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The Shift from Affix to Clitic in the History of the English Genitive: Evidence from John of Trevisa's *Polychronicon*

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In this article I address the question of the change in grammatical nature for the English genitive from inflectional affix to clitic. I focus on the rise of the group genitive, a construction in which the mark for possession is not attached to the head of a possessor phrase but to the rightmost element of it—as in *the king of England's name*—and the role the *his* genitive or separated genitive played in the whole process. In my argumentation I present *prima facie* evidence derived from the analysis of one of the first texts in the history of English where the presence of the group genitive is most noticeable while consistently using the *his* genitive: John of Trevisa's translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (dated around 1387). The results suggest that the *his* genitive may have played a major role in the rise of the group genitive in English, challenging Allen's (1997, 2003, 2008) hypothesis that the group genitive developed after the generalisation of the inflectional genitive ending *-(e)s* to all noun classes as well as Janda's (1980, 1981) theory that the old inflectional genitive was reanalysed as a clitic as a result of deflexion.

Keywords: English genitive; group genitive; split genitive; *his* genitive; complex postmodification structures; deflexion

1. Introduction

The persistence of the genitive in English is a striking fact. It survived the general process of syncretism undergone by much of the case morphology of Old English and, over time, it has greatly strengthened its position to the detriment of the analytical construction with *of*. Variation between the inflectional genitive and the analytical *of*-construction has therefore been a favourite topic for research since Breejen (1937), and it prompted a number of groundbreaking studies on syntactic variation such as Sorheim (1980), Siemund (1993), Raab-Fischer (1995), Jucker (1993), Hundt (1997, 1998), Rosenbach, Anette, and Vezzosi (2000) or Rosenbach (2008, 2014), among others, with much of the focus being placed on the extension of the *'s* genitive to inanimate noun classes.

Another major aspect of the history of the genitive in English is its presumed development from an inflectional affix to a clitic, a change about whose nature and chronology theorists diverge considerably. Authors such as Janda (1980, 1981), Kroch (1997), Lightfoot (1999) or Weerman and de Witt (1999) assume that the reanalysis from inflectional affix to clitic was an early one, having taken place already in early Middle English as a result of the general process of deflexion undergone by the nominal paradigm of English, while Plank (1980) and more recently Allen (2003, 2008, 2013) have provided strong arguments (typological, morphological and syntactic) for considering that the change from affix to clitic may not have been such an early one, and that the transition from one to the other was not completed until the very late Middle English period.

In this article I will try to shed some light about the chronology and the general process of change from affix to clitic for the English genitive, focusing on the rise of the group genitive construction (*the king of England's name*), its coexistence with the split genitive (*the king's name of England*),[1] and the role the *his* genitive or separated genitive, a construction where the possessive marker is detached from the possessor N (as in *the king his name*), played in the process.

2. The group genitive and the genitive as a clitic

Structures like (1) below provide strong evidence for the clitic analysis of the genitive in English (examples from Lowe 2016):

(1) a. The Queen of Tonga's tiara.
b. Someone I know's brother.
c. The boy opposite me's sister.
d. The man I live with's girlfriend.

As we can observe, in these constructions the possessive marker is attached, not to the possessor head (*Queen*, *someone*, *boy*, *man*), but to the last element of the possessor phrase, which can be any grammatical category. This unselective distribution of the possessive *'s* is what—according to Lowe (2016)—we would expect of a clitic. On the other hand, as Lowe (2016, 159) points out, "maintaining an affixal analysis of (1) would imply that every word in the lexicon (noun, verb, pronoun, preposition) would have an inflectional possessive or 'genitive' form," which is not satisfactory from any lexicalist point of view. Furthermore, the arrangements in (1) present us with a serious morphological problem, as the mark

[1] Allen (1997, 2003, 2008) uses the term *combined genitive* for this structure, a fitting label which describes the coexistence in a single construction of a native resource to indicate possession (the morpheme *-(e)s*) and a French one (the *of*-genitive), descending probably from French names using *de* (Lightfoot 1999, 123–24).

for possession is not attached to the semantic head of the first part of the genitive relation but to one of its complements. The solution, historically, and probably still in the present day (if we consider the findings in Denison, Scott, and Börjars 2010, 548) is the so-called *split genitive* in (2) below, where the possessor N receives the mark for possession and any postmodifiers of the same are placed after the *possessum*:[2]

(2) a. The gentleman's name with the tape recorder
b. The manager's secretary of the Co-op
c. Somebody's desk who was actually supposed to carry out the work
d. A twinkle in somebody's eye with no money at all to spend on physical work
e. My neighbour's husband down the stair

However acceptable some of these structures may be in Present-Day English, what is clear is that split-genitive structures do avoid the morphological pitfall mentioned before, but at the cost of violating logical order and sacrificing the referential integrity of the entire possessive construction. In all: no arrangement is 100% satisfactory from the point of view of the linguistic interfaces, but historically the placement of the mark for possession at the end of a complex possessor, next to an element which is not necessarily the possessor head (edge marking) was clearly disfavoured until the end of the fourteenth century, which presupposes an affixal status for the English genitive until then. We will discuss the transition from affix to clitic in the history of the English genitive and the role deflexion (i.e., the decay of the inflectional case system) played in the early Middle English period in the following section, building heavily on Allen (2003).

3. Deflexion, the early reanalysis hypothesis and the status of the English genitive 1100–1250

The Old English substantive distinguished four morphological cases (five, including exceptional uses of the instrumental) which underwent a massive simplification during the early Middle English period, so approximately by 1250 the language distinguished only two cases: nominative and genitive.[3] In this regard, the idea of the retention of the genitive as inflection in early Middle English has been disliked by a legion of scholars, including Janda (1980), Kroch (1997), Lightfoot (1999) or Weerman and de Witt (1999), to name a few. These authors reject the idea of a two-case system for the English language consisting

[2] See Denison, Scott, and Börjars (2010) and Börjars et al. (2013) for a discussion of the real impact of the group genitive in Present-Day English based on corpus data.
[3] The Kentish dialect retained flexion for a longer period of time–until the fourteenth century, and even later than that for some elements of the nominal paradigm (Lass 1992, 113).

of genitive versus other on the basis of the typological findings in Greenberg (1966), for whom the genitive was a marked case, so it could not be preserved when less marked cases such as the dative or accusative had disappeared (Borshtshanenko 2008, 2). Therefore, assuming the dictum that crosslinguistically no language opposes a genitive case to a default case, many of the theorists mentioned above adopted the theoretical position of an early reanalysis for the Old English genitive from affix to clitic in the early Middle English period (1100–1250), linking it crucially to deflexion and to the evidence provided by the loss of case agreement for determiners and adjectives in the noun phrase in the period.

Allen (1997, 2003), on the other hand, has provided very compelling arguments to suggest that the genitive remained an inflectional category all along the early Middle English period, based both on typological and morphosyntactic evidence. From the typological point of view, Allen (2003, 9) has argued that—besides the obvious fact that our current knowledge of the languages of the world is constantly changing, including the inventory of possible and impossible case systems—the opposition genitive-single case does exist in languages such as Megleno-Romanian, referring to the works of Atanasov (1990) and Capidan (1925). Allen (2003, 9) also makes a point of the fact that most of the supporters of the theory that it is impossible to have a system where genitive is opposed to a single other case rarely back up their ideas with references to typological studies, whereas Plank (1980) provides us with "strong evidence to believe that, in fact, the genitive is more resistant to syncretism than other cases are" (Allen 2003, 9).

Within the linguistic arguments the proponents of the early reanalysis hypothesis have put forward to suggest that the genitive was a clitic already in the eME period, lack of case agreement for determiners and adjectives within the possessive phrase clearly stands out. Strict agreement for all modifiers in the possessive phrase was mandatory in Old English, a period when the genitive was an inflectional ending, but once deflexion set in the requirements for agreement relaxed, and the mark for possession was only obligatory on the nucleus of the possessor phrase[4] (see for example the uninflected adjectives *ald* in (3a) and *laþe* in (3b); examples from Allen 2003, 4):

(3) a. til ald man*s* words
to old man^{gen} words
"to an old man's words" (C Mundi (Vesp) 1740) (c. 1200)

[4] This is in line with Weerman and de Wit's (1999) suggestion—equalling early Middle English with Modern Dutch—that only possessive markers attached to proper nouns or kinship terms have the true status of a case ending, while any other recursive possessives and NPs which are not proper nouns are to be analysed as complex determiners, which do not bear any case. Allen (2003), however, correctly confirms that the genitive in English was never restricted to proper nouns or kinship terms, so Weerman and de Wit's (1999) arguments should probably be put in quarantine.

b. þat laþe wif*ess* father
that hateful woman^{gen} father
"that hateful woman's father"

(Orm 19829) (c.1180)

As Allen (2003, 4) points out, lack of case agreement within the NP makes a clitic analysis possible for this type of examples, but she is ready to produce interesting counterevidence involving complex possessor phrases where the determiners of the NP bear a mark for genitive, even in case-impoverished texts from the North and North-East of England (where presumably deflexion travelled faster), like the *Ormulum*. In (4) below (example from Allen 2003, 5) we can observe residual agreement in the genitive case in the quantifier *nan* in this work:[5]

