



FROM MORPHEME TO PRONOUN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEPARATED GENITIVE IN THE EARLY MODERN ENGLISH PERIOD

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The separated genitive, or *his* genitive, was a grammatical resource used systematically in earlier stages of the English language to express possession. The general assumption is that it originated at the end of the Early Middle English period as an allomorph for the flexive genitive (*-es*), and that it was later reanalyzed in Early Modern English as an authentic possessive pronoun that required agreement with its antecedent in the possessor phrase. In this paper I provide evidence for said reanalysis using the correspondence of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey (1569-1594) and Katherine Paston (1603-1627) as sources. The main features that will be discussed are the use of a wide range of pronominal forms for the possessive particle (including feminine and plural ones); the lack of non-agreeing examples; the presence of genitives combining morphemal *-es* and the external possessor *his*; the status of the separated genitive when attached to complex possessors; and, finally, a question of orthography and the spelling of *his*.

Keywords: separated genitive; *his* genitive; Early Modern English; pronoun.

1. Introduction

The separated genitive, or *his* genitive, was a grammatical resource used systematically in earlier stages of the English language to express possession. It was defined by a syntactic configuration in which two noun phrases (first, one referring to the possessor and, second, another referring to the possessed or *possessum*) are connected by a particle in the form of a possessive pronoun, usually *his*:

- (1) ... is to be at ffelmingham to view Mr Crofts his land
 '... is to be at Felmingham to view Mr Crofts's land'
 (PASTONK, 53.017.287)¹
- (2) a small time after my brother his death
 'a small time after my brother's death'
 (BACON, III, 218.363.6299)

The question about its origins is not yet settled, although nowadays it is generally assumed to have appeared at the end of the Early Middle English period (around 1250) as a result of the phonological similarity between the pronunciation of the weak form of the possessive pronoun *his* and the allomorph for the genitive case */-iz/*, which contributed to the formal identification of both resources in the mind of speakers.² This hypothesis has been backed by scholars such as Wyld (1936, 314), Janda (1980; 1981), Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2003, 668) and, especially, Allen (1997; 2002; 2003; 2008). According to her, early putative examples of the separated genitive can be dismissed as mistranslations or are, at least, amenable to other syntactic analyses (2008, 227).

As for the indisputable separated genitives that began to appear systematically from 1250, Allen argues that the structure appeared at the end of the Early Middle English period as either an orthographical variant or an allomorph for the flexive genitive

¹ The citations for the examples quoted in this paper from the letters of Nathaniel Bacon and Katherine Paston are taken directly from the PCEEC.

² Other authors such as Mustanoja (1960, 160), Barber (1976, 200), Seppänen (1997, 202-203) and, more recently, Pérez Lorido and Casado Núñez (2017) affirm the existence of a separated genitive during the Old English period in configurations that were not restricted to the use of *his* as the possessive particle.

(2008, 239-240) that could be attached not only to masculine or neuter possessors, but also to feminine and plural ones. About this, Allen states:

As in the EME period, there is no justification for analysing the separated genitive in the period 1380–1545 as syntactically different from the attached genitive, whatever analysis we may choose. If we analyse the possessive marker as being in D, the head of DP, in the earlier period, we will surely have the same analysis for this period from LME to EModE. The only significant difference would be that it is quite clear in this period that the possessive determiner, although it may be identical in form to the third person possessive pronoun, is simply a marker of possession devoid of gender features, as necessitated by the absence of agreement with the possessor. (2008, 251)

However, something changed in the middle of the sixteenth century, when the particle was reanalyzed as an authentic possessive pronoun that required agreement with its antecedent in the possessor phrase. Allen calls this stage the “period with agreement,” and argues that the rise during Middle English of the group genitive (as in ‘the kyng of Spaynes navye’) made speakers aware that “the normal position of the possessive marker was at the edge of the possessor phrase,” which, in turn, led people to believe that *-es* was a reduction of *his* (2008, 253). Hence, the educated detected a seemingly incorrect use of the masculine pronoun when talking about female and plural possessors, and started using *her* and *their* as hypercorrections (Allen 2008, 267). The aim of this paper is to provide empirical evidence for said reanalysis using two Early Modern English collections of letters: *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey* (Hassell Smith 1979; 1983; 1990)—with letters dating from 1569 to 1594—and *The Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston, 1603-1627* (Hughey 1941). To this date, there are no other corpus-based analyses of the separated genitive during this stage of its existence, so studies such as this one are necessary to support the different theories posed on the emergence and use of the structure. I will focus mainly on the separated genitives I found in the corpus, but other possessive configurations might be brought up in order to provide comparisons and overall statistical data.

