her on the forehead
      'He kisses her on the forehead.'   (Internet example)

(45) *She was sick at heart.*   (Haspelmath 1999: 121)

(46) Dutch
      Hij haalde zich   de woede op de hals van de
      he got   himself the anger on the neck of   the

      China Daily door een artikel in Foreign Affairs.
      China Daily by   an   article in Foreign Affairs

      'China Daily got furious with him because of an article in Foreign Affairs.'
                                                          (Internet example)

While it is true that the possessor argument in (23) to (25), (43) and (44) is licensed by the verb, there are other examples where such an analysis cannot be maintained. Consider (47) and (48), for example. The corresponding sentence without the possessee PP is ungrammatical (*She looked him*, *She yelled him*). This suggests that the possessor does occupy an unlicensed slot here, which would make it a real external possessor by the strict standards put forward in Payne and Barshi (1999) (see also König and Haspelmath 1998: 554).

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10 If, for (46), one argues that not the subject (*hij*) but rather the indirect object reflexive (*zich*) is the possessor, then (46) is a regular indirect object external possessor.

(47) *She looked him in the eyes.*   (Internet example)

(48) *She yelled him in the face, her voice shaking. "Wake up!"*
                                                                 (Internet example)

The same goes for Dutch. In (49), the verb *kijken* 'look' is used, which, like English *look*, does not normally combine with a non-prepositional object (*Ze keek hem, literally 'she looked him'). Interestingly, the Dutch verb *bekijken* (literally 'be-look', i.e. 'examine') does combine with a non-prepositional object (*ze bekijkt hem* 'she examines him'), but it does not occur in the possessor-splitting construction, as (50) shows.

(49) Dutch
    Ze keek   hem in de ogen.
    she looked him in the eyes
    'She looked him in the eyes.'   (Internet example)

(50) Dutch
    **Ze bekeek   hem in de ogen.*
    she be-looked him in the eyes
    'She looked him in the eyes.'

Dutch also has external possessors with non-prepositional object possessees in sentences with particle verbs, as in (51). According to Vandeweghe (1987: 149), such particle verbs are often historically related to prepositional possessees, as in (24). Presumably, the preposition drifted away from its complement and became associated with the verb. Thus, *de keel doorgesneden* (lit. 'the throat through-cut') derives from *door de keel gesneden* (lit. 'through the throat cut').

(51) Dutch
    Ik heb hem de keel   door-gesneden.
    I   have him the throat through-cut
    'I cut his throat.'   (Internet example)

Note that not all external possessors in Dutch occur with particle verbs, as (52) to (54) show (the last example with a reflexive).

(52) Dutch
    Ik schudde hem de hand.
    I shook   him the hand
    'I shook his hand.'   (Internet example)

(53) Dutch
    Zij   rukten hem de   kleren   van het lijf.
    they tore   him the clothes off   the body
    'They tore his clothes of his body.'   (Internet example)

(54) Dutch
    Poes heeft zich   het hoofd gestoten.
    cat   has   itself the head   banged
    'The cat has banged its head.'   (Internet example)

Moreover, the existence of subject-possessee external possessors as in (55) suggests that the direct object construction should also be possible, as there is a universal (or at least European) implicational scale by which the existence of subject-possessee external possessors entails that of direct-object-possessee external possessors (see Haspelmath 1999: 113; König 2001: 976).

(55) Dutch
    Ma het is puur   die kaak   die   me zo'n pijn   doet.
    but it   is purely this cheek that me so   pain does
    'But it is only my cheek that really hurts so badly.'   (Internet example)

Another construction that can be regarded as an instance of an external possessor involves verbs with noun-incorporation, as in (56) to (59), which do involve possessor splitting as well.

(56) *They brainwashed him.*   (Haspelmath 1999: 122)

(57) Dutch
    Dan kan ik hem hersenspoelen.
    then can I   him brainwash
    'Then I can brainwash him.'   (Internet example)

(58) *And I earmarked a page.*   (COCA)

(59) Dutch
    Hij oormerkt   de   koeien.
    he   earmarks the   cows
    'He earmarks the cows.'   (Internet example)

As pointed out by Vandeweghe (1986) and Lamiroy and Delbecque (1998: 50), the Dutch external possessor is very frequent in figurative expressions. It is commonly assumed that such idiomatic constructions are calcified relics from a time when the external possessor construction was still productive. Consider the examples in (60) to (65).

(60) Dutch
 iemand op de vingers tikken
 someone on the fingers tap
 'to rebuke someone'

(61) Dutch
 iemand de mantel uitvegen
 someone the coat wipe.out
 'scold someone'

(62) Dutch
 iemand iets op het hart drukken
 someone something on the heart press
 'insist on something (with someone)'

(63) Dutch
 iemand een pad in de korf zetten
 someone a toad in the basket put
 'saddle someone with a problem, get someone in difficulties'

(64) Dutch
 iemand in het verkeerde keelgat schieten
 someone in the wrong throat.pipe shoot
 'upset someone'

(65) Dutch
 iemand iets in de maag splitsen
 someone something in the stomach split
 'to thrust something upon a person'

In English too, external possessors occur in constructions with a figurative meaning and in idioms, such as (66), though not as frequently as in Dutch. The figurative expression in (67) is marked, as the normal construction would involve an internal possessor (i.e. *getting on my nerves*).

(66) *Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.*   (König and Haspelmath 1998: 537)

(67) *Truly, anything goes in the world, but I really dare to see the shocking things getting me on the nerves.*   (Internet example)

In sum, what the above data show is that the distribution of external possessor constructions is not an all-or-nothing matter but that it has fuzzy boundaries. Any purely synchronic explanation that hinges on the observation that the external possessor is categorically absent in English or totally unproductive with non-PP possessees in Dutch is thus bound to be inadequate. In contrast, we adopt a diachronic perspective (see also Vandeweghe 1986: 125) and view the fluid synchronic boundaries as the result of diachronic change – or, put differently, as "gradience" due to "gradualness" (Lamiroy 2007; Traugott and Trousdale 2010; Carlier et al. 2012).

3.2 Romance

The dative external possessor is well-attested in Romance, both historically and in the present-day languages. Still, the individual languages differ considerably in the extent to which the construction is productive (see Lamiroy 2003 for a detailed investigation). Spanish is the least restrictive language in its use of dative external possessors while French is the most restrictive. Italian is in the middle, with some contexts allowing it and others not.

That dative external possessors are by far more productive in Spanish than in the other two languages is shown, for example, by the fact that the construction can be used with non-human possessors – the dative clitic *le* is coreferential with 'the table' in (68) – and with kinship possessees, as in (69).

