

**SENTENCE DATIVES
AND GRAMMATICIZATION OF THE DATIVE POSSESSIVE
Evidence from Germanic**

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ABSTRACT

As a starting point, this paper takes what in Germanic linguistics has traditionally been dubbed the sentence (or sometimes personal) dative, and examines it in the light of certain syntactic features of early Dutch. Included here are a number of unusual medieval Dutch construction types which show exceptional uses of the dative. Far from being scribal errors, however, as has traditionally been thought, it is argued here that these constructions have much wider theoretical implications for the overall organization of Dutch grammar at this time. Of particular interest here is the fact that these expressions form the basis of a reanalysis whereby the dative emerges as the new case of possession, in some Germanic languages totally taking over the role of the original genitive. This illustrates quite a different grammaticalization path than has formerly been recognised for the dative.

In sum, this paper has two specific purposes. Firstly, it seeks to show that the Dutch dative, indeed the Germanic dative generally, expresses in all its grammatical uses one basic value within the language system; namely, “indirect participation in an action or event”. Secondly, it seeks to explain how it is that in some constructions this meaning has given way to a primarily possessive sense.

1. Introduction

Grammaticalization studies have shown that there is a strong diachronic relationship between adpositions and case affixes — as Lehmann (1982) and others have demonstrated, adpositions frequently give rise to case markers. For example, two common sources for the dative case are both directional and benefactive adpositions. Unfortunately for our purposes, the Germanic dative is too old to reveal anything of its possible lexical origins. Nonetheless, there are many languages which provide evidence for this particular change. For instance, modern Romance *à*, from the Latin preposition *ad* meaning “to, towards”, has now grammaticalized into a dative case marker (cp. the fate of English *to* which is now both directional preposition and dative marker). Continuation of this grammaticalization process may see the dative further develop into an accusative marker. This has already happened in Spanish and the fact that *à*, is confined to human entities in this language is directly in keeping with its dative source — we would expect further generalization to take place and this restriction to eventually disappear. With their inherent meaning of “goal”, datives can also develop into purpose clause markers. This would appear to have happened in many Australian Aboriginal languages (cf. Blake 1977 and Dixon 1980) and is also reported to have happened in the Bodic branch of Tibeto-Burman languages (cf. Genetti 1986). These are two typical grammaticalization paths for the dative. Germanic languages reveal another; namely, the development of the dative into the case of possession.

The fact that the dative and genitive coincide is certainly not unique to Germanic. In many Australian languages, for example, the dative case expresses the (usually alienable) possessor (cf. Blake 1977: Ch4). Nonetheless, the particular grammaticalization path that Germanic has followed here is, I believe, quite different from these other languages.

In order to understand how this change has taken place in Germanic, I have selected to examine instances of the dative from the early history of Dutch. Dutch is an appropriate place to begin here since the Afrikaans possessive happens to be the most advanced along this particular grammaticalization path. This compares with the equivalent Modern Dutch possessive construction, which is somewhat less advanced. Unlike the Afrikaans, it shows a number of restrictions and still reflects strong associations with its dative origins.

For the most part, the texts examined here consist of Middle Dutch medical treatises from the 14th and 15th centuries (see Appendix for details of these texts). Middle Dutch is really a cover term used to describe the compound of dialects both northern and southern spoken in the Netherlands during the Middle Ages. For this present study, two dialects in particular were chosen — Brabantish, the language of the southern medieval duchy of Brabant, and Hollandish, the language of the former province of Holland (now divided into North and South Holland).

2. The dative case

In early Dutch, as well as in related Germanic languages, the dative is of course first and foremost the case of the indirect object. But the dative has always had a variety of other grammatical uses, some of which show the dative object, not as a verbal complement as in this former use, but more as an adjunct of the clause, qualifying the clause as a whole. These are the so-called “sentence datives” and it is these constructions which are the main focus here. We start by considering body part expressions in Middle Dutch, in particular the constructions involving inalienability, since these have an important role to play in the rise of the dative as the possessive case.

2.1 The construction of inalienability¹

Whenever something happens to a body part, it must necessarily also involve the body part’s owner — this is the special relation which exists between body and person. Sometimes this fact is left unstated and there is no mention of the person. Consider, for example the following:

- (1) *Dat suuert harde dat hoeft*
that cleans well the head:ACC
‘That cleans the head well.’

(no mention of person, body part expressed as accusative object with definite article)

Most times, however, the involvement of the person is made explicit, and this can be done in a number of ways. Consider the following examples from the texts here. (Note, as you move down sentences 2-5, so the writer’s description focusses increasingly on what is happening to the person; cp. in English something like *He kicked my leg* versus *He kicked me in the leg* where the speaker’s plight is much more in focus):

- (2) *Dat suuert siin hoeft*
that cleans his head:ACC
‘That cleans his head.’

(person expressed as possessive pronoun modifier of accusative object body part)

¹ For a more detailed description of the different body part expressions found in these texts see Burridge 1991, and for accounts of inalienability across languages generally see Chappell and McGregor 1991.

