

The syntactic phrasal *'sa* marker in Faroese

1 Introduction

The topic of this paper is a relatively new possessive or syntactic marker in Faroese (I use both terms in this paper), *'sa*, which is “typically added to proper names (of persons and domestic animals) and nouns that function more or less as proper names” (Thráinsson et al. 2004:251).

- (1) a. *mammu -sa bók*
mother -SA bók
'(my) mom's book' (Staksberg 1996:28)
- b. *Snar -sa skál*
Snar -SA bowl
'Snar's bowl' (Snar = a proper name of a dog) (Staksberg 1996:28)
- c. *Petur -sa hús*
Peter -SA house
'Peter's car'
- (2) **bilurin -sa lyktir*
car.the -SA lights
'the lights of the car'

This is a phrasal marker, as can be seen in (3) where it is attached to a whole phrase, cf. (3a), but not heads, cf. (3b):

- (3) a. [*Petur og Annu*] -sa hús
Peter and Anna -SA house
'Peter and Anna's house'
- b. **Petursa og Annusa hús*

If *'sa* were attached to heads, we might expect (3b) to be grammatical, where it is attached separately to the two proper names, *Petur* and *Anna*.

Two other examples that show clearly that *'sa* is a phrasal marker are found below. Here, *Petur á Heyggi* 'Peter at Heyggur' refers to a person who lives at a place called *Heyggur* and *Petur Rói* is a name of a person.

- (4) a. *Petur á Heyggi -sa hús*
Peter at Heyggur -SA house
'[Peter at Heyggur]'s house'
- b. **Petursa á Heyggi hús* (Staksberg 1996:29)
- (5) a. *Petur Róa -sa hús*
Peter Rói -SA house
'Peter Rói's house'

- b. *Petursa Róasa hús

If *'sa* would attach to heads rather than phrases, we would expect (4b) to be grammatical—we wouldn't expect any marking on the PP. Also, if it were a regular genitive marker, it should attach to both *Petur* and *Rói* in (5b), just like genitive case marking in, e.g., Icelandic:

- (6) grein Einar-s Frey-s
 paper Einar-GEN Freyr-GEN
 'the paper by Einar Freyr'

By now, it should be fairly clear that *'sa* is a phrasal marker. It seems to resemble the *'s* possessive marker in English. Just as in English, the Faroese marker is only realized when the possessed DP precedes the possessor:

- (7) a. mammu -sa bilur / *bilur mammu -sa
 mom -SA car / car mom -SA
 'mom's car'
 b. mom's car / *(the) car mom's

Given the data above, we would be tempted to say that *'sa* is a possessive marker of the same kind as in English, and that is what it's usually called. However, *'sa* is also found with prepositions and that might complicate our analysis of it:

- (8) Hjalmar-sa vegna
 Hjalmar-SA because.of
 'because of Hjalmar' (Thráinsson et al. 2004:180)

With respect to prepositions, it seems that *'sa* is only found in the context of the preposition *vegna*. Most prepositions do not allow movement of their complement DP to specifier position. There is, though, at least one other genitive assigning preposition that does, *millum*. I have, however, not come across any examples with *'sa* and *millum*. I will discuss these two prepositions in more detail in Sections 2–3.

Just as in (7), *'sa* is only found when the DP it attaches to is in the specifier position, i.e., the “possessed” DP must precede the preposition that assigns case to it.

- (9) *vegna Hjalmar-sa
 because.of Hjalmar-SA
 'because of Hjalmar'

This short introduction should give the reader some sense of the *'sa* marker in Faroese. Its development seems to happen at the same time as the morphological genitive is on the decline as I will discuss in section 2.

2 The dying genitive

Barnes and Weyhe (1994:207) note that “[t]he expression of possession in Faroese is complicated by the almost total loss of the genitive case for this purpose in the spoken lan-

guage”. Morphological genitive is not extinct in Faroese, yet, but it is on the way out.¹ According to Hamre (1961:241), it is rarely used in spoken Faroese, except with prepositional phrases and fixed expressions.

First of all, no verbs assign genitive to their objects anymore (that goes for all Faroese speakers). For example, *sakna* ‘miss’, which, at an earlier stage assigned genitive, now assigns accusative. In Icelandic, however, the same verb still assigns genitive to the object.

