On possessive (reflexive) pronouns, equatives, and the structural basis of Principle A

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The paper proposes a sub-morphemic, nano-syntactic analysis of possessive pronouns in German(ic) (*sein-, zijn, sin/sitt/sina* etc.). The proposal is that the relational nature of the possessive construction is a direct consequence of the composite meaning of the two items that constitute the possessive pronoun: the equative particle **so** + a (kind of the) **indefinite determiner** (with its inflection). As for *so*, it ensures that there are two entities in a specific, slightly modified identity-relation, see below, whereas the indefinite determiner is responsible for the fact that the possessee is quantificationally dependent on the possessor, cf. (in)-definiteness spreading – a behaviour that cannot be observed in surrogate possessive constructions , e.g. with the preposition *of*.

In the first part, it will be shown, how the meaning can be derived, thereby also addressing questions of Binding Principle A. In the second part, the analysis will be bolstered by observations from contemporary German dialects as well as diachronic data, supporting the claim that *s-ein* indeed lies at the bottom of all possessive pronouns and that the different forms for 1st and 2nd person as well as feminine possessors (German *ihr*) are a secondary effect of adding interpretationally irrelevant person/gender features.

The internal structure of s-ich and s-ein-: It is a well known fact that possessive pronouns are diachronically closely related to the reflexive pronoun. Furthermore, both share the property of being subject to Principle A of the Binding theory. The question thus arises whether there is a uniform analysis that derives their common properties. Turning first to reflexives, it has been shown by Leiss (2004) that a de-composition into **so** + 1st personal pronoun is plausible, given the diachronic and comparative data from various Indo-European languages. The question then is how the combination of an equative particle with a personal pronoun may yield the reflexive meaning? Assume that the difference to the 'normal' equative construction where the two elements involved are situated in their own respective functional domain (two CPs, if we adopt the ellipsis analysis of equatives/comparatives, e.g. Lechner (2004), is that the two entities are coerced into one functional domain, i.e. one clause. As there are now no more different properties that could be equalled, the only remaining interpretation is that the referential indices are equalled, i.e. the reflexive meaning. The analysis thus amounts to saying that a clause with a reflexive like *Peter wäscht sich* (P. washes himself) has a paraphrase like *Peter washes an X like me.* This might seem strange at first sight, but if we assume that the pronoun in this configuration has grammaticalized into an expletive-like element, being simply a 'bearer of properties', and if we further look at other languages where the reflexive often contains a noun like 'body', see König & Siemund (2013), the assumption seems well-motivated. Note also that in the Romance languages, the reflexive consists merely of the (equative) particle, *se, si*: an expected difference to Germanic as the former languages do not realize (weak) pronouns, i.e. pro-drop property. The internal structure of s-ich within a clause containing a reflexive pronoun (only heading D) is thus:

(1) [...DP$_i$.....[$_{DP}$[D^0 s-$_{i,j}$ [D^0 ich]]]$_j$...] whereby *so*: j=i

I assume that *so* adjoins to the respective head, since as a particle it does not have a category of its own. Since *so* may combine with any type of category (adjectives, nouns...), this seems to be the correct analysis.

Coming then to the possessive pronoun, the idea that it has an internal structure consisting of the indefinite article and the possessive component is of course not new, see Corver (2004), Leu (2012), also in a sense Georgi & Salzmann (2011) who point out the similar inflectional properties of possessive pronouns and indefinite articles. However, in all these accounts, the possessive meaning itself is still taken to be inherent to the possessive part. In light of the analysis of s-ich from above, the claim here is that again, the equative semantics with its inherent relational character is responsible for the possessive meaning. The difference to the reflexive is of course that we are dealing here with two nominals with their own distinctive

descriptive content. Thus an interpretation in terms of identity of the referential indices is not available. Assume nevertheless that the same type of coercion process took place, in this case in one nominal domain, i.e. one DP, as in (2). The most plausible interpretation is a BE-AT interpretation, i.e. that the <u>location</u> of the two entities is equaled. And this is exactly the possessive relation with all its 'shades' of interpretation, ranging from inclusion (leg - table) to more abstract relations (Peter – car, Mary – cloud). Which of the interpretations is chosen is a matter of encyclopedic knowledge and not one of grammar. To make this work we (i) have to consider what the contribution of the indefinite article is and (ii) how and where the possessor is located within this single nominal domain. As for (i), Carlson (1980) showed that elements like *so* (such…) within a nominal projection only combine with NPs that have a kind-reference, see also the paraphrase for the reflexive above (**an X** like me), and thus the obligatory (sub-)kind-reading is the source of the indefinite article in the possessive pronoun. If we then follow e.g. Zamparelli (2000) and assume that the KindPhrase does not have quantificational force, it follows that the quantificational interpretation co-varies with that of the possessor. For the latter I assume, that it is situated in Spec-DP, leading to a zero-realization of D^0 (DFC-effect).

(2) $[_{DP}$ Possessor$_j$ $[D^0$ $\emptyset$ $[...[_{KindP}$ $[KindP^0$ $s_{i,j}$-$[KindP^0$ ein- $[_{NP}$ Noun$]_i]]]]]]$ whereby *so*: i BE-AT j

The possessor can be overt (Possessor doubling: *Peter his house*) or a pro, being either bound by an appropriate DP within the clause or from outside, accounting for the dual behavior of possessive pronouns in this respect.

Morphological variation: Since kind-interpretations do not necessarily require an (indefinite) article, it is expected that we find variants in which the 'article-part' of the possessive pronoun is missing. German dialects would be a case in point as they allow predicatively used NPs with and without the indefinite article. (*Peter is (a) teacher*). And indeed, we find variants where the possessive pronouns consists merely of the s- element plus the inflection according to the respective noun (Swiss German: *de Mari si-s(nom.n.sg) buech*). Moreover, if the s-root has been overwritten by a person-marking element, e.g. *unser* (our), there are dialects, that inflect nevertheless according to the pattern of indefinite article (*üser-n(nom.masc.sg) fater*, our father). The analysis may also shed new light on the 'Saxon genitive' in that it would support a clitic analysis, bolstered by the fact even in German, nouns like *mother* 'inflect' with –s although they do not belong to a declension class that does have –s as an exponent for the genitive. This part then will also briefly address the rather peculiar system of Mod. English with the consequences concerning its different behavior w.r.t. Binding Theory.

Note finally this analysis is very close to Postma's (1997) analysis of possessives in terms of a functional head, hosting two indices. But whereas in his analysis it remains rather opaque where the two indices come from, in my analysis, it is a direct consequence of invoking the equative particle in the formation of reflexive and possessive pronouns. The analysis furthermore is a contribution to the Minimalist program in its trial to eliminate classical BT such that the binding relations are a coindexation (something that the grammar does not have) but Principle A is the generalization about identity (=reflexive) or BE-AT (possessive) relations induced by the inherent relational nature of the equative particle.

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