(4) Off nan*es* mann*es* e33e
of no^{gen} man^{gen} fear
"of the fear of no man"

(Orm 16137)

Kroch (1997) has also used the lack of inflection in the genitive case in the first part of appositional expressions in early Middle English as evidence of the early reanalysis from affix to clitic for the genitive. Compare, for example, the appositional structure in the Old English example in (5) (with strict agreement in genitive throughout the determiner phrase) with the constructions in (6), where the proper nouns *Leir* and *Herod* lack inflection:

(5) Se wæs Ælfred*es* cyning*es* godsunu
He was Alfred^{gen} king^{gen} godson
"He was King Alfred's godson"

(ASC (A) 890.4; Bately 1986, 54; example from Allen 2003, 10)

(6) a. þat nas in Leir king*es* lond; womman half so hende
that not-was in Leir king^{gen} land; woman half so gracious
"that there wasn't half so gracious a woman in king Leir's land"

(Brut (O); Brook and Leslie 1963, 81; 1570)

b. Uppon Herode king*ess* da33
upon Herod king^{gen} day
"In King Herod's day"

(Orm 257; example from Allen 2003, 10)

[5] According to Allen (2003, 5) agreement with genitive case in quantifiers is indicative of a morphological case category.

The argument, however, is not strictly compelling, as Allen (2003, 10) accurately points out that examples with agreement are occasionally found in the literature of the period–see (7a, b) below:

(7) a. Daviþ*ess* king*ess* kinnessmann
David^{gen} king^{gen} kinsman
"King David's kinsman"
(Orm 13528; example from Allen 2003, 10)

b. Þo weren þar two children; Lud*es* sones þ*es* king*es*
then were there two children Lud^{gen} sons the^{gen} king^{gen}
"then there were two children there, king Lud's sons"
(Brut (O) in Brook and Leslie 1963, 3445;
example from Pérez Lorido and Casado Núñez 2013b)[6]

Finally, a very strong morphological counterargument to the early reanalysis hypothesis of the genitive from affix to clitic in early Middle English is the presence of irregular genitive forms, coexisting alongside the prototypical ending *-(e)s*. As Allen (2003, 5) puts it:

> Irregular inflection is more typical of an inflection than of a clitic, according to Zwicky and Pullum's (1983) criteria . . . The irregular genitives do not show that a clitic genitive did not exist in EME or later ME, but they do indicate that a clitic was not the only possibility.

Irregular forms for the genitive are, thus, found in early Middle English texts with very simplified noun morphology like the *Ormulum*, from which examples (8a, b; from Allen 2003, 5) below are taken:

(8) a. Hiss a3henn broþerr wif
His own brother$^{gen\text{-}sg}$ wife
"His own brother's wife"
(Orm 19601)

b. For 3ho iss allr*e* shafft*e* cwen
For she is all$^{gen\text{-}pl}$ creatures$^{gen\text{-}pl}$ queen
"For she is the queen of all creatures"
(Orm 2159)

[6] In this example the appositional structure is split, which was very common in Old and habitual in Middle English, but the argument still holds, for the mark for genitive is present in both the proper noun *Lud* and the NP *the king*.

Note that *broþer*, in (8a), lacks inflection as it descends from the Old English r-stem substantive *broþor*, which was uninflected in the genitive singular. In the case of *shaffte* in (8b), the genitive takes the ending *-e* for genitive plural characteristic of the Old English feminine ō-stem substantives (*sceaft*).

Summarising, the findings in Allen (2003) allow us to say that no compelling evidence has been provided to date, either from a typological or a morphological point of view, to demonstrate that the genitive was a clitic in early Middle English or to negate the possibility of an affixal status for such genitive. Obviously, syntactic evidence, understood as the appearance of the first examples of the group genitive in the medieval record and its covariation with the split genitive, would be most relevant to understand the shift in the English genitive from affix to clitic, but no evidence of that kind is available in English until the end of the fourteenth century.

4. The group genitive and the rise of the genitive as a clitic in late Middle English

The rise and spread of the group genitive and its competition with the split genitive is a cornerstone of the discussion about the status of the English genitive, starting with Jespersen (1894) and continuing with Janda (1980, 1981), Rosenbach (2002) or Allen (1997, 2003, 2008, 2013), among others. It is obvious that, once morphological evidence for an inflectional analysis of the genitive in terms of agreement within the NP was not available at the end of the early Middle Ages due to general process of syncretism undergone in the nominal paradigm of English, syntactic evidence became crucial to the understanding of the transition from affix to clitic for the English genitive. But, as already noted by Jespersen in 1894, the diachronic development of the construction is far from simple or straightforward. This is so because of the complex textual history of some of the texts that contain group genitives—like the Chaucerian instance in (9), for example, to which I will return later—, but also because of the role played by a new participant in the story: the so-called separated or *his* genitive in (10) below, a construction in which the mark for possession is conveyed, not by an ending, but by a separate, syntactic element:

(9) I, that God of Lov*es* servantz serve . . .
"I, who serve the servants of the Gods of Love . . ."
(Chaucer, *Troilus & Criseyde*, Book I, 15; Benson 1988, 473)[7]

[7] Examples from Chaucer's works other than the *Canterbury Tales* are taken from Benson's (1988) *Riverside Chaucer*. References are made by page, book (when applicable) and line number in the editor's numbering. Examples from the *Canterbury Tales* in MS San Marino, Huntington Library, EL 29 C9 (Ellesmere) are taken from Boening and Taylor's (2012) edition and quoted by

(10) . . .þe kyng of Engelond *his* eldest sone, Edward, seilled into Gascoyne
". . .the king of England's eldest son, Edward, sailed to Gascony"
(Polychr (J), VIII.348.13)[8]

The *his* genitive was a rare alternative to the attached genitive until the late fourteenth century, its first appearance in written texts being recorded around 1250 (*Genesis & Exodus* and Layamon's *Brut* MS (O)),[9] and theorists have adopted very different theoretical stances regarding its role in the genesis of the group genitive. Thus, Janda (1980, 1981) has argued that the *his* genitive was actually the trigger of the group genitive—the detached nature of the genitive mark being indicative of its clitic status—while other authors such as Allen (1997, 2003, 2008) hold that the *his* genitive played virtually no role at all in the process, as both the *his* genitive and the attached genitive had the same characteristics and syntactic distribution. In any case, it is true that from the very beginning the attached genitive and the separated genitive appeared in both group genitive and split genitive structures in English (see examples (11) and (12) below):

(11) a. <u>þe kyng of Fraunc*es* men</u> weren i-slawe and i-chasede,
"the king of France's men were slain and chased"
(Polychr (J), VIII.349.7)
b. . . .<u>þe kyng of Engelond *his* eldest sone</u>, Edward, seilled into Gascoyne
". . .the king of England's eldest son, Edward, sailed to Gascony"
(Polychr (J), VIII.348.13)

(12) a. <u>þe kyng*es* sone *of Fraunce*</u> leye in plegge at Rome
"the king of France's son lay under pledge at Rome"
(Polychr (J), IV.319.13)
b. Attalus, <u>þe kinge *his* broþer *of Siria*</u>, shulde overcome Prusia
"Attalus, the king of Siria's brother, should overcome Prussia"
(Polychr (J), IV.319.13)

Actually, one of the strongest arguments Allen (1997, 2003, 2008) has put forward against the hypothesis of the *his* genitive being the origin of the group

page and line number in the editor's numbering as well as by folio and verso / recto position in the MS. Examples from the *Canterbury Tales* in MS Bodleian Library, Arch. Seld. B. 14 are taken from Skeat's (1906) edition and quoted by page and line number in the editor's numbering, also including references to folio and position (verso / recto) in the MS.

[8] Henceforth, references to MS (J) of John of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* will be made by volume number (from I to VIII, in Roman numerals), page and line in the Cambridge University Press reprint of Joseph Rawson Lumby's (1882) edition of the work.

[9] There is some consensus in considering the *his* genitive a strictly Middle English phenomenon (Allen 1997, 2002, 2008), but other authors, such as Jespersen (1984), Mustanoja (1960), Fischer (1992), Seppänen (1997) or more recently Pérez Lorido and Casado Núñez (2017) have argued for the hypothesis of an Old English separated genitive.

genitive is that both structures seem to overlap in time. If we assume, as indicated by Janda (1980, 1981), that the *his* genitive was the trigger for the group genitive, then its use in such contexts should have antedated that of the attached genitive but—as Allen (1997, 2003, 2008) points out—this is not the case. The *his* genitive and the attached genitive appeared in group genitives at the same time in the history of English as both "had exactly the same distributional properties and functional characteristics, being variant forms of the same morpheme" (Allen 1997, 119; cf. also Allen 2003, 16). Even though this may actually be true, we lack information about the statistical frequency and variation patterns between the *his* genitive and the attached genitive in possessive structures with complex NP possessives in the very early stages of the use of the construction, as textual evidence of that type is scarce in that period of the history of English. The question of timing being crucial here, an adequate handling of the data for the period when the group genitive was taking its first steps is mandatory, as surely is a thorough analysis of the variation patterns between the group genitive and the split genitive. In the following section I will provide new evidence in this regard taken from the first text in the history of English with a substantial number of examples of group genitives while systematically using the *his* genitive: John of Trevisa's translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* (MS (J)). This text has never been analysed in its entirety to the present day despite being perhaps the best candidate to provide *prima facie* evidence of the impact of the *his* genitive in the rise of the group genitive in English, and therefore to give attestation of the reanalysis of the genitive from affix to clitic.