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| (10) a. Faroese | b. Icelandic |
| Hon saknar mannin. | Hún saknar mannsins. |
| she misses man.the.ACC | she misses man.the.GEN |
| ‘She misses the man.’ | ‘She misses the man.’ |

Second, for all or most speakers, a few prepositions that originally assigned genitive to their complements, *innan* ‘within’, *uttan* ‘outside’, *til* ‘to’, *millum* ‘between’, *vegna* ‘between’, now assign either genitive (see the a-examples below) or accusative (the b-examples).

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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (11) a. <i>innan</i> garðs
within garden.GEN
‘within the walled-off area’ | b. <i>innan</i> árslok
within year’s.end.ACC
‘before the end of the year’
(Thráinsson et al. 2004:177) |
| (12) a. <i>uttan</i> veggja
outside doors.GEN
‘outside’ | b. <i>uttan</i> vit
without sense.ACC
‘unconscious’
(Thráinsson et al. 2004:177) |
| (13) a. <i>til</i> okkara
to us.GEN | b. <i>til</i> okkum
to us.ACC
‘to us’
(Thráinsson et al. 2004:178) |
| (14) a. <i>millum</i> fjals
between mountain.GEN
og fjøru
and shore.ACC/DAT/GEN | b. <i>millum</i> londini
between countries.the.ACC
‘between the countries’
(Thráinsson et al. 2004:178) |
| (15) a. <i>vegna</i> tess
because.of that.GEN | b. <i>vegna</i> tað
because.of that.ACC
‘because of that’
(Thráinsson et al. 2004:179) |

Thráinsson et al. (2004:178, 180) note that when *millum* and *vegna* are used like postpositions, the DP is “typically construed with the genitive”.

¹The status of the genitive is debated, though. In a review of a descriptive modern Faroese grammar by Andreassen and Dahl (1997), Petersen (1997) criticizes the authors for including the genitive, since such a grammar should describe the language as it is (“Tann, ið skal skriva eina mállæru, eigur at gera sær eitt púra greitt: mállæran skal fyrst og fremst lýsa málið, sum tað er” (Petersen 1997:34)). According to Henriksen (1998), however, in a response to Petersen, reports of its death have been greatly exaggerated.

- (16) a. landanna millum
countries.the.GEN between
'between the countries'
- b. tess vegna
that.GEN because.of
'because of that' (Thráinsson et al. 2004:178, 180)

It is interesting in this relation that when a proper name precedes the preposition, it is marked with *'sa*, see (8) *Hjalmarsa vegna* above.

The third indication of the genitive drop in Faroese is that with family relations, where the possessed DP stays in situ, i.e., in complement position, that DP gets accusative case, not genitive (Jakobsen 1898–1901:XLIV–XLV, Thráinsson et al. 2004:252).

- (17) a. mamma dreingin
mother boy.the.ACC
'the boy's mother'
- b. pápi gentuna
father girl.ACC
'the girl's mother' (Jakobsen 1898–1901:XLV)

- (18) a. mamma brúðrina
mother bride.the.ACC
'the bride's mother'
- b. abbi lítla Jógvan
grandfather little.ACC John.ACC
'little John's grandfather'
- c. døtur keypmannin
daughters shop.keeper.ACC
'the shop-keeper's daughters' (Lockwood 1955:103)

Lastly, possessive PPs with the preposition *hjá* 'with, at', which takes a complement in the dative, are in modern Faroese "the normal way of marking possessive phrases" (Thráinsson et al. 2004:251). As in the case of *'sa* possessives, the possessor must be animate.

- (19) a. skálin hjá Snar
bowl.the at Snar.DAT
'Snar's bowl' (Snar = a proper name of a dog) (Staksberg 1996:28)
- b. Kettlingurin hjá kettuni hjá mær er vakur.
kitten.the at cat.the.DAT at me.DAT is beautiful
'My cat's kitten is beautiful.'
- c. teldan hjá mær
computer.the with me.DAT
'my computer' (Thráinsson et al. 2004:62, 252)

3 A closer look at the data

In this section I will take a closer look at the Faroese data. To do this, besides consulting the literature, I will mainly do three things, in no particular order. First, I will discuss a few examples of *'sa* that I have found online. Second, I will look at the use in the Faroese Parsed Historical Corpus (FarPaHC; Ingason et al. 2012).² Third, I report some of my results from a judgment task I conducted in the Faroe Islands in 2008. The method used was magnitude estimation. I will, though, not work out the statistical analysis here.

3.1 Possessive pronouns

So far, we have not mentioned possessive pronouns but their position w.r.t. the head they modify may be important for research on the *'sa* possessive. In English, which has *'s* possessive in a prenominal position, possessive pronouns obligatorily precede the head or phrase they modify.