2. Methodology

The data quoted in this study has been drawn from two collections of letters dating from the mid-sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, a period which coincides with the early stages of what Allen has called “the period with agreement” (2008, 253) of separated genitives. The collections chosen were those of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey and Katherine Paston, both included in the *Parsed Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, or PCEEC (Taylor 2006). Together, they consist of four books (three volumes of *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey* and a single tome of *The Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston*), and they amount to approximately 169,000 words.

These are very interesting texts from a linguistic point of view. Because they are letters, they are the best possible reflection of Early Modern English real speech that we can have access to nowadays. Both collections feature masculine and feminine perspectives, and they tackle a great array of topics such as politics, religion and even personal affairs. Furthermore, the Bacon and Paston families were both settled in Norfolk, so any concerns about hypothetical dialectal variations that might affect the present study could, in principle, be discarded.

For the data retrieval, I have carried out a systematic search of every kind of possessive structure in the text, namely flexive genitives (FG), zero genitives (ZG), –‘s genitives and separated genitives. Different methods were used depending on the kind of structure being recorded. To compile flexive and zero genitives, I have opened the parsed files provided by the PCEEC in a word processor and performed a manual search for the labels N\$ (common noun possessor, singular), NS\$ (common noun possessor, plural), NPR\$ (proper noun possessor, singular) and NPRS\$ (proper noun possessor, plural).

As for the compilation of instances of separated and –‘s genitives,³ I have used the Java program for linguistic research

³ Although the study has revealed many instances of –‘s genitives in the first volume of the Bacon letters, this seemed strange given the fact that the use of the apostrophe to indicate possession in English was not fully established until the later *GAUDEAMUS. Journal of the Association of Young Researchers of Anglophone Studies*. 0 (Winter 2020): 47–66

CorpusSearch 2. Two different algorithms were input: first, I searched for all the noun phrases dominating an isolated \$, which is the label used in the corpus to indicate separated and – ‘s possessive markers; second, I looked for all the noun phrases dominating a PRO\$ (the label used for “normal” pronouns) in case I could find any SG structures that were not labeled as such.

Furthermore, to have the results be the most revealing possible, formulaic possessive structures such as those found in the elliptical referral to someone’s house (‘at Mr Brownes’), in farewells (‘Your Lordships redye at commaunde G. le Gascoigne’), or in the mentioning of the Queen’s Majesty have not been taken into account for this study, as I considered them to be idiomatic and, in a way, fossilized.

3. Results

3.1. Overall Results for The *Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey*

Table 1 below reflects the overall distribution of possessive structures in the Bacon text, both in terms of types and tokens.

	Separated Genitive	Separated + Flexive Genitive	Flexive Genitive	Zero Genitive	Total
Types	52 (7.3%)	2 (0.3%)	571 (80.5%)	84 (11.8%)	709
Tokens	56 (6.4%)	2 (0.2%)	716 (81.7%)	102 (11.6%)	876

Table 1. Possessive structures in *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey*

part of the seventeenth century. The rules of transcription for Volume I of the paper edition of *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey* confirmed my suspicions by stating that “in this volume the apostrophe has generally been used, even where the final *es* sign has been transcribed, but it will *not* be used in future volumes” (Hassell Smith 1979, xlix). As a result, I have concluded that there are no real cases of – ‘s genitives in the text. I will henceforth refer to all the – ‘s examples as part of the flexive genitive category. Even if some of them could be, in theory, zero genitives, I haven’t had the opportunity to access the original manuscripts in order to clarify this question. Moreover, the statistic deviation caused by this is minimal and not relevant for the purposes of this specific study.

As seen above, I have split up the separated genitives in two categories: the pure ones and those that show a flexive marker along with the detached one. Even though both types may be treated as equivalent in most fronts, it is important to record their differences as these could have interesting implications. In any case, the joint occurrence of all the separated genitives in the text amounts to 54 cases in terms of types (7.6%), or 58 in terms of tokens (6.6%).