4.1 The chronology of the data

As has been mentioned previously, the presence of the group genitive is conventionally considered as an unequivocal indication of the reanalysis of the genitive in English from inflectional affix to clitic. If we consider the data in Allen (2003, 2008, 2013), which my own research can corroborate, such reanalysis would not have taken place any earlier than ca.1400, as texts prior to that date lack group genitives altogether (see the data in Table 1):[10]

[10] This table contains the results of the searches for split and group genitives carried out by Allen (2013) from syntactically parsed electronic corpora (PPCME2, PCEEC, Penn1, Penn2 and Helsinki). The data distinguish the historical periods used by the original Helsinki Corpus, namely m1-m4 for Middle English and e1-e3 for Early Modern English.

Table 1. Split and group genitives in Middle English and early Modern English (adapted from Allen 2013, 18).

Text	Split total	Group total	Total	% Split	% Group
m1	23	0	23	100%	0%
m2	1	0	1	100%	0%
m3	30	5	35	86%	14%
m4	67	79	146	46%	54%
e1	5	102	107	5%	95%
e2	24	250	274	9%	91%
e3	12	90	102	12%	88%

As we can observe, no examples of group genitives have been attested in English in the m1 (1150–1250) and m2 (1250–1350) periods of the Helsinki Corpus, according to Allen (2013, 18), with the first instances of it being found at the end of the m3 period (1350–1450). This can be considered clear evidence—though negative—against a clitic analysis for the English genitive in eME. As Allen (2003, 6) puts it:

> If the genitive was an inflection until near the end of the ME period, it would explain the complete lack of group genitives in the texts until towards the end of the fourteenth century. . . . [A]n analysis of the genitive marker as clitic at the end of the possessor NP/DP in EME would predict that group genitives should have been possible.

This hypothesis was questioned by Kroch (1997), who pointed out that the group genitive was probably a grammatical option in the spoken language "even a long time before the first knockdown examples" (134) and that the lack of group genitives in Early Middle English was simply the result of linguistic conservatism, characteristic of written texts. I find this unconvincing, and think, in line with Allen (2003, 6–7), that—besides the ever problematical question of making assumptions about unrecorded speech—the early Middle English period is perhaps the time of the history of English where the written and spoken language stood closest to one another in Britain, Latin and French being the socially 'superior' languages at the time. So I agree with Allen (2003) in believing that there is no well-founded reason to think that if group genitives did not surface in the written texts of eME they should have done so in the spoken language of the time. Also, and most importantly, we must bear in mind that the primary syntactic context that was later to give rise to the group genitive (complex possessor structures of the type *the king of England*, *the bishop of York*, combining an NP and a French *of* genitive), had existed in the English language for centuries (since the second half of the eleventh century, actually). These

structures—despite being indisputably a syntactic hybrid English-French—had an enormous impact in the textual record since the very onset of Middle English,[11] as illustrated by the following examples from the *Peterborough Chronicle*:

(13) a. Ðis wæs eall ear gedon ðurh *se biscop of Seresbyrig*
this was all formerly done through the bishop of Salisbury
"This all was done by the intervention of the bishop of Salisbury"
(PC, 251.25 [1123])

b. & *se kyng of France* brohte þone eorles sunu
and the king of France brought the^{ACC} duke^{GEN} sone
"and the king of France put forward the duke's son"
(PC, 257.6 [1127])

So, if—as Allen (2003, 8) points out—the scribes of the Early Middle English period showed no prejudice against using this construction and freely used it in written texts, why should they have refrained from using it in a possessive construction if they did so in the spoken language, as Kroch (1997) suggests? The answer probably is: the group genitive was never used in early Middle English, and its first presence in texts from the late fourteenth century onwards is due to factors that do not necessarily correlate with case syncretism and deflexion, as in Kroch's (1997) theorising. In this respect, Allen's (2003, 2008) suggestion that the group genitive arose as a result of the extension of the ending *-(e)s* to all declensional types inherited from OE in the LME period is a very interesting and plausible alternative, although it fails to explain some intriguing facts if observed against the backdrop of wider-scope textual research, as we will see in the following section. In any case, we must remember that any possessor NPs in which the nucleus was postmodified by an *of* genitive appeared as a split genitives (Allen's "combined genitive") in the early Middle Ages, as illustrated in the examples below from the *Peterborough Chronicle*:

(14) a. Æðelic (…) þe ær wæs *þes Caseres* wif *of Sexlande*
Æðelic who formerly was of-the-emperor wife of Germany
"Æðelic, who had formerly been the emperor of Germany's wife"
(PC, 256.29 [1127])

[11] A preliminary analysis I carried out of the first 10 pages of the *Peterborough Chronicle* in Earle and Plummer's (1965) edition, counting only examples of the combination determiner + noun + PP (the type *se biscop of Lincolne* type (PC, 253.16 [1123])) and excluding combinations of just a nobility title plus a postmodifying PP (*Hugo of Mundford*; *Alexander of Lincolne*, etc.) revealed 23 examples of this construction.

b. Willelm hæfde æror numen *ðes eorles* dohter *of Angeow* to wife
William had before taken of-the of-count daughter of Anjou as wife
"William had previously taken the count of Anjou's daughter as wife"
(PC, 257.8 [1127])

In conclusion: it appears that an adequate periodisation and attestation of the use of the group genitive vs. the split genitive and the interaction of that with the use of the attached genitive vs. the separated (*his*) genitive is crucial for a complete understanding of the process of change of the English genitive from affix to clitic, and that is what I will attempt to do in the following section.

5. The role of the *his* genitive in the rise of the group genitive

As stated earlier, the theoretical positions regarding the role of the *his* genitive in the genesis of the group genitive differ considerably, with two theorists taking highly diverging—not to say opposite—stances: Janda (1980, 1981), for whom the *his* genitive was the trigger of the group genitive, and Allen (1997, 2003, 2008, 2013), for whom the *his* genitive played no special role at all in the process.[12] Both positions differ considerably on the nature of the separate possessive marker too: for Janda (1980) the possessive particle *his* was a true possessive determiner (like the pleonastic element found in the possessor doubling construction of some Germanic languages of the type *meinem Vater sein Auto*, "my father's car") which later became a clitic, the detached quality of the marker being an indication of its clitic nature. It would have arisen (according to Janda 1980) due to the reanalysis caused by the phonological identification of *-(e)s* with the weak form of *his* once the masculine and neuter singular marker *-(e)s* generalised to most nouns. Janda (1980) ultimately linked the reanalysis of *-(e)s* as a reduced form of *his* to the simplification of the noun morphology in English, which made it impossible to analyse *-(e)s* as inflection, so once more, a connection was established between deflexion and the reanalysis of the genitive from affix to clitic.[13] For Allen (1997, 2003, 2008, 2013), however, the particle *his* should be simply regarded as a variant form of the attached genitive *-(e)s*, as both had exactly the same distributional properties and syntactic distribution.[14] In either account chronology is obviously crucial: if the *his* genitive were the trigger of the group genitive, it should antedate the use of the attached genitive in that specific context

[12] Rosenbach's (2002) position is that the *his* genitive, while not being the direct cause of the rise of the group genitive in English, played a contributory role in it.
[13] See Allen (1997, 113–15) for an excellent analysis of the problems in Janda's (1980) account, including an erroneous design of the database and a poor handling of the chronology of the data.
[14] Pérez Lorido and Casado Núñez (2013a, 2013b) analysis of the separated genitive in Layamon's *Brut* (MS O) lends some support to Allen's view.

over time, but this is not the case, as Allen (1997, 2003, 2008, 2013) is very well aware of. Janda (1980, 1981), however, does not provide any detailed analysis of the chronology of the development of the group genitive in connection with the *his* genitive, that being one of the major flaws of his proposal. Another serious objection to Janda's (1980, 1981) theory is that the *his* genitive is quite unusual in general if compared to the attached genitive (it was exceptional in early Middle English and rare in late Middle English until about 1400), and therefore unlikely to have provided a robust enough set of examples to trigger the kind of structural reanalysis he proposes. In fact, the *his* genitive is only present in two eME texts of around 1250: *Genesis and Exodus* and Layamon's *Brut* (London, British Library, MS Cotton Otho C.XIII), and the type of examples of possessive structures found in them is structurally very simple, far away from the complexity of the group genitive. See example (15)—from Allen (1997, 113)—for illustration:

(15) ðe was Adam *is* sune
who was Adam gen son
"who was Adam's son"

(Gen. and Ex. 493 (c. 1250))

Furthermore, considering the geographical distribution of the *his* genitive in the Middle Ages, it was quite limited to the South and South-West of England,[15] which does not fit at all well in the patterns of deflexion, which—as is well known—proceeded faster in the north and more slowly in the south of Britain. Even if we consider texts dating from the latest part of the Middle English period (from the year 1450 onwards, which is when the use of the *his* genitive greatly increased in frequency), it is found primarily in manuscripts written or copied in the South and South-West of England (see below a dot map corresponding to the geographic location of MSS containing instances of the *his* genitive according to eLALME).[16]

Returning to the question of the chronology of the development of the group genitive and its interaction with the *his* genitive, Allen (2013, 18) is very clear in stressing the relevance of timing, making a strong point of the fact that the separated and attached genitives appeared simultaneously in group genitives in

[15] Even though Waldron (1991, 64) insists that ". . . the 'detached' genitive is found in the late fourteenth century only in South Western profiles," Allen (2008, 244) makes a point of the fact that a few instances of separated genitives have been found in texts written or copied in other regions, such as the 6 examples of the *his* genitive found in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* (British Library MS Add. 37790), located in Lincolnshire, or the two examples found in Capgrave's *Lives* (British Library MS Add. 36704), located in Norfolk.

[16] Virtually all of these manuscripts are fifteenth-century ones, exception made of MS (J) of John of Trevisa's *Polychronicon*; eLALME website and materials are copyright of the University of Edinburgh.

the history of English, so the former could not have served as a model for the latter:

> it must be emphasised that the group genitive with an attached marker did not develop from a prior genitive with a separated marker . . . Both types of group genitives appear around the same time, and in fact we find the group genitive with an attached marker in some texts in which the separated genitive is not found at all, in groups or any other type of genitive.

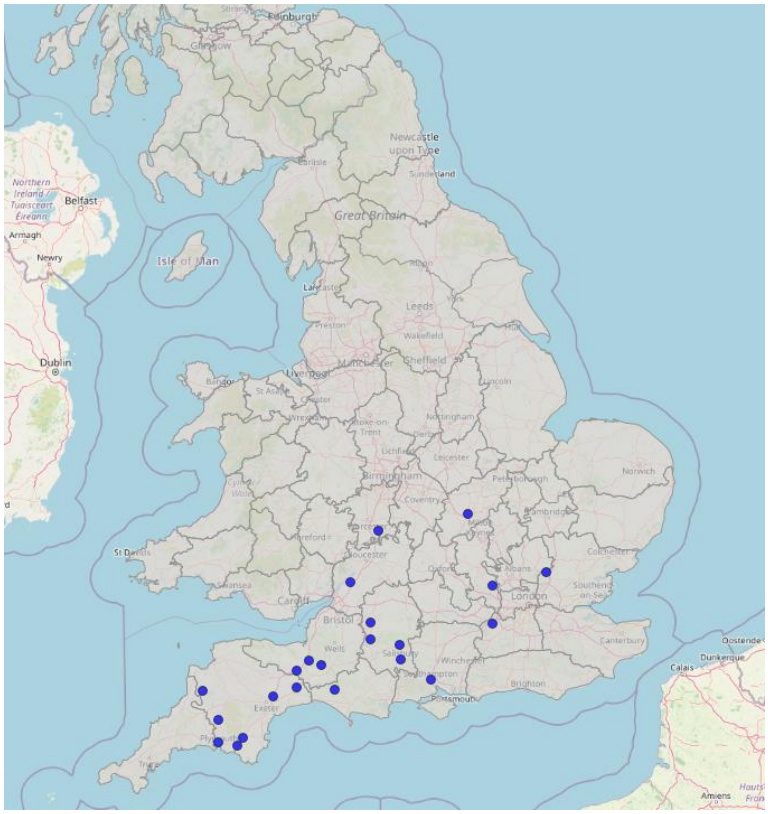

Figure 1. Dot map for texts in eLALME containing *his* genitives. © Its authors and the University of Edinburgh.

In this regard, the findings in Allen (2003, 22), which contains data taken from the analysis of 53 texts ranging from 1131 to 1711, confirm that perhaps the first author to use the group genitive in the Middle English period was Geoffrey Chaucer.[17] Any examples of the group genitive in his works, however, would involve the use of the attached variant *-(e)s*, not the detached *his* genitive.

[17] Fischer (1992, 229) also mentions only Chaucerian examples when introducing the question of the group genitive in her account of the late Middle English developments in the syntax of the noun phrase.

According to Allen (1997, 120–21; 2008, 153), the group genitive is found in Chaucer's works in just three examples (16a-c), all of them involving the construction *(the) god of*:[18]

(16) a. The grete *god of Loves* name
"The great God of Love's name"
(Chaucer, *House of Fame*, 1489; Benson 1988, 366)

b. That was the *god of slepes* heyr
"That was the heir of the God of Sleep"
(Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*, 168; Benson 1988, 332)

c. I, that *God of Loves* servantz serve…
"I, who serve the servants of the Gods of Love…"
(Chaucer, *Troilus & Criseyde*, Book I, 15; Benson 1988, 473)

These three examples have consistently been quoted in the literature on the English genitive, but some authors such as Fischer (1992, 230) have cast some doubts about their relevance, on account of their formulaic nature:

> In these examples the *of*-phrase is descriptive and functions like a "restrictive" phrase, i.e. it further identifies the type of God. Not surprisingly, therefore, the group genitive first occurs here, and not in phrases like *the Wyves Tale of Bathe* (Chaucer, CT III.1264/5 [2: 1238/9]) where *of Bathe* is non-restrictive (it gives additional information about the Wyf) and locative rather than descriptive.

It is interesting that Fischer (1992) mentions the titles of the chapters and linking passages of the *Canterbury Tales*, as these provide us with some apparent examples of group genitives using the *his* genitive. Allen (2008, 241–44), however, dismisses them both on textual, linguistic and codicological grounds, emphasising the importance of an adequate handling of the dating of the manuscripts when dealing with that kind of evidence. I am referring to examples such as (17) below:

(17) Heere bigynneth the man of lawe his tale
(Chaucer, *Man of Law's Tale*, l. 133
San Marino, Huntington Library, MS EL 29 C9 (Ellesmere), f. 50v; Boening and Taylor 2012, 124)

[18] I can confirm this with my own reading of Chaucer's works, at least as far as the attached genitive is concerned.

(17) could be initially taken for an instance of the group genitive ("The Man of Law's tale begins here"), but it allows for another reading ("The Man of Law begins his tale here"), with *begin* being used as a transitive verb taking the complement *his tale* and subject-verb inversion in the original. As Allen (2008, 241) points out, the early manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* (Hengwrt and Ellesmere) present us with evidence that the analysis involving two NPs is often superior. For instance, take the coordinate structure in (18):

(18) Heere endeth the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe / And bigynneth hir tale
(Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue*, ll. 857–58
San Marino, Huntington Library, MS EL 29 C9 (Ellesmere), f.72r; Boening and Taylor 2012, 161)

Allen (1997, 126–27; 2008, 242) considers that—on account of the material in the second part of the coordinate structure—the only acceptable reading would be "The Wife of Bath ends her prologue here and (then she) begins her tale" with *end* being used as a transitive verb taking two arguments, the subject *The Wife of Bath* and the object *her prologue*, with coordinate subject deletion in the second conjunct. I believe, however, that a reading such as "The Wife of Bath's prologue ends here and (then) her tale begins," containing a group genitive and coordinate deletion of *here* in the second coordinate structure is a plausible one, as there are multiple instances in Chaucer's works of clauses starting with "heere beginneth" followed by a subject.[19] This example is, in any case, admittedly ambiguous and does not provide conclusive evidence about the use of the group genitive with the *his* genitive in Chaucer's writings. Adding to Allen's (2008) arguments, ambiguity is resolved in favour of the non-group genitive reading if we consider the analogous example in (19):

(19) Here endith the Shipman his prolog /And next folwyng he bigynneth his tale.
(Chaucer, *Shipman's Prologue / Tale*, ll. 1191–92; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Seld, B. 14; Skeat 1906, 7)

As we can observe, the presence of the subject *he* in the second part of the coordinate structure makes it impossible to analyse "the Shipman his prolog" in the first conjunct as a single constituent containing a group genitive. There is, however, an example in the *Canterbury Tales* which can hardly be accounted for as anything but a group genitive using the detached possessive marker *his* in (20):

[19] It is true, however, that *her* is almost never used as a separate genitive marker in the Middle Ages, as Allen (1997, 127) points out, which makes the interpretation of *the Wyf of Bathe hir Prologe* as a single constituent containing a group genitive ('the Wife of Bath's tale') unlikely.