- (20) a. my house
b. *house my

That is not the case in Faroese where possessive pronouns either precede or follow the head/phrase they modify. However, it has been debated what is the “normal” position of the possessive pronoun, as discussed in Barnes (2002).

Hamre (1961) looked at the use of genitives and possessive pronouns in “selected materials from modern Faroese writings in *normal prose*” (p. 235). These were 24 texts, two of which were translations. When it came to possessive pronouns, whether they preceded or followed the head they modified, Hamre divided them in two: Possessives preceding/following an otherwise unqualified noun and possessives preceding an already qualified noun. We have already seen examples of the first category. In (21), however, we see an example of the second category, where a possessive pronoun precedes “an already qualified noun”.

- (21) Har endaði hann sínar seinastu dagar.
there ended he his.REFL last days
‘There he ended his last days.’ (Lockwood 1955:116)

Lockwood (1955:116) states that the normal position for a possessive pronoun is after the noun it modifies; when the noun is “already qualified by an adjective”, however, it usually precedes the adjective and the noun.

Hamre’s (1961:244) results were that when a possessive pronoun modified an otherwise unmodified noun, 62% of the time (350 out of 568 examples) it preceded the noun. When the possessive was not only modified by the possessive pronoun, the possessive preceded it in 92% of the examples (142 out of 154). This is consistent with Lockwood’s

²The corpus is syntactically parsed for phrase structure. It consists of three texts, all of which are translations of the New Testament: The Gospel of St. Matthew (from 1823, translated by Johan Hendrik Schrøter), Acts of the Apostles (from 1928, translated by Jákup Dahl) and The Gospel of St. John (from 1936, also translated by Jákup Dahl). Version 0.1 of FarPaHC consists of 53,202 words but the version I use and refer to dates from 10 December 2013 and can be downloaded from <https://github.com/einarfs/farpahc>. It consists of 59,255 words.

statements in that possessive pronouns usually precede modified nouns (and in that the group of “already qualified nouns” is more frequently found with a preceding possessive pronoun than the group of “an otherwise unqualified nouns”). However, the fact that prenominal possessors are more frequent with nouns that do not have any other modifier might suggest that the “normal position” for possessive pronouns is not after the head it modifies.

Hamre avoided “writings in technical or other specialized language, deliberately archaic style such as **biblical language**, and poetic language” (Hamre 1961:235; my emphasis). FarPaHC consists of three texts only, all of which are translations of texts in the New Testament. It may be of interest to compare the use in these texts to Hamre’s results, since they might be conservative and archaic—which might tell us something about how the language has changed or is changing.

The results, for “otherwise unqualified nouns”, are shown in Table 1.

Text	Prenominal	Postnominal
Matthew (1823)	45 (13%)	291 (87%)
Acts (1928)	13 (7%)	176 (93%)
John (1936)	8 (2%)	332 (98%)
	66 (8%)	779 (92%)

Table 1: Pre- or postnominal possessive pronouns in FarPaHC.

The numbers for prenominal possessive pronouns, ranging from 2% to 13%, are much lower than in Hamre’s study (62%).

Petersen (2011:19) states that in spoken Faroese, possessive preceding a head is more common than a head preceding the possessive pronoun.

- (22) Eg koyri sangir inn á **mín iPod**. (11 year old girl)
 I put songs in on my iPod
 ‘I am loading songs onto my iPod.’ (Petersen 2011:19)

My informants in the Faroe Islands usually found both orders fine but some of them added that it is more formal to have the head preceding the possessive whereas the other way around would be more natural in spoken Faroese. Since written language tends to be more conservative than spoken, Petersen’s statement and my informants’ comments may indicate that Faroese is gradually changing toward the English word-order, where possessors are obligatorily prenominal. The reason for the low percentage of prenominal possessors in the biblical texts in FarPaHC might then be due to how conservative they are—they possibly reflect an older stage of the language.

3.2 Genitive with the prepositions (*i*)*millum*, *vegna* and *til*

Thráinsson et al. (2004) state that when *millum* and *vegna* are used like prepositions, their complement (which then presumably moves from complement position to spec,PP) normally gets genitive case.