Regarding the gender and number of all the possessor heads retrieved from the Bacon letters, results are as expected: most of them are masculine and singular. Feminine and neuter possessors are rather rare, especially in the case of proper nouns where the only plurals present in the text were masculine.

Common Nouns				Proper Nouns			
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter		Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Sg.	233 (32.86%)	116 (16.36%)	34 (4.79%)	Sg.	261 (36.81%)	14 (1.97%)	1 (0.14%)
Plr.	34 (4.79%)	1 (0.14%)	12 (1.69%)	Plr.	3 (0.42%)		

Table 2. Gender and number in the Bacon letters, in types (percentages calculated from total types).

The variety of possessor heads grows substantially smaller when isolating the data for separated genitives. Masculine and singular nouns are the most popular options; only two non-masculine examples are found in these letters.

Common Nouns		Proper Nouns		
	Masculine		Masculine	Feminine
Sg.	13	Sg.	39	1
Plr.		Plr.	1	

Table 3. Gender and number of separated genitives in the Bacon letters, in types.

Another interesting variable when dealing with separated genitives is that of the complexity of the possessor heads. In the Bacon letters, there are 15 examples of complex genitives, 5 of which show a detached marker.

	Group Genitives	Appositive Genitives
Separated Genitives	5	0
Flexive Genitives	5	1
Zero Genitives	4	0

Table 4. Complex possessor heads in the Bacon letters.

3.2. Overall Results for The *Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston*

The overall distribution of possessive structures in Katherine Paston's letters can be found in Table 5 below. As was the case in the Bacon text, I have identified two distinct categories of *his* genitives. For general purposes, however, it can be stated that there are 17 possessive constructions with a detached marker in the text, which amount to about 14.2% in terms of types and 13.2% in terms of tokens.

	Separated Genitive	Separated + Flexive Genitive	Flexive Genitive	Zero Genitive	Total
Types	14 (11.7%)	3 (2.5%)	91 (75.8%)	12 (10%)	120
Tokens	14 (10.9%)	3 (2.3%)	93 (72.7%)	18 (14%)	128

Table 5. Possessive structures in *The Correspondence of Lady Katherine Paston*.

As for the gender and number of possessor heads in Katherine Paston's correspondence, the situation is similar to that of the Bacon letters: masculine and singular possessors are predominant. In this case, however, no feminine and plural heads appear in the text, and neither do proper noun heads in the masculine plural.

Common Nouns				Proper Nouns		
	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter		Masculine	Feminine
Sg.	24 (20%)	7 (5.83%)	19 (15.83%)	Sg.	58 (48.3%)	3 (2.5%)
Plr.	7 (5.83%)	/	2 (1.6%)	Plr.	/	/

Table 6. Gender and number in Katherine Paston's letters, in types (percentages calculated from total types).

The isolation of separated genitives reduces the array of possessor heads even further. As seen in Table 7 below, in this text only masculine and singular nouns are chosen as possessors when using a detached possessive marker.

Common Nouns		Proper Nouns	
	Masculine		Masculine
Sg.	2	Sg.	15
Plr.	/	Plr.	/

Table 7. Gender and number of separated genitives in Katherine Paston's letters, in types.

As for complex possessors in the Paston text, only three examples were found. Surprisingly, the one separated genitive attached to a complex head in this text is an instance of an already archaic structure by the Early Modern English period: the split genitive.

	Group Genitives	Split Genitives
Separated Genitives	0	1
Flexive Genitives	2	0

Table 8. Complex possessor heads in Katherine Paston's letters.

4. Analysis

4.1. Agreement between Possessive Markers and their Antecedents

The overall results of the study are not surprising given the diachrony: most of the possessive structures found in the texts are flexive and zero genitives. However, that does not mean that the separated genitive is infrequent. In terms of types, out of the 709 total examples in the Bacon letters, 54 are separated genitives (7.6%). As for the Paston letters, out of 120 types, 17 show a detached possessive marker (14.1%). This proves that, even though it was not the default option for these speakers/writers, its use was systematic.