- (3) *Dat conforsteert des menschen zenen*
 that soothes the person:GEN sinews:ACC
 'That soothes the person's sinews.'
 (person expressed in the genitive case modifying the accusative body part)
- (4) *Hi suuert hem sun hoeft*
 he cleans him:DAT his head:ACC
 'It cleans his head.'
 (person doubly coded as dative object and possessive pronoun modifier of accusative object body part)
- (5) *Dat suuert hem die hersen*
 that cleans him:DAT the brain:ACC
 'That cleans his brain.' (i.e. what it does to the person is clean the brain)
 (person coded as dative object, body part expressed as accusative object with definite article)

The last of these different construction types has been described in the literature as a construction encoding inalienability; that is, the special part-whole relationship which exists between body part and owner (cf. Fox 1981 and Chappell and McGregor 1991). The person is defined as a central participant and this is signalled by the dative case. The inseparable status of the body part is expressed by the preceding definite article and its inability to be modified. (I should point out that there was no evidence of any modification in the texts examined here, although of course in the case of 'dead' languages negative occurrence is never conclusive). In many languages, the construction of inalienability can, in addition to body parts, also involve other types of bodily 'accessories'. In Middle Dutch, the entities which enter into the construction seem to include anything which has some sort of close association with the body; e.g. speech, mind, hair, nails, effluvia, sores, wounds, sickness, fever etc. Examples like the following were recorded here:

- (6) *Als enen die naghele afvallen*
 when one:DAT the nails:NOM off-fall
 'When one's nails fall off'
- (7) *Dat doet hem dat haer dicke worden*
 that makes him:DAT the hair:ACC thick grow
 'That makes his hair grow thickly.'
- (8) *Dat heelt hem dat seer*
 that heals him:DAT the sore :ACC
 'That heals his sore.'

For reasons which will become apparent, however, I feel the concept of inalienability is inadequate to account for these particular constructions. For one, the construction is not confined to any sense of possession, nor specifically to entities which enter into this kind of identity or part-whole relationship.

2.2 Exceptional Body Part Syntax

In addition to the constructions we have just seen, the texts present a confusing array of other possible body part constructions. First impression suggests that they are probably little more than the chaotic product of a crumbling case system. Closer inspection, however, reveals that they are much more interesting than straightforward errors and have something important to say about the dative case at this time.

2.2.1 Dative Body Part NPs

There are a number of examples of body parts (not body part owners) which appear in the dative case instead of the expected nominative case. Consider the following. (Note, 9-11 do not mention any body part possessor, while 12 expresses the possessor in the nominative — in each instance, the dative body part has been bolded).

- (9) *Als* ***den*** *lichaem* *heet* *is*
when the body:DAT hot is
'When the bowel is hot'
- (10) *Den* ***lichaem*** *is* *swaer*
the body:DAT is heavy
'The bowel is heavy.'
- (11) *Sinen* ***pols*** *sloech* *sterkeliic*
his pulse:DAT beat strongly
'His pulse beat strongly.'
- (12) *Die* ***den*** *maghe* *vercout* *is* ...
who:NOM the stomach:DAT cold is
'He whose stomach is cold ...'

Because the dative and accusative distinction is collapsing for the singular at this time, the forms above could conceivably represent either case.² Examples like (13) below, however, involve plural body parts which unambiguously appear in the dative case.

- (13) *Sie* *heelt* *wel* *denghenen* *die* ***den*** ***voeten*** *dicwil* *swellen*
she heals well those who the feet:DAT often swell
'It heals well those people whose feet often swell.'

It is also clear from sentences like (14) below that we are dealing here with the dative case. This ed example is taken from another (most probably eastern) dialect which retains the dative/accusative or distinction.

- (14) *Wan* ***deme*** ***maghen*** *vorkoldet* *is*
when the stomach:DAT cold is
'When the stomach has become cold'

But, when you compare this example with (15) from the same text, the whole picture begins to look very confusing.

- (15) *De* *minsche* ***deme*** ***sin*** ***maghe*** *is* *vorkoldet*
the person who:DAT his stomach:NOM is cold
'The person whose stomach is cold'

Example (15) is once more the familiar construction of inalienability with the body part owner appearing in the dative case, and the body part in the nominative case. Why do we find this switching of cases? Are examples like (9-14) simply errors of case marking, as has traditionally been assumed, or is there some underlying system to all of this? If they are errors, then there are some striking coincidences to be explained when we come to consider the sentences in the next section.

² The distinction had collapsed for the masculine but remained distinct for feminine and neuter nouns. However, at this time the traditional masculine/feminine/neuter gender distinction was also collapsing into a two-way system. Many nouns appeared to belong to more than one gender which meant that gender was not always a reliable guide here. In the following, for instance, *hersen* (usually a feminine noun) receives a masculine/neuter ending - *denghenen die den hersen verwout* is 'those who the brain:DAT? is frenzied'

2.2.2 Accusative Subjects

Grammarians have long noted the appearance of what they describe as ‘accusative subjects’ in Middle Dutch. Van der Horst (1981 :2 1), for example, writes ‘occasionally the subject of a sentence has the accusative form’ (my translation). Like the dative body parts above, they are commonly attributed to the decaying condition of the case system at this time. Van der Horst claims that they typically appear post-verbally and in subordinate clauses, and he appeals to something like Sapir’s (1921) original notion of ‘drift’ to account for them; namely, the increasing importance of position in the sentence and the diminishing feeling for cases as an indication of syntactic function. (Note, the same argument of drift has been used to explain changes in English like *It is I* ---> *It is me* and *Whom did you see* ---> *Who did you see*). For the three reasons given below, however, I think these accounts are inadequate to explain these accusative subjects in early Dutch:

- (i) Examples of accusative subjects are far too frequent in the body of texts here to dismiss as simply errors of case assignment.
- (ii) I could find no such correlation between position and clause type to support Van der Horst’s proposal.
- (iii) If these forms were simply the result of a declining case system, then their appearance should be chaotic and unsystematic — as I will show below, however, this is not the case.