Hamre (1961:236–237) looked at the use with the preposition *(i)millum* ‘between’ in his texts. He gives the table marked here as Table 2. It is interesting to note that while accusative is quite frequent when the DP follows the preposition (note especially the 112 occurrences out of 119 with nouns!), there is only 1 example of it out of 28 (4%) when the DP precedes the preposition. This is in line with Thráinsson et al. (2004).

Nouns:	<i>(i)millum</i> plus genitive	7	accusative	112
Pronouns:	<i>(i)millum</i> plus genitive	15	accusative	4
Place names:	<i>(i)millum</i> plus genitive	5	accusative	5
Personal names:	<i>(i)millum</i> plus genitive	1	accusative	5
Nouns:	genitive plus <i>(i)millum</i>	12	accusative	1
Pronouns:	genitive plus <i>(i)millum</i>	15	accusative	0

Table 2: Case assignment of *(i)millum* in Hamre’s (1961) study.

We can also look at the use in FarPaHC, not only for *(i)millum* but also for *vegna*, as their complement DP can either follow or precede them. The results are shown in Table 3. However, unlike Hamre, I do not distinguish between different types of DPs (gen/acc,PP means that the DP precedes the preposition and gets genitive or accusative, respectively; P,gen/acc means that the DP follows the preposition and gets genitive or accusative, respectively). One might think that the difference between the text from 1823 and the other two suggests that the genitive is on the rise when the DP is in the complement position of *(i)millum* and *vegna*. That would not be a well founded claim as there are no other indications of that, as far as I know. What is of most interest in Table (3) is the difference between the two positions in the translation from 1928. In all 10 instances where the DP precedes the preposition does it get genitive whereas only in 7 out of 12 instances does it get genitive when it is in the complement position. This further strenghtens Thráinsson et al.’s (2004) claim. It is then not (only) due to conservatism that the DP gets genitive case when it precedes its preposition.

Text	Gen,PP	Acc,PP	P,gen	P,acc
Matthew (1823)	0	0	1 (8%)	11 (92%)
Acts (1928)	10 (100%)	0 (0%)	7 (58%)	5 (42%)
John (1936)	17 (100%)	0 (0%)	15 (94%)	1 (6%)
	27 (100%)	0 (0%)	23 (58%)	17 (42%)

Table 3: Case assignment of *(i)millum* and *vegna* in FarPaHC.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the preposition *til* ‘to’ which can either take a genitive or accusative case complement (cf. (13) above). Lockwood (1955:92) shows a few examples of fixed expressions of *til* and a noun in the genitive case (not further modified by a D head or anything else):

- (23) *til* botns / bjarga / fugla / sjós / lands / dðmis
to bottom.GEN / cliffs.GEN / birds.GEN / sea.GEN / land.GEN / example.GEN

However, according to Lockwood (1955:92), *til* governs accusative when the head noun of the complement is “qualified by an article or adjective”. In my judgment task in 2008 I tested this with the following examples.

- (24) a. Teir gingu oman til sands.
 they.M went from.above to sand.GEN
 b. Hann gekk oman til sand.
 he went from.above to sand.ACC
- (25) a. Vit gingu oman til sandsins.
 we went from.above to sand.the.GEN
 b. Hon gekk oman til sandin.
 she went from.above to sand.the.ACC

In (24), the complement of *til* is a bare noun. My informants generally found the genitive in (24a) better than the accusative in (24b). In (25), however, the complement is a noun and a suffixed definite article. Here, conversely, the speakers found the accusative in (25b) much better than the genitive in (25a)—the genitive case seemed to be ungrammatical for many of the informants. This patterns with Lockwood (1955:92).

3.3 Genitives preceding or following nouns

Hamre (1961) looked at the frequency of genitives in his selection of texts when they preceded or followed a noun they modified. In 99 examples (77%) the genitive preceded the noun whereas in 30 cases (23%) the genitive followed it. In Table 4, however, we see the results from FarPaHC.

Text	Prenominal	Postnominal
Matthew (1823)	53 (84%)	10 (16%)
Acts (1928)	26 (53%)	23 (47%)
John (1936)	17 (40%)	26 (60%)
	96 (62%)	59 (38%)

Table 4: Pre- or postnominal possessive pronouns in FarPaHC.