(20) Here endith the man of lawe his tale /And next folwith the Shipman his prolog.
(Chaucer, *Man-of-Law's Tale* and *Shipman's Prologue*, ll. 1161–62; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Seld. B. 14; Skeat 1906, 6)

Here we have once more a coordinate structure, but if we focus on the second part of the same, the intransitive use of the verb *folwith* prevents any reading other than "the shipman's prologue" from being adopted (and consequently presumably the sequence in the first conjunct should also read "the Man of Law's tale ends here" rather than "the Man of Law ends his tale here"). Allen (2008), as is to expected of such a perceptive scholar, was aware of the problem with the sequence *the shipman his prologue* (first noticed by Jespersen 1894, §251), but she correctly dismisses it, putting down the presence of a group genitive in Chaucer with the *his* genitive to its appearance in a late manuscript (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Arch. Seld, B 14, dated around 1500 by Cowen and Kane 1995, 146), when such grammatical resource had long been naturalised in the English language (Allen 2008, 243). This is the argument that Allen (2008) primarily uses to dismiss any other presumed examples of group genitives in Chaucer's works with *his*: the fact that they appear in manuscripts so far removed temporarily from Chaucer's time that they do not represent any more a breakthrough in the history of the English syntax.[20]

I think it can be concluded, therefore, that Chaucer's works do not provide us with any clear examples of an early use of the group genitive involving the *his* genitive.

5.1 John of Trevisa's translation of the "Polychronicon" and the role of the "his" genitive in the rise of the group genitive

As I mentioned in previous sections, the relevance of John of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* (an English version dated around 1387 of the homonymous Latin work by Ranulph Higden) is considerable for the discussion of the rise of the group genitive in English. It is probably the first text in the history of English to display any instances of the group genitive (if we disregard the handful of

[20] Actually, example (20) above belongs to a section (the end-link passage that connects the Man of Law's Tale to the Shipman's Prologue) which Furnivall (1868–79) included in his edition of the Canterbury Tales (allegedly based on the Ellesmere MS), but in fact neither that end-link passage nor the Shipman's Prologue are present in MS Huntington Library, EL 29 C9 or any MSS of the Ellesmere group. As Skeat (1910) points out, all the MSS of the Ellesmere type have a gap at that point, and the Pardoner's Tale is immediately followed by the Shipman's Tale. Example (20) is, therefore, correctly placed by Allen (2008) in MS Bodleian Library Arch. Seld, B 14 (from where Furnivall possibly retrieved it for his edition), and consequently her arguments about the chronology of the rise of the group genitive in connection with the *his* genitive in Chaucer do hold. I would like to thank one anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to this important fact.

debatable examples in Chaucer's works mentioned previously) and it is also a text where the *his* genitive is used very systematically, so it is likely to produce interesting patterns of variation with the attached genitive in the contexts we are discussing. Allen (2003, 22), of course, included the *Polychronicon* in her list of Middle English texts containing examples of group genitives, listing one example ((12a) above, repeated here as (21)):

(21) þe kyng of Fraunc**es** men weren i-slawe and i-chasede,
"the king of France's men were slain and chased," (Polychr (J), VIII.349.7)

It is, as we can see, an example of the attached genitive, which fitted well in Allen's hypothesis that the *his* genitive did not precede the *-(e)s* genitive in the use of the group genitive. However, in a later work Allen (2013, 17) was able to retrieve three more examples of group genitives in the *Polychronicon*, all of them using the *his* genitive:

> This [referring to example (21) above] is in fact the only example of a group genitive with an attached genitive marker which my electronic searches of the m3 files threw up; Trevisa was a very enthusiastic user of the separated genitive and this is the type of genitive that we find in the other three examples of group genitives in the portions of the *Polychronicon* included in the PPCME2.

It appears, then, that Trevisa's text is likely to render insightful information about the rise of the group genitive in English and the role the *his* genitive played in it: it is one of the earliest (if not the earliest) English text using this resource, it presents us with multiple examples of the *his* genitive too, which allows us to make useful comparisons with the *-(e)s* genitive (especially as regards the use of one and the other in group and split genitives), and it is preserved in fourteen manuscripts—some of them copied in a date very close to that of the compilation of the original text (Waldron 2004, xii)—which gives us the chance to compare relevant structures in the renderings of different copyists. The only problem is that, as I mentioned before, no study has analysed the complete work of the *Polychronicon* to the present date, but only a fragment of it. All studies of Trevisa's work I know of (including Allen's 2003, 2008, 2013 studies of the genitive) employ the digitised version available in the Helsinki Corpus and the Pennsylvania Parsed Corpus of Middle English (PPCME2) as database. This contains only Book VI and 35 pages of Book VIII, from the eight books of the paper edition by Joseph Rawson Lumby (1882) that the compilers of the Helsinki Corpus used as source text. A fraction of the work.

Considering then the pivotal position the *Polychronicon* occupies in the history of the construction we are discussing, I decided to analyse the entire work, making an exhaustive search of group genitives, split genitives and other relevant

structures with both the *his* genitive and the attached genitive, whose results are presented in section 4.1.1. below. This necessarily implied a manual search of the work, using the Cambridge University Press 2012 reprint of Lumby's edition as source, while I also used sometimes PPCME2 and Corpus Search for confirmation of some of the passages in the digitised sections. Lumby's (1882) edition employed MS Cambridge St. John's College H 1 (labelled conventionally as MS J) as source text, whose compilation is dated by Waldron (2004, vii) around 1380-1420, but I also used Waldron's (2004) edition of Book VI the *Polychronicon* (based on MS Cotton Tiberius D. VII) and the collation the author made of other manuscripts when necessary.

5.1.1 The data

There are two major types of structures which we can call "group genitives" in the *Polychronicon*, both involving possessor NPs with more or less complex postmodification structures: i) constructions of the type *TITLE of PLACE*, in which the possessor head (a title) is postmodified by an *of* genitive, illustrated in (22) below, and ii) appositive structures like (23) in which an NP head (typically a proper noun) is postmodified by another NP standing in apposition to it. Both can be found with the attached genitive (22a; 23a) or the *his* genitive (22b, 23b):

(22) a. <u>þe kyng of Fraunc**es**</u> men weren i-slawe and i-chasede,
"the king of France's men were slain and chased,"
(Polychr (J), VIII.349.7)

b. . . . <u>þe kyng of Engelond</u> **his** eldest sone, Edward, seilled into Gascoyne
". . . the king of England's eldest son, Edward, sailed to Gascony"
(Polychr (J), VIII.348.13)

(23) a. in <u>Theodor þe archebisshopp**es**</u> tyme.
"in Theodor, the archbishop's time"
(Polychr (J), II.119.1)

b. oon Menynus, <u>Caton þe advoket</u> **his** sone, (…) fil doun of his hors
"one Menius, Cato the advocate's son fell down of his horse"
(Polychr (J), IV.107.7)

Crucial to our analysis is also the presence of split genitives and whether they select the *-(e)s* genitive or the *his* genitive. Both patterns mentioned before (structures of the type *TITLE of PLACE* and appositive ones) have a split counterpart in the *Polychronicon*, actually clearly outnumbering the grouped ones (see statistics below). In (24a; 25a) we can see some instances of split

genitives with the attached variant of the possessive marker, while examples (24b; 25b) illustrate split structures involving the *his* genitive:

(24) a. þe kyng**es** sone **of Fraunce** leye in plegge at Rome
"the king of France's son lay under pledge at Rome"
(Polychr (J), IV.319.13)

b. Attalus, þe kinge **his** broþer **of Siria**, shulde overcome Prusia
"Attalus, the king of Syria's brother, should overcome Prussia"
(Polychr (J), IV.319.13)

(25) a. þat was in Iustinis tyme **þe Emperour**
"that was in Justinus the emperor's time"
(Polychr (J), I.207.6)

b. from Seint Iohn **his** chirche **þe Lateran** to Seint Peteres
"from St. John Lateran's church to St. Peter's"
(Polychr (J), VIII.205.2)

Quantitatively, we can observe a clear difference in the incidence of the attached and separated genitives in the group genitive structures of the first type (posssessor N postmodified by an *of* prepositional phrase), as reflected in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Group genitives and split genitives in Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* (MS J) with the attached and separated genitive in constructions of the type *TITLE of PLACE*.

	-(e)s	*his*	TOTAL
Group genitive (*of* + NP)	3 (20%)	12 (80%)	15
Split genitive (*of* + NP)	47 (88.7)	6 (11.3%)	53

Firstly, it is clear that, in general, split genitives are far more common than group genitives in the *Polychronicon* (53 examples of the former versus only 15 of the latter), which fits the view in Allen (2003, 14; 2008) that the status of the genitive in English towards the end of the fourteenth century was one of fluctuation between an inflectional affix and a clitic, but probably closer to that of an affix (which requires adjacency between the possessive marker and the possessor head) than a clitic. Then, it is also clear that there is a correlation between the use of the *his* genitive and group genitives of this type in Trevisa's text, not only because the number of examples of the group genitive with the separated possessive marker outnumber those with the attached one by a ratio of 4 to 1 (12

examples of the group genitive with *his* vs. 3 examples with the attached ending), but because there is a clear preference for the attached genitive when we deal with split genitives (47 examples of the same vs. only 6 examples with the separated marker). I am aware of the fact that Allen (1997, 117; 2003, 15–16) finds examples of split constructions using the *his* genitive—like (24b) above—at odds with the hypothesis of the clitic nature of the particle *his* in group genitives, as there is no reason why—provided that we assume that the separate marker *his* was such clitic—it should attach at all to a possessor head in complex possessor NPs, leaving some postmodifiers dangling to the right of the *possessum*. But, while this is an irrefutable theoretical appreciation, I think that it is crucially counterbalanced by the quantitative findings in Trevisa's text, mostly if we consider (as I will try to show at the end of this section) that the *his* genitive and the attached genitive overlapped generally in most syntactic contexts, so it is not unlikely that some of the form-function correspondences in the marking of possession with one resource should incidentally be transferred to the other.