(68) Spanish
Le   fregué   las manchas al   tablero.
3SG.DAT wiped.1SG the stains   to.the table
'I wiped the stains off the table.'   (Demonte 1995: 23)

(69) Spanish
Se   les   casa   la hija   mañana.
REFL.3SG 3PL.DAT marries the daughter tomorrow
'Their daughter is getting married tomorrow.'   (Lamiroy 2003: 268)

French does not allow the external possessor construction in either of these cases, as (70) to (73) show.[11]

(70) French
  La table, je l'   ai   astiquée sur toute   la   surface.
  the table I 3SG.ACC have polished on whole the surface
  'I polished the whole surface of the table.'   (Leclère 1995: 183)

(71) French
  *La table, je lui   ai   astiquée toute   la   surface.
  the table I 3SG.DAT have polished whole the surface
  'I polished the whole surface of the table.'

(72) French
  *La fille   se   leur   marie   demain.
  the daughter REFL.3SG 3PL.DAT marries tomorrow
  'Their daughter is getting married tomorrow.'   (Lamiroy 2003: 268)

(73) French
  *La mère   lui   est morte il y   a   peu.
  the mother 3SG.DAT is dead it there has little
  'His mother died not long ago.'   (Lamiroy 2003: 268)

Italian seems to be more restrictive than Spanish, in that part-whole relations with inanimate possessors as in (74) do not allow the dative construction, but it is less restrictive than French, where kinship terms as in (75) and (76) are allowed in certain contexts.

(74) Italian
  *Gli   ho   pulito le macchie al   tavolo.
  3SG.DAT have.1SG wiped the stains   to.the table
  'I wiped the stains off the table.'

(75) Italian
  ?Gli   si   sposa la figlia   domani.
  3sg.dat refl.3sg marries the daughter tomorrow
  'Their daughter is getting married tomorrow.'   (Lamiroy 2003: 268)

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11 Not surprisingly, the only possibility to express the equivalent of (69) in French is the internal possessor construction *Leur fille* ('their daughter') *se marie demain*. Also compare (73) to *Sa mère* ('his/her mother') *est morte il y a peu*.

(76) Italian
Gli   è mancata la   mamma poco fa.
3SG.DAT is missed   the mother little ago
'His mother died not long ago.'   (Lamiroy 2003: 268)

The contrast between Spanish and the other two languages with respect to the external dative construction is all the more striking in view of the fact that the three languages share the construction with an implicit possessor illustrated in (31) to (33) and, more crucially, that, as already shown by (26) to (28) and (35), all three make use of the possessor splitting construction:

(77) French
Il la   baisait au   front,   dans ses cheveux,
he 3SG.F.ACC kissed at.the forehead in   her hair

en sanglotant.
in weeping

'He kissed her on the forehead, in her hair, while he was weeping.'
                                             (Maupassant, *L'enfant*)

(78) Spanish
Delincuentes golpearon en la   cara a un párroco en
criminals   beat   in the face to a priest   in

Caracas para robarlo.
Caracas to   rob.him

'Criminals hit a priest in the face in Caracas to rob him.'
                                             (Internet example)

(79) Italian
I   miei suoceri   hanno il   vizio   di baciare
the my   parents-in-law have   the bad.habit of kiss

sulla   bocca la mia bimba   di due anni.
on.the mouth the my little.girl of two years

'My parents-in-law have the bad habit of kissing my two-year-old little girl on her mouth.'   (Internet example)

Note that, in Spanish, as in German, the productivity of the external dative possessive construction parallels that of two other productive "unlicensed" dative constructions, viz. the *dativus commodi/incommodi*, as in (80), and the ethical dative, as in (82). Both may contribute to the vitality of the external dative possessor structure. As expected, these two types of datives are not entirely absent from the other Germanic or Romance languages, but they are far less

common, as shown by the following contrasts with French in (81) and English in (83).

(80) Spanish

    Nos   han entrado ladrones en casa.
    1PL.DAT have entered thieves in house
    'Thieves entered our house.'

(81) French

    Des   voleurs nous   sont entrés dans la maison.
    INDEF.PL thieves 1PL.DAT are   entered in   the house
    'Thieves entered our house.'

(82) German

    Mir   ekelt   vor fetten Speisen.
    1SG.DAT nauseate for fat   food
    'I hate high-fat foods.'   (Draye 1996: 193)

(83) ?*High-fat foods are disgusting to me.*

A final observation we want to make with respect to French is similar to what we saw for Dutch in Section 3.1: the dative possessor construction may be receding in everyday language (Spanoghe 1995), but it is still widely attested in French idiomatic expressions, i.e. in fossilized remnants of older stages of the language. Consider the examples in (84) to (89).

(84) French

    casser les pieds à quelqu'un
    break the feet to someone
    'to bother someone'

(85) French

    tirer les vers   du   nez à quelqu'un
    pull the worms from.the nose to someone
    'to ask someone delicate questions'

(86) French

    la moutarde monte au   nez à quelqu'un
    the mustard goes.up to.the nose to someone
    'to get very upset'

(87) French
    rire   au   nez et   à la barbe à quelqu'un
    laugh to.the nose and to the beard to someone
    'to laugh at someone'

(88) French
    donner froid dans le   dos à quelqu'un
    give   cold in   the back to someone
    'to give the shivers'

(89) French
    fendre le   coeur à quelqu'un
    split the heart to someone
    'to be heartbreaking'

In the following section, we discuss existing accounts of the possessor construction in West Germanic and Romance as it has been sketched so far.

4 Previous accounts of the distribution of the external possessor construction in West Germanic and Romance

The conundrum in the distribution of the external possessor in West Germanic is its conspicuous near-absence in English, as pointed out by Haspelmath (1999), McWhorter (2002), Vennemann (2002) and König and Gast (2009: 112–121). It has not escaped the attention of these scholars that there is a striking areal pattern in the presence or absence of the external possessor illustrated in (1) and (2): the external possessor is a feature of continental Europe. It is found in a continuous area on the continent, including non-Indo-European languages like Basque, Hungarian and Maltese while it is, at the same time, absent in geographically peripheral Indo-European languages such as the Celtic languages, English and the Scandinavian languages. This has led to the idea that external possessors are a feature of what is often referred to as Standard Average European.

　　Standard Average European (SAE) is a term coined by Whorf (1956: 138) and revived in a number of recent publications on the topic, most notably in Haspelmath (1998a, 2001a), to label the remarkably homogeneous linguistic area to

which most languages of the old continent belong.[12] Several features that these languages share are typologically not very common, and their fading distribution – ranging from a geographically contiguous group of languages forming the "nucleus" over languages forming the "core" to languages at the periphery – is indeed consistent with a wave-like spread due to language contact. The language contact spread resulted in a Sprachbund, as this distribution cross-cuts the genetic relationships between the European languages. French, for instance shares more SAE features with German, a neighboring nuclear SAE language, than with its Romance sister Spanish, which does not belong to the SAE nucleus. Similarly, Hungarian, though not an Indo-European language, occupies a position in the periphery of the SAE Sprachbund, together with Indo-European languages like Russian, in contrast to the Indo-European Celtic languages and the non-Indo-European languages Turkish and Lezgian. It is no coincidence that Hungarian is surrounded by Indo-European languages. There is some discussion about the exact features which can be attributed to SAE (see Haspelmath 1998a, 2001a; Heine and Kuteva 2006: 23–27), but definite and indefinite articles, *have*-perfects, participial passives and verbal negation with a negative indefinite, for instance, are generally assumed to be SAE features. Dative external possessors also appear in all lists of SAE features (see Haspelmath 1998a: 277–278, 2001a: 1498; Heine and Kuteva 2006: 24; Harbert 2007: 11; van der Auwera 2011). In view of its near non-existence outside Europe, Haspelmath (1998a: 278) calls them "a very robust example of an SAE feature".