Even though genitive complements of nouns are not rare in the written language, they are much more infrequent in the spoken language. These are, though, not always completely out, according to Thráinsson et al. (2004:248-249) (the judgments are theirs):

- (26) a. ?litur veggjanna; *veggjanna litur
 color walls.the.GEN walls.the.GEN color
 ‘the color of the walls’
- b. ?tindur fjalsins; ?fjalsins tindur
 peak mountain.the.GEN mountain.the.GEN peak
 ‘the peak of the mountain’

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|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| c. | *stødd húsanna;
size houses.the.GEN
'the size of the houses' | *húsanna stødd
houses.the.GEN size |
| d. | *Íbúgvar Eiðis;
inhabitants Eiði.GEN
'the people of Eiði' | *Eiðis íbúgvar
Eiði.GEN inhabitants
(Thráinsson et al. 2004:248–249) |

- b. húsi ástarinnar (Icelandic)
 house.DAT love.the.GEN
 ‘house of love’

It is not the case, though, that Petersen always switches the order from noun + genitive to genitive + noun. I will not look at this any further in this paper but it should be investigated in more detail when genitives are possible, if at all, in relation to a noun head in spoken Faroese.

3.4 The ‘sa marker

Hamre (1961:242) shows examples of group genitives in Faroese:

- (32) a. danskt ríkisstýris viðgerð
 Danish.NOM/ACC government.GEN treatment
 ‘the Danish government’s treatment’
 b. hin danska kongsins ráð
 the.NOM/ACC Danish.NOM/ACC/DAT/GEN king.GEN council
 ‘the council of the Danish king’

If we would get the inflectional genitive on all relevant heads we would expect ***dansks** ríkisstýris viðgerð* and ***hins** danska kongsins ráð* in the examples above. We do not see that and neither do we get the ‘sa marker. If -s and -sa were allomorphs, we would expect *hin danska kongins ráð* (i.e., *kongins*, not *kongsins*). I do not know what to make of these examples but this needs to be studied further. Note, however, that it was mentioned above that ‘sa is typically added to proper names or nouns that function or behave like proper names (Thráinsson et al. 2004:251). If there is such a restriction, we do not expect the ‘sa marker in the examples above. In (32a), *ríkisstýri* is not animate and therefore does not get the marker and in (32b), *kongur* ‘king’ does not function as a proper name.

I have, however, found examples online by using Google and reading Faroese websites that do not obey such a restriction:

- (33) a. fyri børnini -’sa skyld
 for children.the -’SA sake
 b. onnur -’sa viðurskifti
 others -SA business
 ‘other people’s business’
 c. Eg haldi at tað eru bara “the developers” sa’ skyld
 I think that it is just the developers SA sake
 ‘I think it’s just the developers’ responsibility’

Children, others and developers are animate but these definitely do not function generally as proper names. I have, however, not found any examples with the ‘sa marker where the possessor is inanimate, cf. (2) above.

We have already seen, cf. (17)–(18) above, that for possessives that show family relations, the DP in complement position (the possessor) is in the accusative. When such DPs precede the noun they do not just simply retain or get accusative case.

- (34) a. Ólav -sa bilur
 Ólav -SA car
 b. *Ólav bilur
 Ólav.ACC car
 ‘Ólav’s car’ (Thráinsson et al. 2004:249)

- (35) a. abba -sa hús
 grandfather -SA house
 b. *abba hús
 grandfather.ACC house
 ‘grandfather’s house’ (Thráinsson et al. 2004:249)

It’s not clear what case, if any, the DP that precedes the *’sa* marker gets. In (34a) *Ólavsa bilur*, though, it can not be dative which is *Ólavi*. The nominative, *Ólavur*, is different from the accusative and the genitive is *Ólavs* (it could be possible that this is actually *Ólav-s-sa*). For *abbi* ‘grandfather’, cf. (35), the accusative, dative and genitive case are the same, i.e., *abba*. Again, we see that the case of *abba* in *abbasa* cannot be nominative. Given these two examples, *Ólavsa bilur* and *abbasa hús*, we are left with two possibilities, *Ólav(s)-/abba-* must either be accusative or genitive.

Now, if we look at more proper names with the *’sa* marker, we see that the names are not in the genitive case:

- (36) a. Rannvá -sa bloggur
 Rannvá.NOM/ACC/DAT/ -SA blog
 b. *Rannváar -sa bloggur
 Rannvá.GEN -SA blog
 ‘Rannvá’s blog’

It thus looks like we are dealing with the accusative here. If so, how do we explain *Sjúrða-sa* in the following example?