Concerning the complex possession structures involving appositives, the picture is very different: as we can see in Table 3 below, the *-(e)*s genitive and the *his* genitive are very evenly distributed between grouped and split constructions:

Table 3. Group genitives and split genitives in Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* (MS J) with the attached and separated genitive in constructions involving appositions.

	-(e)s	*his*	TOTAL
Group genitive (apposit)	31 (48.4%)	33 (51.6%)	64
Split genitive (apposit)	14 (50%)	14 (50%)	28

The attached and separated genitives appear in Trevisa's text with almost the same frequency in grouped structures (48% of instances with *-(e)s* vs. 51% of examples with the *his* genitive), and with exactly the same incidence in split ones. This apparently puzzling fact can be partially explained if we assume, as Allen (2013, 13) does, that in appositive examples there is always head marking of some sort, since the head of the possessor phrase consists of more than one noun, as also happens with coordinate heads,[21] so there is always some degree of head-marking either in the grouped or the split appositional structures. This probably

[21] An example of a coordinate head using the *his* genitive in the *Polychronicon* can be found in "Me redeþ þat sche was in kyng Cyrus and in Solon his tyme" ("some say that she was in the times of king Cyrus and Solon"; Polychr (J), II.401.4).

renders examples of complex possessor structures involving postmodifying appositions less relevant for the elucidation of the problem of the origin of the group genitive in English than the examples involving postmodifying prepositional phrases with *of*, but obviously the question of why complex possessor NP structures involving appositions do actually show two different patterns in the corpus—the split and the grouped one—remains.

Returning to examples of the first type, I have also found interesting qualitative evidence to establish a certain connection between the group genitive and the use of the *his* genitive in Trevisa's text: I am referring to the fact that, out of the three examples of group genitives of this type with the attached genitive I could retrieve from the *Polychronicon*, (22a) above is the only one actually using the ending *-es*. The other two show no ending (26a-b):

(26) a. þat <u>þe kyng of Fraunce</u> nygromansers had i-made þat tempest
"that the sorcerers of the king of France had made that tempest"
(Polychr (J), VIII.339.5)

b. in contemplacioun <u>of the kynges[pl] of Engelond</u> progenye
"in contemplation of the kings of England's offspring"
(Polychr (J), VII.115.1)

The zero genitive is, of course, very common in Trevisa's work, especially with singular nouns ending in /s/,[22] but this is not the case with *England* in (26b), and *France*, despite ending in a sibilant, is very commonly inflected in the genitive in the *Polychronicon* as *Fra(u)nces,* (including example (22a) above itself). So I rather believe that the use of the zero genitive in these examples might be indicative of a certain insecurity on the part of the scribes when using the attached genitive with a group genitive, which is resolved by no inflection. Certainly, these examples do not support Allen's (2003, 2008) hypothesis that it was the extension of the ending *-(e)s* to all noun classes that triggered the use of the group genitive (rather, they represent a counterargument to it) and I presume she would be ready to rule them out as non-diagnostic. This would eventually reduce the number of genuine group genitives with the attached possessive marking in our corpus to one.

[22] Trevisa's text abounds in proper names ending in /s/ (many of them of Greek or Latin origin), which use the zero genitive by default in the singular (117 out of 292 relevant examples, 40.1%), but surprisingly they do not represent the majority of endingless genitives in the corpus: 175 singular substantives in the *Polychronicon* (59.9%) have a zero genitive despite not ending in /s/. Nearly half of them are substantives that descend from nouns belonging to declensional types other than the ă-stem in Old English, which used zero as a default marker for the genitive singular in Trevisa's work (see Table 4 below).

There is possibly a fourth example that might be considered a group genitive with the attached genitive in Trevisa's *Polychronicon*, in (27) below, but it seems to be closer to the category of complex proper nouns like *William the Conqueror* or *Alfred the Great*, in which the nucleus and the postmodifier have been lexicalised into a single unit. See the rendering in Caxton's fifteenth-century version of the text in (28) and Higden's Latin original in (29) as evidence of this:

(27) Þis Stephen was **eorle of Blesenses** sone . . .
"this Stephen was the Count of Blois' son . . ."
(Polychr, VII.479.11)

(28) Steven erle of Bonony, sonne of **the erle Blessense**, did succede . . .
(Caxton)

(29) Stephanus comes Bononiae, filuis **comitis Blesensis** . . .
(Higden)

Moreover, the presence of the preposition *of* in (27) is rather puzzling, as it quite redundantly introduces the idea of possession also conveyed by the genitive singular ending *-is* in the Latin original *Blesensis* (realised as *Blesenses* in Trevisa's text). This—together with the lack of the expected determiner preceding the nucleus *eorle* in the possessor phrase—makes me believe that the entire sequence is perhaps a performance error.

Another piece of evidence pointing out to a strong association between the group genitive and the *his* genitive (and perhaps reflecting its budding use as a clitic) is the presence in Trevisa's work of group genitives with the separated genitive in possessor NP structures other than just the simple construction *TITLE* of *PLACE* found in the examples using the attached genitive. (30) below is an example of this type of configuration, where the possessive particle is placed after a postmodifying PP ending in a common noun (unlike the *TITLE* of *PLACE* instances), in line with the characteristically unselective nature of clitics:

(30) and 3af hym self to be a man of straunge nacioun **his** bonde man,
"and made himself be the servant of a foreign man"
(Polychr (J), V.283.8)[23]

One more example of the use of the separated genitive with a really complex possessor NP in the *Polychronicon* is (31) below, where the possessor head (*Scipio*) is postmodified by a relative clause:

[23] As Allen (2008, 154) points out, the earliest examples of the group genitive in English usually involved "a postmodifying prepositional phrase that had a very close connection with the possessor N, that is, the whole NomP is a sort of title or name." This is clearly not the case.

(31) Scipio Nasica, þe greet Scipio þat heet Affricanus **his** nevere,
"Scipio Nasica, the great Scipio who was called Affricanus's nephew"
(Polychr (J), IV.91.16)

Let's remember that in all other examples of possessor heads postmodified by relative clauses in the *Polychronicon*, like (32a,b) below, the norm is extraposition of the relative:

(32) a. aboue alle kyng**es** trones [þat were wiþ hym in Babilon].
"above all the thrones of the kings that were with him in Babylon"
(Polychr (J), III.119.11)

b. and he 3af his son**es** armure [þat was i-slawe] to …
"and he gave the armour of his son who had been killed to…"
(Polychr (J), V.355.12)

Examples like (30) or (31) hint at the *his* genitive being used in group genitives in Trevisa's *Polychronicon* much as a modern clitic does, with the possession marker having the capacity to attach to different word classes, in an array of different constructions, and leaving sometimes the possessor head at a considerable distance from the *possessum*. None of these characteristics is displayed, however, by the examples of group genitives with the attached marker.

Finally, an interesting fact that we can observe if we compare the different manuscripts of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* is that if one example uses the attached genitive in a split construction in a certain manuscript and the same example appears as a group genitive in a different manuscript, the latter tends to use the *his* genitive. See, for instance, examples (33a-c) below and compare them to (34):[24]

(33) a. He made Odoun, þe kyng**es** broþer of Fraunce comynge agayne hym
"He made Odo, the king of France's brother come against him"
(Polychr (J), VII.125.10)

b. He made Odoun, þe kyng**ys** broþer of France, comyng agayn hym,
(Polychr (D), Waldron 2004, 117.53)[25]

[24] Other examples of this correlation are "þe kynges sone of Cumberlond" (Polych (J), VII.185.19; Cambridge, St John's College, MS 204) and "þe kyng of Cumbres **hys** sone" ((Polych (C), Waldron 2004, 168.11).