There are a number of hypotheses on what exactly gave rise to the remarkable homogeneity in SAE. Haspelmath (2001a: 1506–1507) considers various explanations, and concludes that the most likely one is language contact at the time of the great migrations at the transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages. Van der Auwera (2011) basically concurs, but adds Charlemagne's reign to the equation, and the later use of French and German in a cultural homogenous region. Whatever exactly happened in the early Middle Ages that ultimately gave rise to the Sprachbund, scholars seem to agree that it is the result of language contact (see also Heine and Kuteva 2006).

If the SAE features spread through language contact, the absence of the external possessor in English can be ascribed to the fact that the English-speaking community was less involved in this contact situation, which in turn is at least partly connected with the fact that Britain is an island.

There are, however, a number of serious problems with the analysis of the dative external possessor as an SAE feature. The first problem is that, in contrast

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12 Haspelmath's notion of SAE overlaps to a large extent with van der Auwera's (1998) "Charlemagne Sprachbund". See van der Auwera (2011) for a recent overview.

to other SAE features, it has a venerable tradition in the European languages (see Havers 1911). It is well-attested in old Indo-European daughter languages like Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Old Church Slavonic, as (90) to (93) show. This in itself sets it apart from other SAE features, as they are all of much more recent date (Haspelmath 1998a: 282; Harbert 2007: 11).

(90) Vedic Sanskrit
ā́ te vájraṃ jaritā́ bāhvór dhāt
PT 2SG.DAT bolt.of.lightning singer arm.DU.LOC put
'The singer put the lightning bolt in your arms.'

(König and Haspelmath 1998: 551)

(91) Homeric Greek
enéplēsthen dé hoi ámphō haímatos ophthalmoí
were.filled PT 3SG.M.DAT both blood.GEN eyes
'Both his eyes were filled with blood.' (König and Haspelmath 1998: 551)

(92) Latin
Cornix cornice numquam ocellum effodit
crow.NOM crow.DAT never eye guts
'A crow never guts another crow's eye.' (König and Haspelmath 1998: 552)

(93) Old Church Slavonic
brъnьe položi mъně na očiju
clay.ACC.SG put.AOR.3SG 1SG.DAT on eye.LOC.DU
'He put clay on my eyes.' (Havers 1911: 306)[13]

It is not only the timing that sets apart the external possessor construction from the other SAE features. The distribution of the construction over the linguistic area is also somewhat suspect. Dutch, for instance, does not have a fully productive possessive dative (at least if the construction with possessee PPs is not considered a genuine external possessor construction), although the language is according to Haspelmath (1998a) part of the SAE nucleus in other respects.[14]

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13 We would like to thank Jaap Kamphuis for helping us with the glosses for this example.
14 In Haspelmath (2001a), the nucleus is reduced to just two languages, German and French. Dutch is pushed to the core because it has one feature less than the nuclear languages. The feature that Dutch is said to lack is the differentiation of reflexives and intensifiers. In actual fact, Dutch does make a difference between the two: reflexive *zich* versus intensifier *zelf*, just like German *sich* versus *selbst*.

Furthermore, the external possessors in the non-Indo-European languages Hungarian and Maltese are not pure instances either, as Haspelmath (1999: 117) himself notes: the possession relation is also marked NP-internally by a pronominal affix, as in (94).

(94) Hungarian

    A   kutya beleharapott a   szomszéd-nak a   lálá-ba.

    the dog   bit.into   the neighbor-DAT the leg.3SG-LOC

    'The dog bit (into) the neighbor's leg.'   (Haspelmath 1999: 117)

In addition, the external possessors in the European languages seem to have been in recession since ancient times (see Havers 1911; König and Haspelmath 1998: 583–584). Their use along the implicational hierarchies mentioned in Haspelmath (1999) has been severely curtailed, whereas other SAE features have become stronger and have spread over a larger area (e.g. Heine and Kuteva 2006: 97–182 on the rise and spread of articles and *have*-perfects). In other words, the use of the external possessor lost ground at the time that other SAE features were thriving.

The problem is even clearer if we take the Romance languages into account. French and the Northern Italian dialects belong to the SAE nucleus, whereas the Southern Italian Dialects and Spanish merely belong to the SAE core (the region just around the nucleus) (Haspelmath 1998a: 273). Consequently, one would expect France and Northern Italy to have a more established external possessor than Southern Italy and Spain, especially in view of the fact that external possessors are well preserved in the other nuclear SAE member, German. We have shown in Section 3.2 that the opposite is true.

Another problem with the SAE account of external possessors pertains to their absence in Indo-European languages like Celtic and English. The geographically peripheral position of these languages can be argued to support the areal SAE account of the dative external possessor construction: their remote position precluded them from adopting the feature. This view, however, is at odds with the fact that, in earlier stages, the Celtic languages and English did have a dative external possessor (see Havers 1911: 240 for Celtic examples and Traugott 1992: 205–206 for Old English examples).

Moreover, in all other major features of SAE listed in Haspelmath (2001a), English behaves exactly like its continental neighbor Dutch. Whether one looks at the presence of articles, relative clauses with a relative pronoun, *have*-perfects, nominative experiencers, participial passives, anti-causative prominence, negative pronouns and lack of verbal negation, particles in comparative constructions,

relative-based equative constructions or subject person affixes as strict agreement markers, English is just as much a nuclear member of SAE as Dutch or German.[15] In some respects, English is even *more* of a well-behaved SAE language than the exemplar language German: it has a higher nominative experiencer ratio, for instance (Haspelmath 2001b: 62).

Another explanation for the (near-)absence of indirect object external possessives in English – though not necessarily incompatible with the SAE account – is provided by Vennemann (2002). He ascribes the absence of external possessors to substrate influence from Celtic. The immediate objection that Celtic did have external possessors at some point in its history (see Havers 1911) is countered by Vennemann by assuming that insular Celtic was itself influenced by a (Hamito-) Semitic substrate. This assumption remains controversial (see Baldi and Page 2006), however, and even if it is accepted, the account remains problematic. First, Vennemann has to come up with an explanation why there was an external possessor in Old English. Indeed, the demise of the external possessor dates back to late medieval times, long after the Anglo-Saxon invasion of the 5th century.[16] Second, Vennemann does not consider the situation in Romance at all. If the absence of the external possessor in English and its weaker position in coastal ("Ingvaeonic") Dutch are the result of early colonization of the Atlantic coast, it begs the question why the same did not happen in Spain, which is the logical first stop on the Semitic route to North-Western Europe.[17] Third, Vennemann's account does not explain why the dative external possessor changed radically in North Germanic (see Section 5) and why it receded throughout the entire European area – even in those languages where it is still alive, like the Slavic languages (König and Haspelmath 1998: 583–584). Of course, it is not impossible that the continental recession of the external possessor is due to one factor, and the recession in English to another. By Occam's razor and given the controversial status of Vennemann's claims, it would however be preferable to attribute the fate of the external possessor in the whole of Europe to the same factor.