In Middle Dutch, only the masculine nouns preserve a distinction between the nominative and accusative. However, with the ambiguity of some case forms and also the confusion of genders (cf. footnote 2), it is not really clear whether we are dealing with the accusative or dative case a lot of the time. (For instance, footnote 2 showed an example of a usually feminine ‘subject’ noun *hersen* with the definite article *den* — is this accusative or dative? It is impossible to know). Probably we should think of the bolded forms in the following as simply being in the oblique.

(16) **Dien** *doec* *sal* *bernen* *sonder* *te* *bederven*
the cloth:ACC? shall burn without to spoil
‘The cloth should burn without spoiling.’

(17) *Als* **den** *pot* *beginnt* *te* *sieden*
when the pot:ACC? begins to boil
‘When the pot begins to boil’

It is apparent from the texts examined here and also elsewhere that these oblique forms express pragmatic considerations of topicality and focus — topic-worthiness of an item is at least one of the motivating forces behind the appearance of the oblique case in examples like (16) and (17) (see also Burridge 1986 and forthcoming for details).

But this is not all — consider what these constructions have in common with the earlier oblique body part constructions (9)-(14). In the texts, examples like (16) and (17) always involve sentences of low transitivity (e.g. stative predicates, intransitives, reflexives, and passives etc.), where there is no argument which could be said to fill the role of agent or actor. Without exception, all of the so-called ‘accusative’ subjects occurring in the texts here are themselves acted upon in some way, and this is what triggers the oblique case rather than

the nominative. The appearance of the oblique is not random, but is the direct consequence of the semantics of the sentence verb — it signals the non-active involvement of an entity.³

This is also true of the dative body part constructions given earlier. Sentences (9)-(14) all involve something happening to the body. The cause may be felt to lie within body itself (the combination of the patient's humours, for example), but the body is still a passive undergoer. To digress a little here, it is also worth pointing out that current medical opinion also stressed the vulnerability of the body to external forces. Illness was usually linked to the supernatural — either demonological influences or the wrath of celestial powers (where diseases were believed to be sent as retribution for sins and indiscretions). It could be argued that this fact is nicely reflected in the syntax. The absence of an expected nominative subject and the use instead of an oblique case captures the passive role of body and person in processes and states believed to be controlled by outside forces (cf. also Wierzbicka 1979:369-377 on the portrayal of 'the unknown' in syntax).

When the involvement of the person is also made explicit, it is also possible to have structures where both body part and possessor appear in the dative. Consider the following two sentences. Here the effect on the body part and the entire person has been highlighted by the double dative.

(18) *Hem* *wart* *den* *lichaem* *weec*
 him:DAT becomes the body:DAT soft
 'His stool becomes soft.'

(19) *Mi* *is* *den* *buuc* *so* *gheladen*
 me:DAT is the stomach:DAT so full
 'My stomach is so full.'

The varying use of cases in all these examples encodes different emphases and promotes different perspectives of a situation, all to do with affectedness, involvement and control. To dismiss it as simply a performance error, is to miss an important feature of early Dutch morpho-syntax. To shed more light on the use of the dative at this time, we turn our attention now to another group of relevant constructions; namely, impersonal verbs.

3. Impersonal verb constructions

Middle Dutch, like all the Germanic languages of the time, possesses a construction known as the impersonal verb construction. Traditionally, this has been described as involving a group of exceptional verbs which lack arguments with any of the usual subject properties; i.e. nominative case marking and verb agreement. All arguments are oblique and the verb itself stands in the third person singular, regardless of the number or person of its arguments. This is the characteristic which earns it the description impersonal (cp. the *me thinks* construction of early English). The following are some examples:⁴

³ From the late 16th century on things change — the appearance of these accusative subjects becomes more frequent and indeed far less systematic. For example, you start to find accusative subjects of transitive verbs with overt objects. Dialect differences also begin to emerge. In the north, with the levelling of the nominative, constructions like these eventually disappear. In Flemish, however, the accusative eventually grammaticalizes as the masculine marker for all cases.

⁴ Note, this does not include the weather constructions (*it rains* etc.) which have also been described as impersonal.

- (20) *Den godleken twivelt ende den anderen wondert*
 the godly:DAT doubts and the others:DAT wonders
 ‘The godly ones doubt and the others wonder.’
- (21) *Hem dunct datter engeen ghewin aen en leghet*
 him:DAT thinks that-there no gain on not lies
 ‘He thinks that there is no gain in it.’