Also as expected, most of the separated genitives are non-diagnostic, that is, their head is masculine and singular, and usually a proper name. According to Allen (2008, 257), this seems to have been the norm in all periods:

- (3) a. ...on Sir Iohn his parte
 ‘on Sir John’s part’
 (PASTON K, 50.014.227)
 b. ... Mr Secretary Walsingham his secretary
 ‘The secretary of Mr. Secretary Walsingham’
 (BACON, II,8.199.3462)

Common noun heads in the masculine singular are rarer, but also appear in my corpus:

- (4) a. the Master his good pleasur
 ‘the master’s good pleasure’
 (PASTON K, 72.040.721)
 b. the Quenes Majestye shall be at my Lord his howse
 ‘the Queen’s Majesty will be at my lord’s house’
 (BACON, I,257.181.3203)

As for other kinds of heads, I have not found any separated genitives with non-animate (neuter) antecedents. Regarding feminine and plural heads, I have found only one of each in the entirety of my corpus, both in the Bacon letters:

- (5) a. ...but if Rebecca^{FEM/SG} hir^{FEM/SG} father had a householde so
 addressed
 ‘... but if Rebecca’s father had a household like this’

(BACON, I,149.115.1958)
 b. Mr Yelvertons^{PL} their^{PL} sute
 ‘the Mr. Yelvertons’ suit’
 (BACON, III,14.319.5467)

As examples (5 a-b) demonstrate, the possessive particle, which in the past had always been *his* regardless of the gender and number of the possessor head, has by this point in the history of English evolved into a genuine anaphoric pronoun. Pronominal forms other than *his* were used in order to ensure the necessary agreement. It is also important to mention that, once the reanalysis of the possessive particle was completed, no examples of *his* as external possessor with feminine or plural referents are found. In other words, there is no evidence to confirm an overlap in the periods of agreement and non-agreement.

Since examples (5 a-b) come from the Bacon letters and none were found in the Paston collection, it could seem that this proves the downfall over time of the agreeing separated genitive. However, no such conclusion can be drawn from this data, as feminine and plural possessors were very infrequent not only in separated genitives but in the corpus as a whole. For instance, in the Bacon letters, only around 18% of the overall genitive structures collected had a feminine possessor head in terms of types, which descends to an 8% in the case of the Paston text. As for plurals, both sources show an overall incidence of 7%. Even more important than this is the fact that feminine and plural proper noun possessor heads are extremely rare, as seen below.

	Feminine Proper Nouns	Plural Proper Nouns	Total types
BACON	13	3	709
PASTON	3	0	120

Table 9. Overall occurrence of feminine and plural proper nouns as possessor heads in terms of types.

Proper nouns are the expected possessor heads for separated genitives (Allen 2008, 257), so it should not be surprising that I could not find many feminine and plural examples in the corpus given the numbers in Table 9. In any case, it seems that the use of

the agreeing separated genitive never had the chance to become a staple in the language, at least in its written form, due to its artificial nature. The first example of this kind that Allen quotes actually coincides with (5 a), which dates back to 1575, and the last one is from the early eighteenth century (2008, 254-258). This means that, as far as we know, the construction lasted less than a century and a half. Notwithstanding its short lifespan, its status as a systematic grammatical resource used by the educated cannot be denied.

4.2. Sibilant Contexts and their Influence on the Pronoun Status

As stated in the introduction, the separated genitive is assumed to have originated from the erroneous identification in the minds of speakers of the allomorph for the flexive genitive /-iz/ with the weak form of the possessive pronoun *his*. By the Early Modern English period, the regular use of the aforementioned allomorph when a possessor noun phrase ended in a sibilant sound (/s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/) was the norm, and thus the expected result would be to find abundant instances of separated genitives in these kinds of phonological contexts.

The initial overall results do not seem very promising on this front: in terms of tokens (as I'm dealing with a phonological question, the analysis in terms of types seems less fitting for this purpose), the results are as follows:

	Total sibilant	Separated Genitive	Zero Genitive	Flexive Genitive
BACON	99	19 (19.2%)	68 (68.7%)	14 (14.1%)
PASTON	12	2 (16.7%)	10 (83.3%)	0 (0%)

Table 10. Distribution of genitives with a sibilant head in terms of tokens.