Some of the objections against Vennemann's account of the demise of the external possessor also apply to McWhorter's (2002) account. He too argues for language contact, not through a Semitic/Celtic substrate but through imperfect transmission after the Viking settlements. The advantage of this hypothesis is

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15 The only feature in which English, just like Dutch, deviates from the SAE norm is the intensifier/reflexive differentiation. But this feature is rather spurious (see fn. 14).

16 Vennemann rescues his theory by assuming that substrate influence can make itself felt in delayed relay.

17 This problem is all the more pressing in view of the Phoenician settlements that are archaeologically attested on the Iberian peninsula.

that it is less controversial in its archaeological assumptions. Yet, McWhorter also fails to take into account the continental European development in Romance, and his analysis consequently suffers from English bias as well. A case could be made for Viking influence in France to account for the geographically differentiated demise of the external possessor in Romance, but in light of McWhorter's central claim that English is sharply distinct from continental West Germanic, it would be hard to maintain.

In short, most current explanations for the distribution of the external possessor – i.e. SAE, Celtic and Semitic substrate, and imperfect language acquisition by the Vikings – are problematic. One recurring problem is a bias toward English or, in other words, the disregard of the distribution in Romance. In Section 5, we provide an alternative hypothesis of the distribution of the external possessor.

5 An alternative account of the distribution of the external possessor in West Germanic and Romance

The absence of the external possessor in English is unlikely to be due merely to the language's peripheral geographical position with regard to the SAE nucleus, and the previous section has shown that the evidence for treating it as a Celtic, Semitic or North Germanic substrate effect is not very strong either. In this section, we want to propose an alternative account. We argue that the absence of external possessors in English and their significant recession in French is due to an increase in noun phrase configurationality, with the emergence of specialized slots for determination and modification. Combining Haspelmath's (1998b: 318) broad definition of grammaticalization as "the gradual drift in all parts of the grammar toward tighter structures, toward less freedom in the use of linguistic expressions at all levels" with a constructional view on grammaticalization, which encompasses the rise of abstract, lexically underspecified constructions (see Bybee 2003: 146, 2007; Traugott 2008; Trousdale 2008, 2010; Traugott and Trousdale 2013), we regard the rise in NP configurationality as the result of a grammaticalization process (see also Van de Velde 2009a; Carlier and Lamiroy 2014), sometimes termed in current linguistic theorizing as 'constructionalization' (Traugott and Trousdale 2013). This process has progressed further in English than in German, and Dutch occupies a middle position in-between its West Germanic neighbors. In Romance, French is ahead of Spanish, and Italian

occupies a middle position. The advantage of this account is that it works both for Germanic and for Romance, as opposed to the accounts presented above.

As noted in Section 4, the indirect object external possessor is attested in the ancient Indo-European daughter languages. As (95) shows, it is also attested in Gothic (König and Haspelmath 1998: 552), suggesting a continuous line of transmission with the construction still being in productive use in Present-day German.

(95) Gothic
Fani   galagida   mis   ana augona.
clay.ACC.SG put.PST.3SG 1SG.DAT on eye.ACC.PL
'He put clay into my eyes.'   (John 9, 15)[18]

It is also attested in the old West Germanic languages, including Old English, as (96) to (99) make clear.

(96) Old High German
So   riuzit   thir   thaz herza.
then mourns 2SG.DAT the   heart
'Then your heart will mourn'   (Havers 1911: 285)

(97) Old Saxon
Thiu hlust uuarð imu   farhauuan.
the   ear   was   3SG.M.DAT hewn
'His ear was cut off.'   (Havers 1911: 293)

(98) Old Dutch
Tho bat   her that min ímo   an themo cruce up
then asked he that they 3SG.M.DAT on the   cross up

kerde   the uóze.
turned the feet

'Then he asked that they would turn his feet up on the cross.'
                                                                   (ONW s.v. *fuot*)
(99) Old English
… him   mon aslog þæt heafod of.
… 3SG.M.DAT they cut   the head   off
    'They cut his head off.'   (Traugott 1992: 205–206)

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18 The Greek original uses the genitive of the personal pronoun here. The use of the possessive dative in this construction is, in other words, authentically Germanic, not just a translation interference.

It seems that all West Germanic languages inherited the construction from the Germanic parental language. Subsequently, there was a long period during which the external possessor dwindled. According to Mustanoja (1960: 98), external possessors were common in Old English but comparatively infrequent in Middle English, when the construction steadily lost ground (see also Visser 1963: 633; McWhorter 2002: 226). External possessors persisted in Middle Dutch, as in (100), but judging from the situation in Present-day Dutch, they were declining there as well.[19]

(100) Middle Dutch
    Mi   is den buuc   so gheladen.
    1SG.OBL is the stomach so loaded
    'My stomach is so full.'   (Burridge 1996: 691)

The situation in Present-day West Germanic is a snapshot of a diachronic process in which English is the most progressive language and German is the most conservative one. The situation is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Diachrony of external possessors in West Germanic

	German	Dutch	English
Old	+	+	+
Middle	+	+	±
Modern	+	±	−

This differential speed of language change[20] in the West Germanic languages has been noted in the literature (Van Haeringen 1956; Weerman 2006; König and Gast 2009: 14; Lamiroy and De Mulder 2011). As Faarlund (2001: 1718) puts it: "The differences between the Germanic languages can to a large extent be ascribed to their different stages on a continuous line of development."

    This type of situation is also found in Romance, where French is ahead of Italian, which itself is ahead of Spanish (Lamiroy 1999, 2001; Lamiroy and De

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19 With regard to the situation in English, Van Bree (1981: 386) even posits that the dative external possessor had disappeared already in Middle English, but this seems contrary to the facts.
20 The idea that languages change at different rates is sometimes objected to on the grounds that it glosses over subsystems or individual constructions and treats languages as holistic entities. Still, note that even Darwin (1859: 422) already argued that languages change at different paces.