The similarity between impersonal constructions like the above and the sentences involving ‘errors’ of case assignment is striking. Compare (20) and (21) with two of the oblique subject constructions given earlier:

- (9) *Als den lichaem heet is*
 when the body:DAT hot is
 ‘When the bowel is hot’
- (16) *Dien doec sal bernen sonder te bederven*
 the cloth:ACC/DAT shall burn without to spoil
 ‘The cloth should burn without spoiling.’

The similarity is no coincidence — the use of the dative/accusative for arguments of impersonal verbs has long been pointed out as a device for signalling entities ‘unvolitionally/unselfcontrollably involved in the situation’ (cf. McCawley 1976:194 for Old English). It makes no sense then to distinguish between (20) and (21) as impersonal constructions, and (9) and (16) as scribal slips. What this does, is throw into question the validity of assuming, as has traditionally been the case, that the impersonal verb construction involves only a very small handful of syntactically aberrant verbs. In fact, I am not the only one to question the traditional impersonal- personal distinction. Some years back, Van der Horst (1985) also suggested that the impersonal form was potentially a feature of all verbs, and arose as a natural consequence of their lexical meaning. There is a lot of support for this in the texts here. Consider, for example, the two sentences below (both appeared in the texts):

- (22) *Hem walght*
 he:DAT vomits
- (23) *Hij walght*
 he:NOM vomits
 ‘He vomits.’

The verb ‘to vomit’ is not considered among the list of impersonal verbs of Dutch at this time. And yet a sentence like *hem walght* is indistinguishable from a recognized impersonal construction like *hem dunct* given in (21). The activity suggested by *walghen* is, like any bodily function, not something over which we have a lot of control and the use of the dative here reflects this. Sentence (22) is simply semantically more marked than (23) by capturing this fact.

There is another piece of evidence which suggests that the impersonal-personal distinction should be abandoned — the existence of impersonal verbs which do have verb agreement. For example, early English *me think* or Middle Dutch *mij dunke* both show the first person singular verb ending and not the third person singular expected of an impersonal construction (although in this particular example it is conceivable that the Middle Dutch involves a third person subjunctive form). In the literature on Germanic impersonal verbs, these sorts of examples are often cited as evidence for the disappearance of the impersonal construction via the reanalysis of impersonal objects as subjects (see for example Lightfoot 1979). But, as far as Dutch goes, what these examples do is only bring impersonals closer together in structure

to the supposed errors cited earlier here. This suggests still more strongly that all these oblique subject constructions should be subsumed under the one syntactic umbrella — the notion of impersonal verbs as a distinct class on its own is not a valid one, at least for Dutch (and I suspect probably also for the other Germanic languages).

In sum, I suggest that at one stage in early Dutch, there was a productive system for signalling the involuntary involvement of the subject by placing it in an oblique case. This system gave rise to ‘impersonal’ expressions which sometimes showed person/number agreement on the verb (as in *den voeten swellen* ‘the feet:DAT swell:3rdpl’ where the verb is plural to agree with ‘feet’) or, as a more marked variant, showed no agreement and inflected for third person singular. This gave the classical *me thinks* type ‘impersonal’ construction. (Effectively, there was so much levelling of verbal inflections in Dutch at this time, that this distinction is anyway not always apparent). Of course, for those verbs (like “to be hungry” or “to think”) which don’t typically express volition, this would always be the favourite construction; hence their traditional classification as ‘impersonals’.

All this changes in the 17th century, however, with the eventual breakdown of the case system. This means then the loss of this semantically expedient system, and its replacement with a much less transparent one (cf. also McCawley 1976:212 on the loss of Old English impersonals). With only remnants of cases left, the language has to find other ways of handling these sorts of distinctions.

4. The construction of inalienability revisited

Underlying all the different constructions we have seen so far is a single common denominator namely, the use of the dative case (or simply oblique, since in many places it is not clear which case is involved) to promote entities that are indirectly affected in some way by a situation, event or state of affairs. The fact that we so frequently find the dative marking the body part possessor is a direct consequence of the fact that, as many have pointed out before, body parts are physically contiguous with their owners and therefore what affects the part will necessarily affect the whole. The close connexion of the dative case with goals and ‘direction towards’ makes it a natural candidate to express this. Not surprisingly then, the construction involving dative persons is by far the favourite body part expression in the texts here. Persons in these medical texts are after all quite literally ‘patients’ and the whole discourse generally revolves around their suffering! But the dative is not used simply to express the relationship of identity which exists between body part and owner. This is only part of the story — its function is much wider. The concept of inalienability does not make clear what is really going on here. For example, it will not explain the pi of dative persons in constructions like the following:

- (24) Ende *siin* *meester* *hadde* ***hem*** *den* *scacht* *uut* *ghetoghen*
 and his physician had him:DAT the shaft out drawn
ende *tyser* *was* ***hem*** *in* *siin* *hersen* *bleven*.
 and the-iron was him:DAT in his brain stuck
 ‘And his physician had drawn the shaft out of him, but the iron still remained in his brain.’