[25] All these examples refer to the English translation of Book 6 of the original Latin version of the *Polychronicon*, edited by Waldron (2004) using London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius D.VII as source text. Lumby's (1882) edition, based on Cambridge, St. John's College, MS 204,

Aberdeen, University Library, MS 21

c. And Odo, the kyng**es** brother of Fraunce com agenus William…
(Polychr (H), Lumby 2012, VII.515.7)
MS Harley 1900

(34) And Odo þe kyng of Frauns **hys** broþer com a3enes William
(Polychr (C), Waldron 2004, 116.53)
MS Cotton Tiberius D. VII

There seems to be therefore a correlation, therefore, between the presence of the group genitive in Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon*, and the use of the *his* genitive, but—as mentioned previously—this has probably nothing to do with deflexion or the simplification of the case morphology of Middle English, as Janda (1980, 1981) suggested. Allen's (1997, 2003, 2008) alternative hypothesis that it was the extension of the ending *-(e)s* to all noun classes that triggered the use of the group genitive in English does not seem either to be completely borne out by the data from the *Polychronicon*. Allen's (1997, 2003, 2008) theory is based on the premise that the first examples of the group genitive in English coincided in time with the moment when the ending *-(e)s* could be applied to all noun classes inherited from Old English—whichever inflectional type they belonged to—so the genitive *-(e)s* was not associated any longer to a particular host. This weakening of the requirements for attachment between the genitive marker and the possessor N opened the door, according to Allen, to the possibility of adjoining the ending *-(e)s* to the end of a possessor phrase, whether that was the possessor head or not. As far as the *Polychronicon* in concerned, not only do 2 out of the 3 arguable examples of group genitives with the attached genitive show zero inflection instead of the expected *-(e)s*, but the presumed analogical extension of the prototype *-(e)s* for the genitive to all other irregular noun classes inherited from Old English does not systematically apply, as we can observe in the examples in (35):

(35) a. in his moder wombe
in his mother^{gen} womb
"in his mother's womb"
(Polychr (J), III.123.11)

split the text of the translation of Higden's Book 6 between volumes VI and VII, which are thus referenced in our quotations. References to the examples in Waldron's (2004) edition are made by page and line number in the author's numbering. Additionally, Book 6 contains an expanded, longer section corresponding to Chapters 14–26, written in a more literal style of translation, which is preserved in six manuscripts, of which Waldron (2004) used Aberdeen, University Library, MS 21 in his edition and Lumby (1882), MS Harley 1900. These are referenced as such in the examples above.

b. at þe instaunce of þe queen**e** breþeren
at the instance of the queen^{gen} brothers
"at the request of the queen's brothers"

(Polychr (J), VI.337.8)

c. Kyng**ene**[26] kyng schal destroye þis rewme
king$^{gen/pl}$ king shall destroy this realm
"the king of kings shall destroy this realm"

(Polychr (J), VIII.189.3)

In Table 4 below we can observe the figures for the use of the genitive *-(e)s* with some substantives in the *Polychronicon* stemming from the Old English r-stem, u-stem, ō-stem, n-stem, and athematic one, which are—contrary to Allen's (2008) prediction—quite systematically rendered as zero genitives (85.8% of the tokens). More importantly, in 8 out of the 12 types comprised in the 5 declensional types mentioned before, the genitive is always endingless, and regularisation to the ending *-(e)s* never occurs:[27]

Table 4. Irregular genitive marking in John of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon* MS (J).

		Irregular inflection (zero)	**Regularised as *-(e)s***	**Total**	**% inflection regularised to *-(e)s***
r-stem (singular, m/f)	*fader*	24	7	31	22.5%
	moder	14	--	14	0%
	broþer	12	--	12	0%
	dou3ter	3	--	3	0%
	suster	3	1	4	25%
monosyllabic (plural)	*men*	13	4	17	23.5%
	wommen	2	--	2	0%
u-stem	*son*	1	1	2	50%

[26] Obviously, *king* was not an Old English n-stem substantive, but I find this analogical use of the weak ending for the genitive plural indicative of the vitality of some of the old inflectional classes still by 1400. Allen (2008, 146) calls these exceptional genitive plurals "lexically idiosyncratic," and states that they ". . . appeared all throughout the ME period, and not just in fixed expressions, showing the need for the grammars of those periods to refer to a morphological category which regulated the use of those forms."

[27] It is true, however, that—as pointed out by one anonymous reviewer—3 of the 5 *irregular* noun classes in Table 4 use (at least for some of their types) the regular *-es* genitive. This is clearly indicative of the spread of the ending *-es* for the genitive to noun classes other than those stemming from the OE ă- stem in Trevisa's text, and of the fact that the ending *-es* was becoming the genitive ending by default in the late Middle Ages.

ō-stem	*queene*	1	--	1	0%
n-stem (feminine)	*lady*	3	--	3	0%
	widewe	1	--	1	0%
	hoore	1	--	1	0%
TOTAL		78	13	91	14.2%

As we can see from the data in the table, it is obvious that—regardless of the fact that other substantives in the *Polychronicon* descending from the irregular noun classes in Old English might have been analogised to *-es* for the genitive (the data in Table 4 is not exhaustive)—the old etymological forms for the genitive had not at all disappeared in Trevisa's text, and indeed they were the only possibilities with some nouns, e.g. *moder*, *broþer*, etc. Therefore, if we disregard deflexion (Janda 1980, 1981) or the role of the analogical extension of the prototypical ending *-(e)s* to all declensional types (Allen 1997, 2003, 2008), how can we account for the group genitives found in Trevisa's *Polychronicon*, and specifically for the correlation that there seems to be between the use of such group genitives and the use of the *his* genitive? The answer—partially hinted at also in Allen (2003, 12, 18)—might be found in a very systematic restriction operating on the use of the *his* genitive in the history of English, which is clearly portrayed in Trevisa's work: the fact that most *his* genitives were used with proper nouns, many of them ending in /s/,[28] and many of them of a foreign origin, which scribes probably found difficult to inflect in the genitive (see some illustrative examples in (36-37) below).[29] In this regard, the invariable nature of the *his* genitive should have come in very handy to solve the morphophonemic problems that inflection with the morpheme *-(e)s* would have caused when attached to those unfamiliar roots.

(36) a. **Seuerus** his famous walle
"Severus's famous wall"
(Polychr (J), I.67.5)

b. **Zenocrates** his mouth
"Zenocrates's mouth"
(Polychr (J), II.355.6)

c. lawes þat beeþ i-cleped **Molmicius** his lawes
"laws that are called Molmicius's laws"
(Polychr (J), II.247.6)

[28] Specifically, 520 out of the 1,253 examples of the *his* genitive in the *Polychronicon* have a possessor N ending in /s/, according to my count, amounting to 41.5% of the total. On the other hand, if we consider only the possessor Ns in the singular ending in /s/ in the entire text of the *Polychronicon* (637 tokens), the *his* genitive massively outnumbers the inflected genitive (zero genitive in that context), being used in 81.6% of the relevant examples (520 tokens), while the zero genitive is used in only 18.4% of the contexts (117 tokens).

[29] This idea is also mentioned by Kellner (1956, 189–90), Mustanoja (1960, 162), Traugott (1972, 125) and Fischer (1992, 230–31).

(37) a. and brende **Baruch** his book
"and burned Baruch's book"
(Polychr (J), II.89.8)

b. and Socrates was **Plato** his maister
"and Socrates was Plato's master" (Polychr (J), II.6518)

In Table 5 below we can see the figures for the incidence of the *his* genitive vs. the attached genitive in Trevisa's *Polychronicon* according to the type of host that each resource was used with (proper noun or common noun):

Table 5. Incidence of attached genitives (including zero) and *his* genitives in John of Trevisa's *Polychronicon*.

	-(e)s[30]		***his***	
Genitives	923 (42.4%)		1,253 (57,6%)	
Possessor	Common N	Proper N	Common N	Proper N
	432 (46.8%)	491 (53.2%)	71 (5.7%)	1,182 (94.3%)

As we can see, the *his* genitive is massively used with proper nouns (94.3% of the total number of instances), while common nouns only take the separated genitive in a very small proportion (5.7% of the examples). I suggest that, considering that specific syntactic context as reference, once the possession marker was physically detached from the possessor head, a connection was made in the mind of the speakers between the use of the *his* genitive and *distance* from the possessor N,[31] which naturally led to contexts in which the *possessum* could be separated from the possessor by larger strings of material (NPs with complex postmodification structures), giving rise to the group genitive. Possibly, this also implied that possessive particle *his* also underwent some sort of structural reanalysis, becoming progressively detached from the possessor phrase and increasing its attachment with the *possessum* phrase, until it became a true determiner, as demostrated by the later development of the separated genitive in the late 16th century, when the possessive particle could agree in feminine or plural with the possessor. Over time the use of the separated genitive in group genitives would project itself to the ending *-(e)s*, as both resources overlapped generally in other

[30] I have counted as attached genitives i) those ending in *-(e)s* with a singular possessor not ending in /s/; ii) those ending in *-(e)s* with a plural possessor; and iii) zero genitives with a singular possessor ending in /s/. I have disregarded the examples of zero genitives with a singular possessor not ending in /s/ and irregular genitives.