The results in Table 10 show how the sibilant context is dominated by zero genitives. This was another expected outcome, as it was customary not to write any mark after a possessor noun phrase ending in /s/ (Barber 1976, 200). Separated genitives only amount to 19.2% and 16.7% in the Bacon and Paston letters respectively. However, if all the masculine and singular sibilant

heads (that is, those which choose *his* as a possessive marker) are isolated, the data takes a very interesting turn:

	Total sibilant	Separated Genitive	Zero Genitive	Flexive Genitive
BACON	38	19 (50%)	7 (18.4%)	12 (31.6%)
PASTON	3	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.4%)	0 (0%)

Table 11. Distribution of genitives with a masculine and singular sibilant head in terms of tokens.

It is clear that the separated genitive is used in this context in a significantly higher proportion than the other genitives, which seems to confirm the traditional hypothesis about the role of homophony between the allomorph /-iz/ and the weak form of the personal pronoun *his* as a major trigger for the use of detached possessive markers.

Now that the interest of sibilant contexts in the study of separated genitives has been settled, it is time to introduce a special grammatical configuration that I have come across in my corpus. The following examples (6a-e) present a combination the flexive and separated genitives:

- (6) a. my frendship yonge Mr Hubbert & Mr Hastettes^{FLEXED}
his^{DETACHED} sonne
 ‘my friendship with young Mr. Hubbert and Mr. Hastett’s son’
 (BACON, I, 141.113.1898) (my underlining)
- b. my Lord Kepperes^{FLEXED} hes^{DETACHED} howsse
 ‘my Lord Keeper’s house’
 (BACON, I, 234.168.2975) (my underlining)
- c. sir williaime pastons^{FLEXED} his^{DETACHED} purpos
 ‘the purpose of Sir William Paston’
 (PASTONK, 52.016.257) (my underlining)
- d. and tom I haue sent to my Cosine Cokes^{FLEXED} his^{DETACHED} howse
 ‘and I have sent Tom to the house of my cousin Coke’
 (PASTONK, 100.079.1668) (my underlining)
- e. the good docter wallsalls^{FLEXED} his^{DETACHED} directions for
 preparing your self
 ‘good doctor Wallsall’s directions to prepare yourself’

(PASTONK, 102.081.1732) (my underlining)⁴

Although these examples could probably be dismissed as slips of the mind, I do not believe that this is the case and I consider them to be highly relevant for several reasons. First, they seem to reflect the previously discussed generalized use of the separated genitive in sibilant contexts. This configuration suggests that the appeal of such phonological contexts was so great that speakers apparently generated analogical formations where sibilance is created artificially by adding the flexive genitive morpheme *-es* to the head noun, even at the cost of causing redundancy in case marking. To further support this claim, I will reproduce the extended context of (6d) in (7) below:

- (7) and tom I haue sent to my Cosine Cokes his howse till mr Birch
his returne
'and I have sent Tom to the house of my cousin Coke until Mr. Birch
returns'
(PASTONK, 100.079.1668)

This is a particularly interesting sentence because there are two separated genitives in it, *my Cosine Cokes his howse* and *mr Birch his returne*. The possessor heads of both examples are singular, male, proper nouns, so why does one of them display a double genitive marker and not the other? The answer lies in the phonological contexts of both heads: while the last name 'Coke' ends in a plosive sound, 'Birch' ends in the sibilant /tʃ/. The appeal of sibilant contexts when it came to the use of detached markers, along with the proximity of an already sibilant head, most probably led Katherine Paston to "fix" the non-sibilant 'Coke' before adding the detached possessive particle.

A second reason why I consider these doubled constructions to be very revealing is the fact that I have not been able to find any such structure with a feminine or plural head, which leads to two consequences. First: whereas a sibilant phonological context has been proven to be pretty decisive when a speaker chooses to—or not

⁴ It must be noted that I made sure that none of these possessor heads is in the plural. I meticulously revised the immediate context of these examples, as well as the letters in which they appeared, to rule out any suspicions about them being non-agreeing separated genitives.

to—use a separated genitive if dealing with a masculine and singular head, this is not the case for feminine and plural possessors. Of course, the very limited appearance in the corpus of non-masculine heads should be considered, but I believe this adds to the artificial nature mentioned in section 4.1 of these kinds of genitives, further separating them from their non-diagnostic siblings. Second: by this stage in the history of English, speakers have been familiar with the separated genitive construction featuring *his* as the detached marker for centuries already, which must have made them internalize certain facts about it—like its predilection for sibilant contexts—but also allowed them time to consciously ponder over the structure. Hence, later developments such as these doubled constructions are given the opportunity to flourish.