- (37) Sjúrða -sa borð
 Sjúrður -SA table
 ‘Sjúrður’s table’ (Thráinsson et al. 2004:64)

For the proper name *Sjúrður*, *Sjúrð*, but not *Sjúrða*, is the accusative. The genitive, however, is *Sjúrðar*. In this example, and others like it, *-a* might reflect genitive if *-r* has been dropped (maybe it is phonologically conditioned and, for some speakers, not pronounced before *-s*). Another possibility is that it is an epenthesis vowel. What makes this even more confusing is the fact that the nominative form of names like *Sjúrður* and *Ólavur*, which both end in a consonant, before *’sa* is grammatical but not the nominative form of nouns that end with a vowel, like *abbi* and *mamma* (Staksberg 1996:28–29, Thráinsson et al. 2004:64:

- (38) a. Sjúrður -sa / Ólavur -sa bilur
 Sjúrður.NOM -SA / Ólavur.NOM -SA car
 ‘Sjúrður’s / Ólavur’s car’

- b. *abbi -sa / mamma -sa bilur
 grandfather -SA / mother -SA car
 ‘grandfather’s / mother’s car’

We also get the nominative on the noun in larger phrases:

- (39) [Ólavur á Heyggi] -sa hús
 Ólavur.NOM at Heyggur -SA house
 ‘Ólavur at Heyggur’s house’ (Thráinsson et al. 2004:250)

Thráinsson et al. (2004:fn. 22 on p. 250) cite personal communication with Staksberg who says that the head noun in larger phrases (“complex” *’sa* constructions) must be in the nominative, like in the example above, even when the noun ends in a vowel (has weak inflection), but not in coordinated constructions.

- (40) Bogi á Heyggi -sa hús
 Bogi at Heyggur -SA house
 ‘Bogi.NOM at Heyggur’s house’

However, I have found the following examples online:

- (41) a. *fyrir tykkum öll -’sa skyld*
 for you.PL.ACC all.NOM/ACC -SA sake
 b. *fyrir gentuna -sa skyld*
 for girl.the.ACC -SA sake
 ‘for the girl’s sake’
 c. *um hennara og manninn -sa fantastiska kærleika*
 about her and man.the.GEN -SA fantastic.ACC love.ACC
 ‘about her and her man’s fantastic love’

Note especially (41a), where a phrase in the accusative consisting of pronoun and a quantifier precedes *’sa*—it definitely is a complex *’sa* construction in the sense of examples like (39). In (41b) a noun head that has adjoined to a determiner head precedes *’sa* and in (41c) the same happens except there we have also a possessive pronoun. It is not trivial how we interpret the two last examples here; *gentuna* and *manninn* can be regarded as one head each even though they are made up of two heads (N+D). (41c) has additional complexity in that there we have a possessive pronoun as well. Whether we should regard *hennara og manninn* as one phrase marked by *’sa* or two possessive phrases, that is *hennara* and *manninn’sa*, is not clear. That would probably not make much difference as coordinated phrases/nouns do not have the behaviour of complex *’sa* constructions according to Staksberg (cited in Thráinsson et al. 2004). We will look briefly at complex *’sa* constructions in Section 5.

3.5 Interim summary

We have seen in this section that there seems to be a tendency for genitive DPs to be in specifier position rather than complement position. For possessives marked with *’sa* they

must be in the specifier position but when they are in the complement position they are usually spelled out as a PP (with the preposition *hjá*). The case marking of possessives marked with *'sa* is far from being clear but we will look at that in Section 5. Now, however, we will look at a very short comparison of Faroese and Historical English.

4 Historical English

Since the development of the syntactic/possessive marker *'sa* marker in Faroese resembles the possessive marker *'s* in English (and Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) a short overview of the changes in earlier English is in order, as that has been well studied. Here I consult only Allen (2008).

Historically, *-es* (> *'s*) was the genitive inflection for most masculine and neuter nouns in the singular (Allen 2008:121). To my knowledge, there are no classes of nouns in Faroese (or other categories, such as quantifiers, determiners, adjectives) that have a *-sa* inflectional ending for the genitive—the origin is unclear but at least it does not seem to be the same as in English.³ Lockwood (1955:106) refers to the syntactic marker as *-sa(r)*. I am, however, not aware of any examples in modern Faroese with *'sar*. If Lockwood is right that at some point speakers in some context said *'sar*, then we would want to know if there are any nouns that end with *-sar* in the genitive.