Both clauses involve dative person pronoun NPs (in bold), but the dative here is not coding any relation of identity. (It is anyway doubtful whether the relationship between the man and the arrow shaft could even be viewed in this way). What is crucial here and what motivates the appearance of the dative forms in both clauses, is the fact that we are dealing with an event which is affecting the entire person. It is the plight of the patient which is the main focus in the description here and the fact that the events are happening beyond his control —

the patient is quite incapable of acting in this situation. It seems then that these sorts of constructions have not so much to do with inalienable possession; i.e. whether or not something belongs to a group of entities which could be thought of as inalienably possessed, but rather whether or not a speaker/writer views body part owners as involved participants in the discourse and chooses to promote them as such.

As a final illustration, compare the following two extracts from the one treatise:

- (25) *Nem die wortel ende hanct den zieken aen den hals.*
 take the root and hang the patient:DAT on the neck
Hi sal ghenesen. Galienus orcont van enen dien hijt
 he shall recover Galienus says of one who:DAT he-it
aen den hals hinc. Ende als hijt afnam had hijt onghemac,
 on the neck hung and when he-it removed had he-the disease
ende als hijt hem anden hals hinc en had hijt niet.
 and when he-it him on-the neck hung not had he-it not
 ‘Take the root and hang it around the patient’s neck. He shall recover. Galienus reports of someone whose neck he hung it around. And when he removed it, he had the illness, and when he hung it around his neck, he didn’t have it.’
- (26) *Daer ene vrouwe in kindelbedde leghet [...] hangt den wortel an horen*
 where a woman in childbed lies [...] hang the root on her
hals ieghen bose ghespaente. Hi iaghet den duuel vanden mensche.
 neck against evil spirits he chases the devil from-that person
 ‘When a woman lies in labour ... hang the root around her neck against evil spirits. It chases the devil from that person.’

Why should the patient be coded by the dative in (25) but not in (26)? Consider the situation being described in (25). The physician is not simply hanging a herbal root around the patient’s neck, but is doing something to the patient that affects him significantly. The root cures him of the sickness — if removed, the sickness returns. So the patient is central here and the writer is able to focus on this fact by expressing him in each instance as a dative argument. The event described in (26), however, has nothing like the same force. The root here is a protective rather than a curative agent as in (25) and it does not directly affect the patient in the same way. Appropriately, she is not expressed as a participant in the situation but is only coded as the possessive adjective modifier of *hals* “neck”. The presence/absence of the dative person is nicely able to capture the different type of involvement by the patient in each instance.

Topicality is undoubtedly an additional consideration here. As mentioned earlier, it is one of the motivating forces behind the appearance generally of oblique subjects — so too of dative persons in constructions like the above. Not surprisingly, body part owners are highly topical. As human beings they are anyway expected to appear high on the topicality hierarchy (cf. Givon 1976 and others), but in these medical texts of course, they have a particularly high profile — usually the whole discourse centres around what is happening to these people. There is also grammatical evidence which indicates this: (a) they are typically pronominalized (b) they appear early in the sentence (i.e. in topic position) and (c) they typically control coreferential deletion (see, for example, sentence 31 below).⁵

⁵ Elsewhere (Burridge 1986) I have argued for the prominence of the notion topic in the organization of Middle Dutch syntax.

5. Summary so far

Traditionally, a number of different (so-called sentence) dative uses have been recognized for Germanic in general. Curme (1904/1970: 500-503; see also Lockwood 1969: 23-24) for instance, distinguishes in Modern German what he calls: (i) The dative of reference denoting the person to whom the statement holds true:

(27) *Die Jacke ist mir zu lang*
the jacket is me:DAT too long
'The jacket is too long for me.'

(ii) The dative of interest denoting persons who directly benefit or are somehow disadvantaged by the situation, sometimes termed 'the dative of advantage / disadvantage':

(28) *Sie kocht mir das Wasser*
she boils me:DAT the water
'She is boiling the water for me.'

(29) *Der kleine Hund lief ihm weg*
the small dog ran him:DAT away
'The small dog ran away on him.'

(iii) The ethic dative denoting persons who have an interest in the situation but whose involvement is more emotional and therefore detached than in 1 and 2. (This particular construction is difficult to render into modern English, as the following example shows — in fact most of these sentence dative uses require considerable *Sprachgefühl* and are notoriously difficult for non-native speakers).

(30) *Du bist mir ein schöner Kerl*
you are me:DAT a nice fellow
'You're a nice fellow, I'm telling you / as far as I'm concerned.'

Modern German with its case system more or less in tact better preserves these dative uses, but similar uses can be found in all the Germanic languages at some stage in their history.⁶ All these traditional types of dative share, together with the inalienable constructions and the impersonal and oblique subject constructions described earlier for Dutch, the same intrinsic meaning; namely, the non-active involvement of a person in an event. All show the dative here as an essentially pragmatically controlled device to bring to prominence the idea of a person (or personified entity) that is in some way indirectly involved in an activity. It could be argued that this same basic meaning is also found in the primary use of the dative; namely as the case of the indirect object.

As all the studies on grammaticalization are now showing (see for example Bybee, Pagliuca and Perkins forthcoming), the full lexical meaning of an item is rarely totally bleached out of the new grammaticalised form. In all the different grammatical uses we have discussed here, the dative origins are still apparent, uniting them with the same invariant meaning — that of "indirect participation". Now, although we know nothing of the actual lexical source of the Germanic dative, this does suggest that its origins may well lie in some sort of directional adposition with the meaning "direction towards".

