86 Order of Genitive and Noun

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1 Defining the values

This map shows the order of a genitive or possessor noun phrase with respect to the head noun. In the example in (1) from Finnish, *tytön* 'the girl's' is the genitive noun phrase, while *kissa* 'cat' is the head noun, so the order in Finnish is **GenN** (genitive preceding head noun).

(1) Finnish (Sulkala and Karjalainen 1992: 227)

>   *tytö-n*   *kissa*
>   girl-GEN   cat
>   Gen   N
>   'the girl's cat'

The opposite order, **NGen**, is illustrated by the example from Krongo (Kadugli; Sudan) in (2).

(2) Krongo (Reh 1985: 152)

>   *níimò*   *má-Kùkkú*
>   mother   GEN-Kukku
>   N   Gen
>   'Kukku's mother'

●	1. Genitive–noun (GenN)	608
●	2. Noun–genitive (NGen)	415
○	3. Both orders occur with neither order dominant	82
	total	1105

The genitive noun phrase is often called the **possessor** (phrase) and the head noun is sometimes called the **possessee** (noun), and the construction itself is known either as a *genitive construction* or as a *possessive construction*. It should be stressed that the term *possession* is used in this context in a broader sense than the term is used in everyday English. Two basic semantic types of genitive relations involve body parts and kinship relations, as illustrated by the French examples in (3).

(3) French

>   a. *le*   *bras*   *de*   *Jean*
>   the   arm   of   Jean
>   'Jean's arm'
>   b. *le*   *père*   *de*   *Jean*
>   the   father   of   Jean
>   'Jean's father'

But the genitive relation can involve various other semantic relations as well. In *le crayon de Jean* 'Jean's pencil', the relationship is one of possession or ownership. In *la mort de Jean* 'Jean's death', the relationship is similar to that of a subject and a verb, while in *la construction de la maison* 'the building of the house' it is more akin to the relationship of an object to a verb. Other semantic relationships are involved in *le maire de Paris* 'the mayor of Paris' and *la population de Paris* 'the population of Paris'. In fact, the genitive relation can be described as simply involving *some* semantic relation between a noun phrase and a noun, the particular relation being determined by inference from the semantics of the words involved and from the context. The order of genitive and noun in all of the above French examples is NGen.

While French uses a single construction in the examples cited above, English employs two different constructions. One, used in *John's arm* or *the governor's house*, involves the order GenN and marks the genitive noun phrase by the clitic morpheme spelled *'s*. The other, used in *the mayor of Paris* and *the population of Paris*, involves the order NGen, with the preposition *of* preceding the geni-

tive noun phrase. The factors governing the choice between these two genitive constructions in English are complex, and involve a combination of syntactic and semantic factors (see Rosenbach 2002). Since both of these constructions are quite common in English, English is coded as a language having both orders with neither order dominant (see the box section "Determining Dominant Word Order" on p. 371). Languages in which neither order is dominant fall into two subtypes: those languages like English where there are two distinct constructions, one which is GenN and another which is NGen, and languages in which there is essentially one construction, but both orders are allowed.

Many languages distinguish two sorts of genitive constructions, one for **alienable possession** and one for **inalienable possession** (see Chapter 58). In many such languages, the order of genitive and noun is the same in the two constructions. In some languages, however, the order of genitive and noun is different for alienable and inalienable possession. For example, in Maybrat (West Papuan), inalienable possession employs the order GenN, with the head noun marked by a prefix agreeing with the genitive noun phrase in person, number, and gender, while alienable possession employs the order NGen, with the genitive noun marked with a genitive case affix. The example in (4a) illustrates GenN order with inalienable possession, while (4b) illustrates alienable possession.

(4) Maybrat (Dol 1999: 93, 97)

>   a. *Sely*   *m-me*
>   Sely   3SG.F.POSS-mother
>   'Sely's mother'
>   b. *amah*   *ro-Petrus*
>   house   GEN-Petrus
>   'Petrus's house'

Pohnpeian (Oceanic; Ponape Island, Micronesia) exhibits the opposite pattern: NGen order is used for inalienable possession, while GenN is used for alienable possession (Rehg 1981: 165).

The map restricts attention to the position of genitive noun phrases containing nouns, rather than ones involving only a pronominal word. In many languages, the same construction is used regardless of whether the genitive is headed by a noun or is just pronominal, as in the Mandarin examples in (5): in both examples, the genitive noun or pronoun occurs first, followed by the linker particle *de*, followed by the possessed noun.

(5) Mandarin (Li and Thompson 1981: 113)

>   a. *rùzi*   *de*   *ěrduō*
>   rabbit   LINK   ear
>   'the rabbit's ear'
>   b. *wǒ*   *de*   *chènshān*
>   1SG   LINK   shirt
>   'my shirt'

In some languages, however, pronominal possession involves a distinct construction and sometimes involves a different word order. An example of such a language is French, which is NGen with genitives involving nouns, as illustrated in (3) above, but which places pronominal possessive words before the head noun, as in (6).