Allen (2008:112) notes, when discussing a change from Early West Saxon (EWS) to Late West Saxon (LWS), that “[t]here is general agreement that there was a gradual change in the positioning of genitives in OE [Old English], with postposition becoming less common.” Furthermore, she shows the results in Table 5 (her Tables 3.1–3.2) for EWS and LWS texts where she looks at the positioning of genitive phrases consisting of “two elements”, a determiner and a noun. As we can see in the table, prenominal genitive is much more frequent in the LWS texts than the EWS texts (the difference between the two time periods is statistically significant, see Allen 2008:114).

Text	Prenominal	Postnominal
ASC(A1)	15 (54%)	13 (46%)
Oros	85 (74%)	30 (26%)
CP	181 (41%)	256 (59%)
curaC	2 (13%)	13 (87%)
curaPref	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
EWS Total	283 (47%)	314 (53%)
CH1	389 (83%)	77 (17%)
CH2	373 (83%)	77 (17%)
Wulfstan	18 (86%)	3 (14%)
BenRule	89 (79%)	24 (23%)
LWS Total	869 (83%)	181 (17%)

Table 5: Two-element genitives in EWS and LWS (Allen 2008:114).

³See discussion in Thráinsson et al. (2004:411) for an idea on a possible source of *'sa*.

With respect to Faroese, it is interesting to look at the status of genitive objects of verbs in Early English at the time the change in Table 5 was taking place. The results in Table 6 are from Allen (her Table 3.5) where she looks at the case marking of the object of selected verbs (*gieman* ‘care for, attend to’, *giernan* ‘yearn, desire’, *sceamian* ‘be ashamed of’, *tweonian* ‘doubt’, *wilnian* ‘desire’ and *beniman* ‘deprive’; see Allen 2008:fn. 44 on p. 118). That there are such high percentages of genitive objects in the two time periods at the same time as the position of genitives w.r.t. nouns is definitely changing, is different from Faroese. When we are looking at changes in Early English, all we have are written texts, we have neither access to speakers (for, e.g., judgments) nor spoken language. For comparison, it thus makes sense to compare Early English and Faroese texts of same genres. As has already been mentioned, genitives are rare in complement or specifier position of NPs/DPs in spoken Faroese. These do not seem to be so rare, however, in written texts (cf. Hamre’s study and the results from FarPaHC). On the other hand, we do not find genitive objects of verbs in any modern Faroese texts, not even in the more conservative ones, as in FarPaHC. What we can conclude from this is that relative to genitives in specifier/complement position of nouns, genitive objects of verbs got extinct sooner in Faroese than in English. That genitive objects were lost so early in Faroese, relatively speaking, might thus be an accident.

A much more thorough comparison of Faroese and earlier English (with a look at at least mainland Scandinavian languages) is needed for an investigation of the *’sa* marker in Faroese. I leave that for future research.

Text	Prenominal	Postnominal
ASC(A1)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
Oros	21 (95%)	1 (5%)
CP	47 (84%)	9 (16%)
EWS Total	71 (88%)	10 (12%)
CH1	24 (89%)	3 (11%)
CH2	13 (72%)	5 (28%)
Wulfstan	10 (91%)	1 (9%)
BenRule	16 (73%)	6 (27%)
LWS Total	63 (81%)	15 (19%)

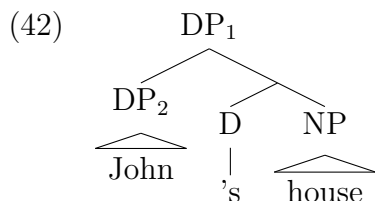
Table 6: Genitive objects vs. alternatives in EWS and LWS (Allen 2008:114).

5 The first step toward an analysis

In this section I will sketch very briefly different possibilities regarding how to analyse the structures where the *’sa* marker is involved, without pursuing them any further and leaving them for future research. For present purposes, I assume a very simple structure within the DP (but see, e.g., Julien 2005 for a much more complex and fine-grained structure in Scandinavian noun phrases). In the discussion below, I leave aside all considerations of why the head/DP that is *’sa* marked seems to be in the accusative case in DPs like *abbasa hús*. Also, even though it is very important, I will not attempt to answer why inanimate

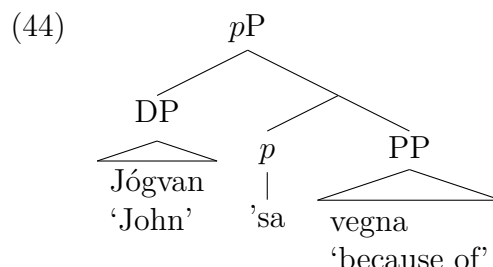
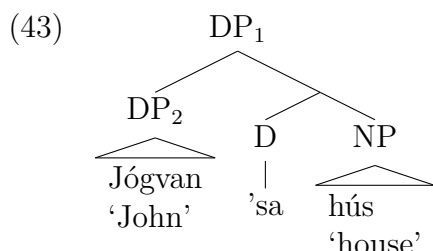
DPs in specifier position of the prepositions *millum* and *vegna* almost obligatorily get genitive case whereas there is a lot of variation between accusative and genitive when a DP is in the complement position of these prepositions.