In sum, the findings here suggest that there are at least three things which generally seem to motivate the appearance of dative arguments:

⁶ See Neumann 1991 for an excellent discussion of the sentence dative in Modern German.

- (i) The affectedness/involvement of an entity in an activity.
- (ii) The lack of control an entity has in an activity.
- (iii) The topic-worthiness of an entity.

In the case of the body part expressions, for example, all of these three factors will interact to bring about the appearance of a dative person. It stands to reason that the special relationship which exists between body and person would make the dative construction a favourite one - particularly in medical texts like the ones here, where the plight of the person, literally as 'medic patient', is in focus. As a final example, consider the following extract. It illustrates very clearly the expressive force of the dative in these texts:

- (31) *Heeft die sieke hoof sweer ende swimelinghe ende*
 has the patient:NOM head pain:ACC and dizziness:ACC and
siin oghen worden root ende siin aensicht al ontsteken ende hi
 his eyes:NOM become red and his face:NOM all inflamed and he:NOM
verliest alle siin verstandenisse ende keert ter kelen bitter
 loses all his understanding:ACC and vomits thru-the throat bitter
coleren ende bi aventueren vloyt hem tbloet ter
nosen
 bile:ACC and by adventure flows him:DAT the-blood:NOM thru-the nose
ende ten oren uut ende hem ontvalt siin sprake ende
 and thru-the ears out and him:DAT disappears his speech:NOM and
 — *verliest siin stemme ende hem siin aensicht root is ende*
 — loses his voice:ACC and him:DAT his face:NOM red is and
hem die puysten uut broddelen ende hi sinen appotiit verliest ...
 him:DAT the pustules:NOM out break and he his appetite loses ...

'If the patient has head pain and dizziness and his eyes become red and his face all inflamed and he loses all his understanding and vomits bitter bile from the throat and it happens U his blood flows out through his nose and his ears and his speech disappears and (he) loses his voice and his face is red and pustules break out on him and he loses his appetite...'

The patient is quite obviously being affected here! But the writer is not simply describing each the appalling symptoms; he is describing and focussing on what is happening to **the person**. The phrase *bi aventueren* shows that it is all happening quite beyond the person's control and it is interesting to see that from this phrase on he is encoded as a separate dative argument. (Note, there is an instance here where the dative person controls the coreferential deletion, not the grammatical subject. This is marked by — in the example). It certainly loses both semantic and stylistic content to translate each of these unpleasant bodily events with simply a possessive construction, as has been necessary in the loose English translation underneath. It is anyway not possible with phrase concerning *puysten* "pustules". This can only translate as something like "pustules break out on him". The concept of inalienability although relevant is not adequate to account for these constructions — it captures nothing of the rhetorical force which this dative construction clearly had in Middle Dutch (only relics of which still survive in the language today).

It stands to reason that a writer would choose this more expressive construction above a simple possessive construction like the genitive to emphasize the personal involvement of a

possessor. But it is not difficult to see how a general possessive might then develop out of this.

We finish by looking at examples where precisely this has occurred — where the dative has actually grammaticalized into the usual marker of possession in the language. For this we go beyond Dutch to compare developments in other West Germanic languages.

8. Dative of possession

In a number of modern German dialects (for example, Swiss German, Alsatian, Pennsylvania German and in colloquial Standard German) the genitive survives only in relic forms. In these languages, possession is indicated by a possessive dative construction, formed with the possessor in the dative case in association with a possessive adjective preceding the entity possessed. Consider, for example, the following from Pennsylvania German:

(32) *Des is em Dadi sei(n) Aarmschtuul*
this is the Grandpa:DAT his armchair
'This is Grandpa's armchair.'

(33) *Des is em Gaul sei(n) Schwans*
this is the horse:DAT his tail
'the horse's tail'

and colloquial standard German:

(34) *Das ist dem Mann sein Fahrrad*
that is the man:DAT his bicycle
'That is the man's bicycle.'

The construction is also found in colloquial modern Dutch although with the breakdown of the case system the possessor no longer appears in the dative case. (Note, in the following examples, the possessive adjectives *z'n* and *d'r* are reduced forms of the full pronoun forms *zijn* 'his' and *haar/hun* 'her'/their' respectively).

(35) *Dat is mijn broer z'n vrouw*
that is my brother his wife
'That is my brother's wife.'

(36) *Dat is die vrouw d'r kind*
that is the woman her child
'That is the woman's child.'

In these examples (32)-(36), the dative NP (the possessor) is no longer a sentential argument (i.e. complement), but a nominal modifier (i.e. attributive) of the thing possessed. This has involved a major syntactic restructuring — the relationship expressed here now is one of subordination; i.e. attribute:head.

8.1 How has this reanalysis taken place — some contributing factors

In order to trace how the possessive dative would have grammaticalized out of the sort of dative of involvement expressions described earlier, take as illustration something like the Modern German example below:

(37) *Dem Mann ist sein Haus abgebrannt*
the man:DAT is his house burned-down
'The man had his house burn down on him.'