Mulder 2011; Carlier et al. 2012, and references cited therein; De Mulder and Lamiroy 2012). For the Romance language family, Posner (1996: 185) posits the idea that "each language is tracking at different speeds along tramlines that lead in the same direction from the same starting point". As mentioned in Section 4, French is far more restrictive in the use of external possessors than Italian and Spanish: when we take a diachronic perspective, this suggests that French has progressed farther from the common origin. Havers (1911: 235) and Lamiroy (2003) point out that, in older stages of the language, French had less restrictions on the use of external possessors, as illustrated by the following examples from the 16th and 17th centuries, in which the possessee occupies the subject position, and which are ungrammatical in Present-day French (but still possible in Spanish and Italian!):

(101) French

Le visage leur reluisoit.
the face 3PL.DAT sparkled
'Their faces shone.' (Rabelais, *Pantagruel*, prologue)

(102) French

Hélas! Notre pauvre Péronne, il faudra bien
Alas our poor Péronne it will.be.necessary well

la renvoyer si le mal lui continue.
3SG.F.ACC fire if the evil 3SG.DAT continues

'Alas! We will have to fire our poor Péronne if she keeps being ill.'
(Lamiroy 2003: 272)

Carlier et al. (2012) assume that the cline French > Italian > Spanish and its West Germanic parallel English > Dutch > German are due to the extent to which these languages have carried through an overhaul in their macro-grammatical structure. In this light, retention of the external possessor is a sign of conservatism. The idea of attributing the absence of external possessors in English to its faster rate of grammatical change, rather than to the influence of a substrate, is supported by looking at overall changes in the noun phrase.

At first sight, the general shift from external to internal possessors seems to be a direct effect of deflection, i.e. the loss of morphological categories and their markers (see Weerman and De Wit 1999). As the distinct marking of the dative case is lost, the dative external possessor comes under pressure. This account is supported by the fact that English and Dutch display accusative/dative syncretism, i.e. they have no distinctive form for the dative pronoun, unlike German.

This line of reasoning has been suggested by Havers (1911: 284–285), Van Bree (1981: 386–388), König (2001: 973) and König and Gast (2009: 253), but there are several reasons to doubt that the demise of external possessors is directly due to the loss of distinctive dative desinences (see also Haspelmath 1999: 124–125; McWhorter 2002: 226–228; Vennemann 2002: 213–215).

First, languages such as Icelandic have preserved the dative case, but have nevertheless lost their dative external possessor (König and Haspelmath 1998: 583). Second, conversely, in languages like Spanish with a meaningful case of dative/accusative syncretism in the pronominal system (the so-called *acusativo* or *complemento directo preposicional*, which is used to mark specific (mostly human) direct objects, see Torrego 1999: 1779), the external possessor is holding up very well. Third, distinctive dative morphology is not really necessary to construe a recognizable external possessor. There are indeed several other options to mark the external possessor:

 (i) by word order – Dutch, for instance, has lost its dative/accusative distinction in pronouns, but makes a distinction between direct objects and indirect objects by word order, and the external possessor behaves like an indirect object in this respect (see Haspelmath 1999: 111–112);

 (ii) by using a preposition – in French, for example, the morphological dative/accusative distinction is only preserved in third-person pronouns, not in nouns, but the external possessor with nouns can still be marked by means of the preposition *à* (Lamiroy 2003: 257);[21]

(iii) by relegating the possessor argument to a locative PP – Scandinavian languages, for instance, have grammaticalized a new external possessor with a superessive preposition, as in (105) and (106). In Icelandic, as in (107), and Russian, similar constructions have arisen with an adessive preposition (König and Haspelmath 1998: 584).

(103) French
   Max a   tordu   le bras à Luc.
   Max has twisted the arm to Luc
   'Max has twisted Luc's arm.'

(104) French
   Max lui   a   tordu le bras.
   Max 3SG.DAT has twisted the arm
   'Max has twisted his arm.'

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21 The construction with the clitic dative is less marked than the PP construction, though (Lamiroy 2003: 258).

(105) Swedish

Någon   bröt   armen   på honom.
someone broke the.arm on him
'Someone broke his arm.'   (König and Haspelmath 1998: 559)

(106) Norwegian

Legen   røntgenfotograferte magen   på dei.
the.doctor radiographed   the.stomach on them
'The doctor radiographed their stomach.'

(König and Haspelmath 1998: 559)

(107) Icelandic

Han nuddaði   á   henni fæturna
he   massages on her   the.legs
'He massaged her legs.'   (König and Haspelmath 1998: 559)

In principle, English could have made use of any of these options. Thus, it could have developed an external possessive construction with an oblique pronoun, as in *They broke him the arm* (like Dutch after its loss of a formally marked dative). After all, the lack of a dative has not prevented English from still having an indirect object. It could also have used its recipient preposition *to* for marking the external possessor, as in *They broke the arm to him* (like French). Haspelmath (1999: 125–131) argues that this is not possible because the range of the preposition *to* on the semantic map of "dative" functions does not extend to the benefactive and the *dativus iudicantis*. This does not seem to be true, as *to* in (108) to (110) does mark a *dativus iudicantis*.

(108)   *It is too ugly to us.*   (COCA)

(109)   *It is too real to me.*   (COCA)

(110)   *The AT is too important to me.*   (COCA)

Another alternative would be for English to grammaticalize the Scandinavian-type external possessor in a locative PP. In fact, English marginally allows this construction, as (111) shows.[22] Note that English's close neighbor Dutch uses this construction as an alternative to its dative external possessor more extensively, as in (112) and (113) (Van Belle and Van Langendonck 1996: 233–234).

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22 The construction occurs with other verbs as well (e.g. *he walked out on me*).

(111) *The rest of the children died on me.*   (König and Haspelmath 1998: 560)

(112) Dutch
   De tranen stonden (bij) hem in de   ogen.
   the tears   stood   by   him in the eyes
   'The tears were in his eyes.'

(113) Dutch
   Dan rijzen (bij) mij de   haren te berge.
   then rise   by   me   the hair   to mountain
   'This makes my hair stand on end.'

The fact that English did not select any of these options – with the marginal exception of (111), which is not really productive in Standard English – is still in want of a good explanation. But what the data described thus far crucially show is that the mere loss of dative case, which did not only occur in English but was part of an overall deflection process that had been raging through the West Germanic and Romance languages alike, is unlikely to be the ultimate cause for the decline of the external possessor. This leaves room for another explanation.

The hypothesis that we want to put forward is that the West Germanic and Romance languages are moving toward greater configurationality in the noun phrase, the hierarchical syntactic structure of the NP being the result of a long-term process of expanding the modification structures of the noun. Integral NPs with a hierarchical constituency structure are a typical feature of European languages (see Rijkhoff 1998: 322–325, 362–363). A close look at the nominal syntax of ancient Indo-European languages suggests that Proto-Indo-European probably lacked tightly structured NPs. The rise of configurationality in the Indo-European NP has been argued for at length in Van de Velde (2009a, 2009b), and has been defended for both Germanic and Romance languages by Himmelmann (1997), Faarlund (2001: 1713), Luraghi (2010), Ledgeway (2011), Perridon and Sleeman (2011) and Carlier and Lamiroy (2014). Looking at a range of Indo-European languages and old Germanic in particular, Van de Velde (2009a) shows that there has been a massive shift of clause-level elements getting absorbed in the NP, in particular as modifiers of all kinds (adjectives, quantifiers, pronouns, etc.) show a tendency to lose their "floating" capacities. Discontinuous structures like (114) and (115) (see Van de Velde 2009a: Ch. 6 for further examples) are no longer possible in Present-day English, Dutch or German.