The structure for the possessive 's in English that is often assumed is shown in (42):



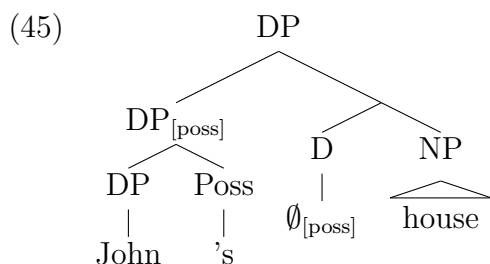
The relation between D and DP₂ is the same as between T and a DP subject in spec,TP. D is a case-checking head and DP₂ gets possessive case.

Let's say this is the right structure for Faroese. But then what about 'sa marking in PPs? It is possible that 'sa is a realization of a functional head, whether it is D or *p*:

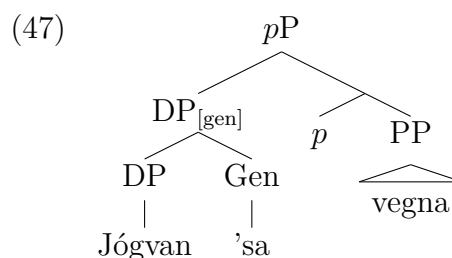
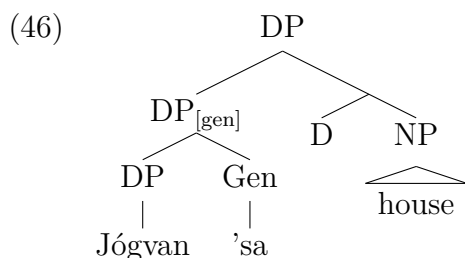


Here, *p* is a case-assigning head in the very same way as D—even though possessive and possessive case might be a misnomer.

Another possibility is that the structure Barker (1991) assumes for English is an appropriate analysis for Faroese:



Whatever we call Poss here, it looks like 's is more of a syntactic marker, used to mark the position of the DP. Let's see what this would look like in Faroese and instead of Poss (because 'sa does not really mark possession in PPs) we use Gen(itive):



Another matter that must be dealt with is why the head of the DP that is *'sa* marked usually gets nominative case (in larger phrases). (39) is repeated here as (48):

- (48) [Ólavur á Heyggi] -sa hús
 Ólavur.NOM at Heyggur -SA house
 ‘Ólavur at Heyggur’s house’ (Thráinsson et al. 2004:250)

The nominative case may suggest that there is no “possessive” case involved. In addition, this may indicate that the DP *Ólavur á Heyggi* is not moved from the complement position within the NP—if moved, it should have other case than nominative, either genitive or some other case (it could also be a possessive PP).

Also, we must find out whether examples like (41) above, repeated here as (49), are “real”. The prepositions in these examples, *fyrir* and *um*, assign accusative case. Both their complement DPs and the *'sa* marked DPs are in the accusative in these cases.

- (49) a. *fyrir* tykkum øll -'sa skyld
 for you.PL.ACC all.NOM/ACC -SA sake.ACC
 b. *fyrir* gentuna -sa skyld
 for girl.the.ACC -SA sake.ACC
 ‘for the girl’s sake’
 c. *um* hennara og mannin -sa fantastiska kærleika
 about her and man.the.GEN -SA fantastic.ACC love.ACC
 ‘about her and her man’s fantastic love’

It is possible that here the *'sa* marked DP gets case in head-comp configuration—it then gets the same case as the DP it “modifies”. When that DP gets nominative case, e.g., in spec,TP, the *'sa* marked DP does, too.

I will stop here in speculating over possible analyses of the *'sa* marker.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I have introduced the syntactic phrasal *'sa* marker and I have sketched a few possible ideas toward an analysis that may be pursued. The marker *'sa* seems to be in many ways the same as possessive *'s* in English. How these two differ must be investigated. Many questions raised in this paper remain unanswered—a more thorough study is needed.

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