This is best rendered in English as something like ‘the man had his house burn down on him’. Here the loss and injury to the man is emphasized by placing him in the dative as a separate clausal argument. This is what Curme (1904/1970:501-2) and others would call the ‘dative of interest’, where the dative emphasizes the person to whose advantage or, in this case, disadvantage the action or event results. From this construction then emerges something like the following:

- (38) Dem Mann sein Haus ist abgebrannt
the man:DAT his house is burned-down
‘The man’s house burned down.’

Here ‘the man’ is understood now as a possessive modifier of ‘the house’ — the attributive function of the dative NP expresses of course a closer relationship between the man and his house and this is indicated by the contiguous word order. Both sentence datives (37) and possessive datives (38) occur in Modern German, although the latter have not yet been accepted into the prescriptive literature. Hammer (1971:29), for instance, describes their use as colloquial and “bad German”.

Although it is difficult to know why in the first place such a change as this takes place, we can isolate at least some contributing factors. By converging, they may well have been enough to trigger the sort of restructuring illustrated by (37) and (38) above. Each of these possible “causes” is discussed in the following sections.

8.1.1 The declining role of the genitive

In Dutch, Afrikaans and with few exceptions among the Modern German dialects, the genitive survives only in remnants (for example, certain fixed temporal expressions and some compounds). In spoken Standard German it now comes across as overly stilted and also tends to be avoided. The decline in the use of the genitive was apparent very early on in these languages; in German, as early as the end of the Old High German period (around the twelfth century; cf. Lockwood 1964: 18-21). Certainly the decline was evident throughout the Middle Dutch period — unfortunately, there isn’t enough of the language at any earlier period to know just how soon it started. It stands to reason then that the weakening position of the genitive as the case of possession would serve to encourage the use of the dative in its stead.⁷

8.1.2 The importance of inference

As pointed Out by Bybee (1988, 1990) and also Traugott (1989), inferential reasoning can be an important stimulus for a semantic transfer of this sort.

Implicit in all the sentence datives we have considered so far is a notion of, if not actual possession, then at least some sort of relationship between an animate NP and some other nominal in the sentence. It must be stressed that possession generally is just a convenient description for what is in reality a wide variety of relationships between the nominals involved. Although important, ownership is just one of the different types of relation which genitive marking can express (a phrase like *the boy’s photo*, for example, can be interpreted in a number of different ways: “the photo of the boy”; “the photo the boy owns”; “the photo the boy took” etc.).

⁷ As in English, these languages have seen the development of another possibility — possession can also be expressed by some sort of ablative preposition “of”. This illustrates another interesting example of grammaticization, this time the generalization of an ablative preposition as the possessive.

With respect to body part expressions, for example, it goes without saying that the affected (dative) person is also going to be the body part owner. This is after all why some choose to describe them as examples of inalienable possession and why it is generally possible to render them as possessives in the English translations. (As this paper has tried to point out, however, this does not capture what is really going on here and overlooks the emotional force of the original dative construction; cp. something like the difference *between He looked me in the eyes and He looked into my eyes*). But we are not dealing only with body part expressions. Appearances generally of dative persons in other construction types typically invite the same inference. For example, a reader might reasonably infer from Middle Dutch sentences like the following, if not actual possession, at least some sort of relationship between the bolded nominals: *mi* and *den arbeit*.

- (39) Want den arbeit sal mi wesen groot ende swaer
 for the work-ACCIDAT? shall me:DAT be great and arduous
 ‘For the work will great and arduous for me / For my work will be great and arduous.’

Context invites the reader here to infer that there must be some close bond between the writer and his work. The emergence of an actual possessive construction from these sorts of examples, represents then a change towards explicit coding of this close bond. As in the body part expressions, it is the implicit sense of possession which then gives rise to a general possessive meaning — inferred meaning becomes the actual meaning (see Bybee 1988, 1990 & Traugott 1989).

Earlier I said that in many Australian languages the dative also coincides with the genitive case. If indeed this has involved a generalization of the dative to this function (which the forms of the suffixes involved strongly suggest), then the path must have been very different from the one proposed here. For one, these Australian languages show the dative only marking the alienable possessor — part-whole relationships typical of inalienable possession are marked quite differently, often purely by juxtaposition of the part and its whole. It would be interesting to trace the evolution of the genitive out of the purposive-dative constructions in these languages. The fact that they exclude inalienable constructions from the general possessive suggests that the motivation behind the restructuring must have been very different from what we have seen in Germanic.

8.1.3 Ambiguity

There always seems to have been a certain amount of ambiguity surrounding the sentence dative. Even as early as Old High German, for example, there are many sentences where it is simply not clear what meaning is intended, as both complement and attributive readings are possible. In order for a reanalysis to take place, there needs to be ambiguity of this sort — sentences like the following from Old High German, for example, would probably have provided a way in for the dative to take over from the already declining genitive as a new marker of possession.

- (40) *Thaz ih druhtine sinan sun souge* (Otfred)
 that I the-Lord:DAT his son:ACC may-suckle
 ‘That I may suckle the Lord’s son / That I may suckle for the Lord his son.’
 (taken from Lockwood 1968:21)

In this sentence, it is not clear whether the dative NP is a possessive (i.e. nominal attribute) modifying ‘son’, or a separate argument of the verb. That is, do we translate the phrase as *druhtine sinan sun* ‘the Lord’s son’ (a simple possessive) or ‘for the Lord his son’ (where the Lord’s personal involvement is made more prominent)? This sort of ambiguity is also apparent in Middle Dutch, although word order and context generally suggest one

interpretation over the other. (In sentence (39) above, for example, the non-contiguous word order suggests that the sentence dative translation — “for the work will be great and arduous for me” — is probably a more accurate rendering of the original Dutch).