(114) Gothic

    dauns sijum woþi
    odor be.1PL sweet
    'We are a sweet odor.'   (Behaghel 1932: 241)

(115) Old Saxon

    hiet   that hie is suerd dedi scarp an scethia
    ordered that he his sword did sharp in sheath
    'ordered that he sheathed his sharp sword'   (Van de Velde 2009a: 193)

These observations concur with findings by Admoni (1967), who shows that the proportion of NP-internal to NP-external material per clause is growing over time in German (see also Weber 1971; Ebert 1978: 49–50). In other words, over the centuries, Germanic has been putting less weight on the clause and more weight on the NP. For Romance, Ledgeway (2011) similarly argues that, in the transition from Latin to Romance, the NP has emerged as a structural template with dedicated positions for the expression of definiteness and modification. Discontinuous structures which were common in Latin, like (116) and (117), are no longer grammatical in Romance.

(116) Latin

    magno cum dolore
    great   with grief
    'with great grief'   (Ledgeway 2011: 393)

(117) Latin

    nostram ridebant   inuidiam
    our   laugh.PST.3PL unpopularity
    'They mocked at our unpopularity.'   (Ledgeway 2011: 394)

In our view, possessor constructions are a good example of this long-term drift towards NP constituency. The strategy of expressing possessors externally, as a direct argument of the predicate, can be seen as a tendency to highlight the relation between the verb and the relevant participants, downplaying their mutual relations. In contrast, the strategy of expressing possessors internally in one constituent highlights the relations that exist between the participants, irrespective of the predicate (König 2001: 973). Extending this idea, one could argue that in languages with external possessors, the verbal predicate plays a more central role as the pivot which inter-connects all the participants, whereas languages with internal possessors have a stronger noun pivot. The distinction

between predicate vs. noun pivots should be conceived of as a cline, rather than as a strict dichotomy, and Germanic and Romance languages vary with regard to how far they have evolved on this cline.

Note that the emphasis on the noun and, hence, the tighter organization of NPs in the Indo-European languages are supported by other syntactic changes in the nominal domain besides the loss of discontinuous modifiers. The rise in NP configurationality is intimately connected to the development of a determiner slot, as marked by the rise of articles (see Himmelmann 1997: 133; Lyons 1999: 323; Luraghi 2010; Ledgeway 2011; Perridon and Sleeman 2011; Carlier 2007; Carlier and Lamiroy 2014). Definite articles did not exist in the ancient Germanic period, and first signs of a budding article occur in the Old English, Old Dutch and Old High German period (Lehmann 1994: 28; Heine and Kuteva 2006: 99–100).[23] The same is true for Romance, where the first definite[24] articles emerge between the 3rd and the 8th centuries (Ledgeway 2011: 388, 409–415 and references cited there), a full-fledged article being a 9th-century innovation (Goyens 1994; De Mulder and Carlier 2011).[25] In the long run, the rise of determiners often led to a decrease in external possessors. That the two tendencies are indeed related is supported by the observation that the modern West Germanic and Romance languages show slight differences in the extent of grammaticalization of the article, which correlate inversely with the retention of the external possessor.

In West Germanic, the grammaticalization of the definite article has progressed further in English than in Dutch, in which the definite article is in turn more grammaticalized than in German. On the phonetic level, this is clear from the distinction between the demonstrative and the article. Phonetic erosion has separated the definite article from its demonstrative origin in English and Dutch, with the full vowels having become a schwa. This is not the case in German, where the vowels have been largely preserved in *der, die, das* (see Van Haeringen 1956: 40). The same holds, to some extent, for the indefinite article. In English, the article and the numeral from which it derives have different vowels (<a> [eɪ]/[ə]) versus <one> [wʌn]). This is true for Dutch as well (<een> [ən] versus <één> [en]). German, however, preserves the same diphthong for both (<ein> [aɪn]), at

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23 The precise date of the emergence of the article is a moot point; see Crisma (2011) and Sommerer (2012) for recent surveys.

24 The indefinite article did not emerge until the Old French period (Goyens 1994: 277) while the partitive appeared in Middle French (Carlier 2007).

25 Goyens (1994: 276) provides the following figures for French: whereas her Latin corpus contains 86.66% of NPs with zero marking for the determiner slot, the percentage of NPs with zero marking is down to 40.76% in Old French and 15.98% in Modern French.

least when pronounced in full in the standard language.[26] On the morphological level too, there is evidence that English is ahead of its continental sister languages. The English definite article does not agree in gender or number with its noun and has become an invariant particle whose surface form is conditioned only by phonological factors. In Dutch and German, however, the article still has gender and number agreement with the following noun. Hence, the English definite article can be considered as more "specialized" in the expression of definiteness than the Dutch article – which, in addition to definiteness, expresses information about gender and number – and much more so than the German article – which even expresses case. The one-to-one mapping between the expression of definiteness (function) and the article (form) is violated in two ways in German: the article expresses more than just definiteness and the expression of definiteness is partly encoded on the adjective as well, by the alternation between strong and weak inflection (pace Demske 2001). Similarly, in Dutch, the inflectional schwa is absent on attributive adjectives with indefinite singular neuter nouns (e.g. *een mooi huis* 'a beautiful house'), but present in all other cases (e.g. *het mooie huis* 'the beautiful house'). Still, there are indications that the adjective is currently losing this function in Dutch and that the schwa is increasingly used as an attributive marker, irrespective of gender, number, or definiteness (Weerman 2003; Van de Velde and Weerman 2014).

Additional evidence for the hypothesis that the grammaticalization of the determiner as part of NP configurationality follows an English > Dutch > German cline comes from the distribution of the resumptive prenominal possessive construction discussed above (Sections 2 and 3.1, see examples (9), (10), (38)). As mentioned, this construction stands midway between internal and external possession. What we see is that German explicitly marks the external nature by a dative, which is reminiscent of its *dativus commodi* origin. Dutch does not do this, and English eschews this semi-external construction altogether.

The rise of the determiner as part of NP configurationality is not only responsible for the switch from dative external possessors to internal possessors but, arguably, also affected genitive possessors. It is clear from (118) and (119) that the genitive used to be a lot freer, and could easily be separated from its head noun.

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26 Note that, in spoken German, the article is often reduced to the form we find in Dutch. However, in English and Dutch, the pronunciation of the numeral cannot be used for the indefinite article, not even in its unreduced form.