(6) French

>   *son*   *livre*
>   3.POSS.M   book
>   'his/her book'

Conversely, Tauya (Madang, Trans-New Guinea; Papua New Guinea) is GenN for nominal possessors, as in (7a), but places pronominal possessors after the head noun, as in (7b).

(7) Tauya (MacDonald 1990: 133, 131)

    a. *ʔe   fanu-na   wate*
        that   man-GEN   house
        'that man's house'

    b. *wate   ne-pi*
        house 3SG–GEN
        'his/her house'

Many languages do not employ separate pronominal words, but use affixes to express such meanings, as in (8) from Kutenai (isolate; western North America).

(8) Kutenai (own data)
    xaⱡi-ʔis
    son-3.POSS
    'his/her/their son'

See Map 57 showing the distribution of such possessive affixes.

The map also excludes the position of nonreferential genitives, if a language employs a construction for these that is distinct from that used for referential genitives. Many languages are like English in employing a type of compound construction for nonreferential genitives (*deer antlers, truck tires*).

There are a number of different structures used for genitive constructions cross-linguistically, the differences between which are ignored for this map, although in some cases different orders are more commonly associated with different constructions. A crucial difference is whether either the genitive or the head noun bears affixes that are part of the genitive construction. In some languages, the genitive noun occurs with a genitive case affix, as in the example in (9) from Chukotko (Chukotko-Kamchatkan; eastern Siberia, Russia).

(9) Chukchi (Dunn 1999: 362)
    ənpənacɣ-əqaj-ərɣ-en   ŋeekak
    old.person-DIM-PL-GEN   daughter
    'the older people's daughter'

In other languages, it is the head noun that bears an affix, typically a pronominal affix coding features of the possessor, like person, number, or gender. This is illustrated in (10) for Kutenai, where the same third-person possessor suffix *-ʔis* is used as in (8) above.

(10) Kutenai
    xaⱡi-ʔis   qu   paⱡkiy
    son-3.POSS that woman
    'that woman's son'

In some languages, a word marking the construction as a genitive construction occurs between the genitive and the head noun. This word may be an adposition, as in the French examples in (3) above, a general linker particle used in other modifier-head constructions, as in (5) above from Mandarin, or a pronominal form, agreeing in number with the genitive noun phrase, as in (11) from Loniu (Oceanic; Manus Island, Papua New Guinea).

(11) Loniu (Hamel 1994: 94)
    ɲatama iy   pihin
    father   3SG woman
    'the woman's father'

In some languages, the genitive construction does not employ any affixes or separate words, the genitive and head noun being simply juxtaposed, as illustrated in (12) from Chalcatongo Mixtec (Oto-Manguean; Mexico).

(12) Chalcatongo Mixtec (Macaulay 1996: 108)
    kačíní peðrú
    hat   Pedro
    'Pedro's hat'

It is not uncommon for a language to employ two of the construction types described above, as illustrated by the examples in (4) from Maybrat.

2 Geographical distribution

Because the order of genitive and noun correlates with the order of object and verb, the general pattern on this map is similar to that of Map 83. NGen order predominates (i) in Europe; (ii) in much of Africa; (iii) in South-East Asia and among the Austronesian languages of Indonesia, the Philippines, and the Pacific; (iv) in the Pacific North-West in North America; and (v) in Mesoamerica. GenN order predominates (i) in an area of West Africa to the west of Nigeria, as well as two less well-defined areas around Ethiopia and south-west Africa; (ii) in much of Asia other than the south-east; (iii) in an area around New Guinea and extending westward into eastern Indonesia; (iv) in the Americas, except for the two areas noted above in which NGen order predominates. Both orders, as well as languages lacking a dominant order, are common in Australia, though GenN is more common.

While the map bears an overall resemblance to Map 83 showing the distribution of the order of object and verb, it differs in ways that are worth mentioning and that can be summarized by saying that GenN order often has a broader distribution than OV order, a situation that arises because many SVO languages are GenN. But because these SVO languages with GenN order tend to be adjacent to OV languages with GenN order, the specific areas in which GenN order is common are often somewhat larger than the corresponding areas where OV order is common. An example of this is the area around New Guinea: while there is a small minority of languages on the mainland of New Guinea that are VO, there are very few NGen languages (and most of these are just offshore on the north coast). Furthermore, the GenN area around New Guinea extends further west than the corresponding OV area, including the Austronesian languages of eastern Indonesia that are closest to New Guinea. Similarly, the GenN area in West Africa is much broader and more clearly defined than the corresponding OV area. Conversely, the area in South-East Asia in which VO order is found is broader than the corresponding NGen area, extending northward into China. And while VO order predominates over much of Europe, this is much less true for NGen order: Scandinavia and the Baltic are GenN and there are many languages in Europe in which neither order of genitive and noun predominates.

3 Theoretical issues

While the order of genitive and noun correlates with the order of object and verb (OV languages tending to be GenN, and VO languages NGen), it differs from other pairs of elements whose order so correlates in that SVO languages are intermediate between OV and verb-initial languages: SVO&GenN languages are as common as SVO&NGen languages.