8.2 Remnants of the original dative

In both Modern German and Dutch, the colloquial dative possessive is not possible unless the possessor is animate. For example, the following two sentences (German and Dutch respectively) are ungrammatical:

(41) **Das ist dem Haus sein Dach*
 that is the house:DAT its roof

(42) **Dat is dat huis z 'n dak*
 that is the house its roof
 ‘That is the roof of the house.’

This also explains the oddity of the German example (44) against perfectly acceptable (43):

(43) *Wir zogen dem Verletzten die Jacke aus*
 we took the injured:DAT the coat:ACC out
 “We took off the injured person’s coat.”

(44) *Wir zogen dem Toten die Jacke aus*
 we took the dead:DAT the coat:ACC out
 “We took off the dead person’s coat.”

The restriction of this possessive construction to animate entities is directly explainable by its origins — as shown here, the construction has evolved out of the original personal dative, a construction which could only ever involve animate (or at least personified) entities; i.e. those capable of showing personal interest/involvement in an event. (English shows a restriction reminiscent of this. Compare, for example, the awkwardness (ungrammaticality?) of something like *?I kicked the chair in the leg* against a sentence like *I kicked the man in the leg*).

The sentence dative use can also account for another feature of the possessive construction. Recall the link described earlier between the appearance of the dative and considerations of focus and topicality. This link is still strongly felt in the German and Dutch possessive dative — in both these languages, the new possessive construction has retained something of the original pragmatic force and is perceived by speakers to give much more prominence to a possessor than any of the alternative possessive constructions.

As grammaticalization proceeds, however, these links with the original dative will become less apparent. For one, as the construction expands into more and more contexts, it will begin including inanimate entities in its range. There is evidence that this is already happening in Pennsylvania German. Examples like the following can now be heard:

(45) *De Disch sei Bee*
 the table its legs
 ‘The legs of the table’

The remnants of its emphatic force will also disappear. In fact, the lessening of expressive value is already apparent in the loss of flexibility of word order. As a sentential complement, the personal dative showed considerable variety of word order to do with focus, stress, scope etc. Its new status as a nominal modifier, however, places it rigidly in the position immediately before the item being possessed (i.e. modifier: modified in line with general modifier ordering), unable now to capture these different pragmatic nuances.

8.2.1 The Afrikaans possessive⁸

In Afrikaans grammaticalization is further advanced and this construction has become the only available possessive construction. Furthermore, it appears to be totally devoid of dative meaning and shows none of the restrictions mentioned above. For example, the following are both perfectly grammatical:

- (46) *Die huis se dak*
the house its roof
'The roof of the house'
- (47) *Drie uur se werk*
three hour its work
'Three hour's work'

Though the meaning of this construction is first and foremost that of 'possession / ownership', as expected of a possessive construction, it can express a wide variety of relations between nouns. This is clear from examples like (47) and also from examples like (48) below where a whole range of possible interpretations are possible (see discussion earlier in section 8.1.2).

- (48) *Die seun se foto*
the boy his photo
'The boy's photo'

In Afrikaans, the grammatical meaning has generalized to such an extent that it has now come to signal simply the subordinate status of one noun (i.e. the modifier) to another (i.e. the modified). Also interesting in this regard is the reanalysis of *se* — originally a third person singular pronoun, it has now generalized to become the fixed marker of possession in this construction, regardless of person and number of the possessor. If grammaticalization continues, we would expect this marker to eventually become affixed to the possessor NP; in fact, further reduction would render it identical to the English clitic possessive 's.

8.3 Conclusion

Although I have been referring to the development of the new Germanic possessive as an instance of grammaticalization, clearly what we have seen here is not the sort of semantic bleaching normally ascribed to this process. For one, the dative is already highly grammaticalized by the time we come to it and we know nothing definite about its putative lexical sources. In addition, the transfer of meaning to possession does not involve any real loss of meaning, but rather the development of a new syntactic and semantic function.

Yet, we can still correctly describe the change as a movement towards a more grammatical status. For one, while there has been no actual loss of meaning, the meaning shift has involved a general loss of features, as the construction comes to be used in more and more contexts. This sort of semantic generalization is typical of the grammaticalization process. Secondly, we see here a shift from what was essentially a rhetorical device for promoting the personal interest or emotional involvement of a person in an event or situation to a syntactic marker of possession. As the construction loses its expressive value and shifts to what is essentially a purely syntactic rule, it carries less and less semantic-pragmatic information. This is similar in fact to a more far-reaching change which has been taking place in all the Germanic languages; namely, the grammaticalization of word order patterns. This has entailed the movement away from pragmatically controlled word order (expressing nuances to do with information structure) to syntactically functional word functional word order (expressing clause types and grammatical relations).

⁸ I am grateful to Bruce Donaldson for his advice on Afrikaans.

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