In any case, these slips, intentional or not, denote a fair degree of independence in the relationship between the old flexive genitive and the detached possessive marker. For speakers to use both markers in the same grammatical configuration, there must have been a clear detachment of one another in their minds. If the possessive pronoun *his* had simply been analyzed as an orthographic variant or allomorph for the morphemal *-es*, as it had been the case during the Middle English period, formations like these would have probably not been possible. It is precisely the separation in the minds of speakers which allows these structures to exist even if they are redundant.

4.3. Group Genitives and their Relationship to the Separated Genitive

Following Jespersen (1894, 279-327), we give the name ‘group genitive’ to those possessive structures in which the marker is attached to the end of the possessor phrase and not to the head, as in (8) below:

- (8) yt is said that the Kynge of Spaynes navye of shippes...
 ‘it is said that the King of Spain’s fleet ad ships...’
 (BACON, III,5.315.5422)

Traditionally, scholars such as Janda (1980; 1981) have considered the *his* genitive to be the flexive group genitive’s predecessor. In his opinion, the detached formation provided the perfect excuse to move the possessive marker far from the head and towards the utmost right edge of the possessive phrase. Hence, he

presupposed that the occurrence of group genitives with a separated mark should start much earlier in the texts than that of its flexive counterparts. Allen has since debunked this idea by providing data that confirms the appearance of group genitives with both flexive and separated markings at the end of the fourteenth century (1997; 2003; 2013).

Interestingly, however, she has also claimed in her works that the rise of the group genitive was the trigger for the reanalysis of the detached possessive particle in separated structures as an actual pronoun:

The group genitive steadily gained ground, and just around the time when the combined genitive has nearly disappeared from the texts (mid-sixteenth century), we find the first examples of a separated genitive agreeing in gender and number with the possessor. The group genitive, by now quite common, provided clear evidence for phrasal attachment rather than head attachment. It is probably this fact that made possible the reanalysis of the separated genitive as a reduction of *his*. (Allen 2008, 270).

The combined genitives mentioned in the quote were a more primitive possessive formation, typical of Old and Early Middle English. They are also known as split genitives due to their internal structure, in which a complex possessor phrase is split in two, having the *possessum* in between. This is done in order to achieve head-marking, in a time where edge-marking was not yet possible. (9) below shows an example of one such structure, taken from the Late Middle English letter collection of the Paston family (Davis 1971; 1976).

- (9) the parson ys seruaunt of Blofeld
 ‘the parson of Blofeld’s servant’
 (PASTON, II,171.341.9274)⁵

In my corpus, as far as complex possessor heads in separated genitive configurations are concerned, I have found 5 instances (in terms of types) of group genitives in the Bacon letters, most of them with the ‘King of Spain’ as the possessor head:

⁵ The citations for the *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century* are taken directly from the PCEEC.

- (10) a. the King of Spayn his forces
 ‘the forces of the King of Spain’
 (BACON, III,259.372.6474)
 b. the Bishopp of Norwich his aunswer
 ‘the answer of the Bishop of Norwich’
 (BACON, II,111.233.4100)

This same possessor was illustrated in (8) above with the morpheme *-es* as its possessive marker, which seems to account for the fact that separated and flexive genitives are interchangeable markers in group structures. However, in her 2013 paper on split and group genitives, Allen suggests that, although the syntactic configuration $DP[DP_{D'}[D[\text{his}] NP]]$ does not seem fit to represent early stages of the *his* genitive where it functioned as a mere orthographical variant for the *-es* genitive, that analysis does become possible once the detached possessive marker is reanalyzed as an authentic pronoun (2013, 22). Therefore, the syntactic configurations of (8) and (10a) would be very different, even if they look the same at surface level.