(118) Middle Dutch

> *Maer ic sal   offerande doen minen   Gode,   die*
> but   I   shall offer   do   1SG.POSS.DAT god.DAT who
>
> *mechtich es boven al, die sceppere es hemelrijcx   ende*
> mighty   is above all and creator   is heaven.GEN and
>
> *eerterijcx ende alles datter   in es.*
> earth.GEN and   all   that.there in is
>
> 'But I shall bring an offer to my god who is almighty, and who is the
> creator of heaven and earth and all that is in it.'
>
> (Van de Velde 2009a: 289)

(119) Early Modern Dutch

> *Wy hebben … sommige monstren gezien der   Kinderen van*
> we have   some   monsters seen the.GEN children of
>
> *Enac, vander   reusengeslachte, by de welcke wy gheleken,*
> Enac of.the.GEN giants.breed   by the which we compared
>
> *schenen sprinchanen   te wesen.*
> seemed grasshoppers to be
>
> 'We have seen some monsters of the children of Enac, of giants' breed,
> compared by which we seemed like grasshoppers.'
>
> (Van de Velde 2009a: 289)

This separability could well be taken as a relic of the former autonomous status of genitive modifiers, which were not configurationally integrated in the NP (see Van de Velde 2009a: 104–105, 285–291 for a more extensive discussion).[27]

In Romance as well, the versatility of the external possessor seems to correlate inversely with the grammaticalization of the article. Examples (120) to (122) show a dissociation between the article and the demonstrative in French and Italian which does not hold for Spanish. The article cannot license NP ellipsis in French or Italian, but it can in Spanish. Put differently, contrary to the demonstrative, the article in French and Italian has lost part of its autonomy. Interestingly, Spanish also has the widest range of external possessors.

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27 Separation is also used as a criterion to distinguish internal and external possessors in König and Haspelmath (1998: 584–586), who argue that the separation of the Greek genitive involves a switch to external possessors.

(120) French
　　*la　voiture de Jean　/　*la de Jean　/　celle de Jean*
　　the　car　　　of John　/　the of John　/　that of John
　　'John's car' / 'the of John' / 'that of John'

(121) Italian
　　*la　machina di Gianni　/　*la di Gianni　/　quella di Gianni*
　　the　car　　　of John　　/　the of John　　/　that　　of John
　　'John's car' / 'the of John' / 'that of John'

(122) Spanish
　　el　coche de Juan　/　el　de Juan
　　the　car　　of John　/　the of John
　　'John's car' / 'the (one) of John'

Furthermore, French has gone furthest in the grammaticalization of the so-called partitive article, which has become a full-fledged indefinite article for plural and mass nouns in Modern French (Carlier 2007; De Mulder and Carlier 2011; Carlier and Lamiroy 2014). As shown in (123), where the partitive is used with an abstract noun, the original partitive interpretation is of course no longer available.

(123) French
　　Il　a　fait　ça　avec de l'　amour.
　　He　has done that with of the love
　　'He did this with love.'　　　　　　　　　　　(Carlier and Lamiroy 2014: 482)

Carlier and Lamiroy (2014) show that the grammaticalization of the partitive article has progressed further in French than in Italian, as (124) to (126) make clear. Spanish has simply not developed a partitive article at all, as illustrated in (127). The partitive construction is possible, but not with the indefinite reading intended here, only with the literal partitive meaning in a deictic context.

(124) French
　　*Pierre mange du　　pain.　/　*Pierre mange pain.*
　　Pierre eats　　of.the bread /　Pierre　eats　　bread
　　'Peter eats bread.'

(125) North Italian
　　Piero mangia del　　pane
　　Piero eats　　of.the bread
　　'Peter eats bread.'

(126) South Italian
    Piero mangia pane.
    Piero eats   bread
    'Peter eats bread.'

(127) Spanish
    *Pedro come del   pan. | Pedro come pan.
    Pedro eats of.the bread / Pedro eats bread
    'Peter eats bread.'

In addition, French behaves differently from Italian and Spanish with regard to the possessive pronoun. In Old and Middle French, possessives could be combined with the article within the same NP (e.g. *un mien filz* 'a son of mine', Chanson de Roland). In Modern French, the possessive adjective is mutually exclusive with the article or demonstrative, which suggests that it is itself a determiner (see Lyons 1999), as in (128). In Italian and Spanish, however, they still co-occur, as in (129) and (130). This again shows that French is ahead in the grammaticalization of the determiner.

(128) French
    (**ce/*le*) *mon livre*
    this/the my   book
    'my book/this book of mine'

(129) Italian
    il   mio libro
    the my book
    'my book'

(130) Spanish
    el   libro mio
    the book my
    'my book'

Yet other aspects of NP configurationality pattern according to the English > Dutch > German and French > Italian > Spanish clines. According to Ledgeway (2011), for instance, agreement morphology on adjectives is typical of non-configurational NPs. The loss of agreement in West Germanic and Romance, which has progressed furthest in English and French and least in German and Spanish, does indeed straightforwardly follow the suggested clines.

Now, if we look beyond the West Germanic and Romance languages, we find further support for the association between the shift to internal possessors and the rise of definite articles, both being the result of an increase in NP configurationality. The external possessor is best preserved in the Balto-Slavic languages (König and Haspelmath 1998: 552), which are precisely the European languages lacking a definite article (see Haspelmath 2001a: 1494).[28] Note that the Slavic languages also have less configurationality in the NP, as they allow adjectives to occur outside of the determiner–noun brace, for example (Corver 1989: 38).[29]

All of the above observations point to a clear historical inverse correlation between NP configurationality (decrease of floating modifiers and emergence of an article and determiner phrase in general) on the one hand and retention of the external possessor on the other hand.

Obviously, the relation between the grammaticalization of the determiner and the decrease of external possessors should be seen not as a law but as a robust tendency. Otherwise, we would expect French to lack an external possessor altogether, just like English, which is not the case.[30] Similarly, the retention of the external possessor in German would be at odds with the NP configurationality that German undeniably displays. However, the main claim stands: if we look at closely related languages, i.e. members of one and the same family, the differences in both domains of syntax are correlated, i.e. the more grammaticalized the determiner slot, the less common the external possessor.[31]

Let us now return to the question of whether there is a relation between deflection and the loss of the external possessor in English. As argued in Section 5, a simple causal connection between these two tendencies does not stand up to scrutiny. Yet, to the extent that the rise in NP configurationality is connected

28 The article in Bulgarian and Macedonian is an exception, possibly influenced by the Balkan Sprachbund: the two languages are near the language that boasts the oldest definite article, i.e. Greek, and we see that Romanian has grammaticalized a postposed article as well, contrary to what happened in the western Romance languages.

29 External possessors also occur in Kalkatungu (König 2001: 975), the standard example of a language that lacks NP configurationality (Blake 1983).

30 A large corpus study (Spanoghe 1995) does show that the external possessor (dative) structure is receding in Modern French.