[31] A similar idea is also mentioned in passing by Allen (2003, 17–18): "it could be that the writing of the genitive separately from the possessor noun was a reflection of the language-user's feeling that the genitive was in some sense less closely associated with its host than other inflections were," but in the end she is skeptical, on account of the almost total restriction of the *his* genitive to proper nouns in all periods of the history of English.

contexts. The almost interchangeable nature of the separated and attached genitive in certain contexts in Trevisa's *Polychronicon* can be illustrated by the following examples (38–40) of the use of the *his* genitive and the *-(e)s* genitive with the same possessor N in the same line or the same paragraph:

(38) mount Ararath, þere Noe **is** schippe abood after Noe**s** flood
"Mount Ararat, where Noah's arch waited after Noah's flood"
(Polychr (J), I.147.4)

(39) in a place þat hatte Austinus ook, þat is Austyn **his** strengþe,
"in a place that was called Austin's Oak, that is Austin's strength,"
(Polychr (J), V.405.7)

(40) a. he was i-bore in a seynt Edmond**is** day,
"he was born on a Saint Edmund's day,"
(Polychr (J), VIII.217.4)

b. and bad here bedes at seynt Edmond **his** tombe,
"and said her prayers at Saint Edmund's tomb,"
(Polychr (J), VIII.217.6)

In this respect, I find particularly revealing the examples in the *Polychronicon* of the interchangeable use of the attached and separated possessive markers in elliptical constructions, such as (41) and (42) below, illustrating the so-called *independent* and *absolute* uses of the genitive:[32]

(41) a. Byschopes & abbotes of Englond beeþ nou3t Godd**es** children or seruauntes, but þe devel**es**
"bishops and abbots of England are not God's servants but the devil's"
(Polychr (D); Waldron 2004, 193.37)

b. Byschopes & abbotes of Englond beþ not God **hys** seruauntes bote þe deuel **hys**
(Polychr (J), VIII.225.1)

(42) a. þe abbot of Seynt Austyn**s** was suffred for to goo awey
"the abbot of St Austin's was made to go away"
(Polychr (J), VII.89.14)

[32] See Allen (2004) for an excellent discussion of the terms *elliptical*, *absolute* and *independent genitive* when dealing with constructions involving the omission of a head noun after a possessive in the history of English, and the problems a sloppy handling of those terms has caused in the reconstruction of the history of ellipsis in English.

b. þe abbot of Seynt Austyn **hys** was ysuffred vore to go hys way
(Polychr (D); Waldron 2004, 86.3)

In (41)—an *independent genitive* in standard terminology—the possessor N inflected with the ending *-(e)s* (*develes*) stands on its own, without a following *possessum*, but this can otherwise be retrieved from the preceding context (*children or seruauntes*). In (42)—an "absolute genitive" or "elliptical genitive" in Mitchell's (1985, §1287) terms—the missing head has a specific locative reading (as in *meet me at John's*), but the *possessum* is not recoverable from the previous discourse, but is understood from the general pragmatic context. These are fairly specific syntactic constructions, and the fact that the *his* genitive and the attached genitive are indistinctly used in either[33] is possibly indicative of a high level of interchangeability between the separated and the attached genitive in general in the grammar of the late medieval speakers. This might in turn explain why the group genitive, though originating in the use of the *his* genitive, easily spread to the attached genitive over time.

I am assuming, therefore, that the only clear restriction applying to the conditions on the use of the *his* genitive and the attached genitive in the *Polychronicon*, which conceptually detaches one from the other, is the nature of the host N: whether a proper noun or a common noun, or—possibly more accurately—whether a familiar possessor N or an unfamiliar one. This apparently minor restriction, which produced a wealth of instances in which the possessive marker was physically detached from the possessor N, possibly caused an association in the mind of the speakers between such detachment and distance between the possessor head and the possessive mark, eventually leading to the rise of the group genitive. The quantitative data in my study seem to confirm this: there is almost complementary distribution between the use of the *his* genitive and the group genitive on the one hand and the presence of the split genitive and the use of the attached marker for possession on the other. In addition to this, the number of examples of group genitives with the *his* genitive clearly outnumber the instances of group genitives with the attached marker, though the number of examples is possibly too small to be significant. Also, qualitative evidence seems to lend support to the hypothesis that the *his* genitive was the trigger of the group genitive in Trevisa's work, but for reasons very different to those adumbrated by Janda (1980, 1981). Obviously, these conclusions are only tentative and open to

[33] Allen (1997, 118–19) is probably the first author to have used elliptical constructions involving the genitive as proof of the functional equivalence between the *his* and the attached genitive in Middle English. Notice, nonetheless, that the alternating examples I quoted above belong to different manuscripts.

much debate,[34] as they stem from the analysis of a single text—however central to the story of the genitive in English—but I hope the results may shed some light on this complex issue, including the necessity to use larger and better corpora in diachronic research.

6. Concluding remarks

As has been stated in the preceding sections, there is no conclusive evidence to support the hypothesis that the English genitive was a clitic in the early Middle English period, despite theoretical claims in the opposite direction, mostly based on typological grounds. At best, there are equally good arguments to suggest that its status was that of an inflection, (i.e. traces of agreement in genitive throughout the determiner phrase in the period, systematic presence of irregular genitives, etc.). On the other hand, we can establish a fairly close relationship between the rise of the English genitive as a clitic and its capacity to appear at the end of complex possessor phrases which do not end in the possessor head (group genitives) in the late Middle English period, though data is scanty. Actually, apart from a few dubious examples in Chaucer's works, the only text with a substantial collection of group genitives in the late 14th century is John of Trevisa's translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*, a text which has never been fully examined, despite containing multiple examples of the *his* genitive. All research previously carried out about the English genitive using Trevisa's text as database has employed only the digitised section of it included in the PPCME (less that one eighth of the complete text), overlooking an important part of the textual material, which has revealed fundamental for the elucidation of the problem.

Starting from the analysis of the complete text of Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon*, the evidence about the rise of the group genitive in English in this work points in the direction of the group genitive as being closely connected with the use of the separated genitive or *his* genitive, as predicted by Janda (1980, 1981), but probably for reasons very different from those suggested by him. We can summarise them in the following points: 1) Though the *his* genitive and the attached genitive with *-(e)s* have similar distributional properties in Trevisa's text (both can occur, for example in independent and absolute genitives), the

[34] Two questions raised by one anonymous reviewer of this paper are definitely worth digging into. They are: i) if the idea of separation from the host N implied in the use of the *his* genitive is the trigger of the group genitive, why is it that there are no group genitives in earlier texts which systematically employ the separated genitive, such as Layamon's *Brut* (Otho)? ii) How could the *his* genitive be a determining factor in the rise of the group genitive if we accept the view that *his* was just a feature of writing, being homophonous with the ending *-es* in pronunciation? Space limitations prevent me from addressing these questions in full here, but they are interesting points for future research.

statistical frequencies for the use of one and the other in group genitive and split genitive structures are remarkably different: group genitives with *his* clearly outnumber group genitives with *-(e)s* (in a ratio of 4 to 1), while there is a striking preference for the attached genitive to be used in split genitive structures (ratio 8/1 if compared with the use of the *his* genitive in those contexts). This nearly complementary distribution between the use of the *-(e)s* genitive when the possessive marker is adjoined to the possessor head (indicative of an affixal status for the genitive) and the use of the *his* genitive when the marker is attached to the last element of the possessor phrase—whether that is the possessor head or not—is, for me, clearly indicative of a connection between the use of the *his* genitive and the new, rising status of the genitive as a clitic. 2) The *his* genitive is used with really complex postmodification structures for the possessor NP, including relative clauses, whereas the few examples of group genitives in Trevisa's text with *-(e)s* are almost all confined to the construction *title* of *place*. 3) Whenever any examples of split genitives with the attached genitive in MS (J) of Trevisa's *Polychronicon* appear as group genitives in other MSS of the work, they systematically do so with the *his* genitive.

On the other hand, Allen's (1997, 2003, 2008) suggestion that the rise of the group genitive is connected to the generalisation of the ending *-(e)s* to all declensional types inherited from OE does not seem to be borne out by the data from Trevisa's text, which retains many traces of irregular genitive marking (reflected mostly as the levelling of the original Old English inflectional endings to zero).

Finally, assuming that there is a connection between the '*his* genitive' and the rise of the group genitive in English, I have attempted an alternative explanation, provided that Janda's (1980, 1981) arguments (which crucially link the use of the *his* genitive with deflexion) have not proven convincing enough. The alternative hypothesis I put forward is the following: because of its invariable nature, the *his* genitive emerged as a functionally optimal option to express possession when dealing with foreign, unfamiliar lexemes for the possessor, lacking the morphophonemic problems of coalescence present in the flexive genitive when attached to such unfamiliar bases. Then, once the *his* genitive was firmly established as a detached marker for the genitive, a connection was established between the use of this resource and *distance* with the possessor head, which opened the door to the use of the *his* genitive when the possessor N and the *possessum* were not adjacent but separated by complex postmodification structures. This particular use of the *his* genitive in group genitives would then spread to the attached genitive, as both resources overlapped generally in other contexts.

All in all, this study proves that it is very hard to draw any firm conclusions from just the digitised portions of diachronic texts, and that partial analyses of

literary works may yield misleading results and seriously misguide research. This can be obviously avoided by using larger corpora and larger databases. In this regard, any efforts to digitise complete texts of the history of English will be most welcome by the community of diachronic linguists.

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