As for complex possessor formations in Katherine Paston’s letters, I have only found one example and, surprisingly, it is one of the rare Early Modern English instances of a split genitive:

- (11) a. by Mr Pickerell his sonne of Intwood
 ‘by the son of Mr. Pickerell of Intwood’
 (PASTON K, 50.014.226)

This example comes from a 1619 letter by Samuel Matchett. Very little is known about this man, other than his not belonging to an affluent family, although that didn’t seem to affect his spelling proficiency (Weir 2010, 69). His social status can hardly explain the reason why he chose to employ an already outdated structure by that time, but the structure in itself poses a very interesting question for us: if both the separated and the flexive markers are found in split genitives, should they not receive the same syntactic analysis?⁶ And, if that is the case, how can we reconcile the previously mentioned

⁶ I have not recorded any split genitives apart from the one quoted in (11) for this period in my corpus, but Allen mentions that most of the ones she has found have an attached marker (2013, 20).

syntax with this? In Allen’s words, “if the possessive pronoun was in D [...], we would not expect split genitives with this sort of possessive marking, since there would be no motivation to extrapose the material modifying the possessor” (2013, 22). At this moment, given the data available in my corpus, I find it impossible to draw any conclusions on this matter.

4.4. Spelling of the Possessive Particle

As a final remark, spelling could also be considered a hint towards the newly acquired ‘pronoun’ status by the possessive particle in separated genitive structures. My study of earlier texts such as the Late Middle English letter collection of the Paston family (Davis 1971; 1976) has revealed that the most common orthography for the detached marker in these epistles is “ys” or “is” (coinciding with some flexive genitive variants), while the spelling “his” or “hys” is usually reserved for real pronouns:

- (12) a. Ser John Paston ys^{DETACHED} seale
 ‘Sir John Paston’s seal’
 (PASTON, II,583.516.12528)
 b. he delyueryd to hys^{PRO} wyffe a box
 ‘he delivered a box to his wife’
 (PASTON, I,298.097.2850)

However, the situation in the letters of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey and Katherine Paston is different: “his” is now shared by real pronouns and the possessive particle in separated genitives, and the spelling “ys” and “is” only appears as the third person singular of the verb to be:

- (13) a. for that my hart is ys^{3RD SG TO BE} very full .
 ‘for that my heart is very full’
 (PASTONK,53.016.277)
 b. Sir Thomas Gresham his^{DETACHED} name
 ‘Sir Thomas Gresham’s name’
 (BACON, I,35.018.331)

I believe that this is a very significant detail, as each spelling seems to be quite specialized. There are exceptions, of course, but the overall impression is that when the perspective on the status of the possessive marker changes, so does its spelling.

5. Concluding Remarks

One of the most significant conclusions that can be drawn from this study is the fact that the possessive particle present in the separated genitives of the Early Modern English period had, indeed, been reanalyzed as a possessive pronoun. This can be seen very clearly in the agreeing examples with female and plural possessor heads, and in the lack of non-agreeing ones. Moreover, the small number of these kinds of structures found in the corpus should not be attributed to a mistake on the part of the writer, but rather to two factors: the overall lack of female and plural possessors in the letters, which leaves little room for separated genitives to flourish; and the artificial nature of these agreeing formations, which can be seen as a reason why authors/speakers would prefer to use one of the other possessive markers that were available to them—unless they wanted to sound solemn or educated.

Sibilant contexts have also been proven to be characteristic to the use of the *his* genitive, especially when dealing with masculine, singular possessors. The existence of examples that combine flexive and separated genitive traits in order to generate analogical formations where sibilance is created artificially by adding the flexive genitive morpheme *-es* to the head noun, hints towards a very clear distinction in the minds of speakers between both markers

Regarding the role of group genitives in the reanalysis of possessive particles, the Bacon letters provide promising results with many examples of edge-marking structures that fit really well in the $DP[DP\ D[D[his]\ NP]]$ syntactic analysis. However, the one example of a separated genitive with a complex possessor head found in Katherine Paston's letters is, surprisingly, a split genitive, which suggests that maybe some speakers had not completed their reanalysis of the possessive particle just yet. Further research should be conducted on this topic.

As for the future of this study, there are a number of issues that are yet to be explored. For instance, the next step should be to record the length of every possessor noun phrase and *possessum* found in the corpus. This would help to determine whether separated genitives are used in more complex syntactic configurations than other possessive structures (i.e., flexive and zero genitives). Furthermore, an exploration of any sociolinguistic clues that the

Bacon and Paston letters might offer about the use of *his* genitives during the Early Modern English period could provide interesting results, especially when taking into the account the claim that the agreeing construction was an artificial device forced by the educated.

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