31 It remains to be seen to what extent all aspects of NP configurationality pattern alike. German and Dutch, for instance, have a richer internal branching of premodifying adjective phrases than English. If this is also part of NP configurationality, we see an inverse patterning of what we have observed for determiners or adjectival inflection. For the time being, we focus on the correlation between the grammaticalization of the determiner slot and the loss of the external possessor.

with the deflection tendency, the decline of the external possessor construction can indeed be analyzed as a consequence of the morphological erosion of the dative, albeit an indirect one.

A similar indirect causal relationship may hold between the external possessor and SAE. As argued above, the dative external possessor is unlikely to be a feature of SAE. However, NP configurationality could be an SAE feature: it is strongest in the SAE nucleus and fades out to the east (Balto-Slavic), where articles and a configurational position for adjectives are either absent, or less developed. Furthermore, NP configurationality is comparatively rare in languages across the world (Rijkhoff 1998). If the loss of the external possessor is due to an increase in NP configurationality, and if the latter is an SAE feature, then the external possessor is ultimately linked to SAE.

If the SAE Sprachbund is a result of language contact during the early Middle Ages, as is not implausible (see also Haspelmath 2001a: 1506–1507), then the differential demise of the external possessor as the result of increased NP configurationality in West Germanic and Romance is ultimately still due to language contact. Indeed, we believe that Indo-European as a spread-zone, to use Nichols' (1992) term, is characterized by intense language contact and late L2 learners' effects and concomitant deflection (see Kusters 2003, Lupyan and Dale 2010, Trudgill 2011, and Bentz and Winter 2013 on the effect of L2 learners). This in turn gave rise to increased NP structure. Which itself bled the external possessor.

We believe that the decline of external possessors was favored by the fact that the determiner slot was increasingly used for the expression of possessors that formerly operated at clause level. Although the internal possessor construction subsequently drained the external possessor construction, the latter did not become totally unsustainable. As shown above, the external possessor construction could have survived in English in one guise or another. On a more general level, the idea that a change in constructions is brought about by an old construction becoming "worn out" or "deficient" is not very likely. As Hopper and Traugott (2003: 124) put it:

> Rather than replace a lost or almost lost distinction, newly innovated forms compete with older ones because they are felt to be more expressive than what was available before. This competition allows, even encourages, the recession or loss of older forms. Textual evidence provides a strong support for this view of coexisting competing forms and constructions, rather than a cycle of loss and renewal.

In this view of syntactic change, there is no automatic trade-off between the rise of determiners and the loss of dative external possessors. German and Spanish

have a well-developed determiner, but the dative external possessor is holding up quite well. Thus, the new determiner-possessive structure has not wiped out external possessors. It merely offered a new opportunity to express them NP-internally. All languages have taken up the offer, though some more reluctantly so than others.[32]

6 Conclusions

We have argued in this paper that previous accounts of the distribution of the indirect object external possessor face numerous problems. Contrary to what has often been claimed, we have shown that the indirect object external possessor is not a straightforward feature of Standard Average European and that its debated near-absence in English, ascribed to either Sprachbund or substrate influences, is not the direct result of the less central position of the language in comparison to its continental West Germanic sisters. Nor is it likely, in our view, that the external possessor has been eradicated from English as a result of exposure to a Semitic, Celtic or North Germanic substrate. In our opinion, all previous accounts are problematic in two respects. First, they fail to sufficiently take into account the gradual distribution of the external possessor in the different languages. The literature is equivocal with regard to the presence of an external possessor in Dutch, and vestigial constructions in English (e.g. in idioms and with the verb *look*) are underplayed as well. Furthermore, the fact that the dative external possessor has partly receded in many languages, including those in which it still is a productive construction, is not always recognized. Second, the focus on English has often led scholars to ignore data from the Romance languages. As shown in this paper, the differential retention of the external possessor in the Romance languages is relevant to discriminate between the various explanations suggested for West Germanic.

In order to solve the abovementioned problems, we have argued that the distribution of the dative external possessor in West Germanic and Romance is better explained by the rise in NP configurationality. Both language families have seen the emergence of syntactic structures to accommodate determination and modification slots (see Van de Velde 2009a, 2009b and Ledgeway 2011, respectively), and exactly these structures have attracted the possessor. In other

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32 Interestingly, and not coincidentally, German shows conservatism in its NP-internal genitives (Scott 2014).

words, all languages under consideration have undergone a process of "possessor descending": free dative possessors that used to operate at the level of the clause have moved down to the level of the NP. The extent to which this has happened in the West Germanic languages corresponds to the language constellation that has been described by Van Haeringen (1956), in which Dutch occupies a middle position between English and German, both geographically and linguistically. A similar constellation holds for Romance, with Italian being in-between French and Spanish (see Lamiroy 2007, Lamiroy and De Mulder 2011; Carlier et al. 2012; De Mulder and Lamiroy 2012). The *raison d'être* of these clines is that some languages are ahead of others in the overhaul of their grammatical system.

The explanation that we have proposed here raises the question as to what determines the differential rates of change in the individual languages: *why* is English ahead of Dutch, and Dutch ahead of German, and *why* is French ahead of Italian, and Italian ahead of Spanish? For Germanic, McWhorter (2002) argues that the explanation lies in the extremely high level of language contact that English had when Scandinavians learned Anglo-Saxon as a second language from the 8th century onward. A similar argument can be put forward for Dutch. Buccini (1995, 2010), for instance, argues that the Dutch language is a result of Ingvaeonic speakers learning Frankish as a second language in the early Middle Ages. While these accounts are well-taken, one may wonder whether the differential speed of language change in West Germanic can really be attributed to one specific period in time. As argued above, McWhorter's story is difficult to link to the demise of the external possessor directly. Of course, a major breakdown in the transmission of a language can have long-term effects, but some changes in West Germanic seem to have started only in the late Middle Ages or later. The loss of adjectival inflection, for instance, follows the English > Dutch > German cline, but both Old English and Old Dutch still exhibited complex adjectival agreement. The same applies to the external possessor. Moreover, McWhorter's account leaves unexplained why we find a similar cline in Romance.

Preliminary work on demographic data shows that one can establish a correlation between the rate of language change in the West Germanic and Romance languages and the urbanization (and concomitant immigration) in the areas where these languages are spoken (see Breitbarth 2008 for a close look at the speed of Jespersen's cycle in Middle Low German; Lodge 1996: 142–143, 2004 on French). Although the preliminary data on the relation between demography and language change seem promising, this is obviously a matter for further research.

Acknowledgments

List of abbreviations

1/2/3 = person; ACC = accusative; AOR = aorist; DAT = dative; DU = dual; F = feminine; GEN = genitive; INDEF = indefinite; LOC = locative; M = masculine; NOM = nominative; OBL = oblique; P = particle; PL = plural; POSS = possessive; PST = past; REFL = reflexive; SG = singular

Corpora

COCA. *Corpus of comtemporary American English*. http://corpus.byu.edu/coca
ONW. *Oudnederlands woordenboek* [Old Dutch dictionary]. http://gtb.inl.nl

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