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## THE ENGLISH POSSESSIVES AND THE DETERMINER *v.* PRONOUN DISTINCTION

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Category and function are two of the most basic grammatical notions. The traditional grammatical description of a sentence essentially amounts to determining what categories or classes of units it is made of, and what functions they assume in the sentence. This description is taken as the ABCs of grammatical learning and often remains a prerequisite for any more advanced linguistic analysis. Far from being fixed and unchanging, however, both categorial and functional analyses have always been, and still are, the objects of constant 'essays' and revisions, some of them being much more than mere adjustments.

The English 'personal' possessives *my/mine*, *our(s)*, *your(s)*, *his*, *her(s)*, *its*, and *their(s)* – little will be said here about *whose* – provide an interesting illustration of those controversies in grammatical analysis. Indeed, they raise a number of non-trivial questions about the grammar of English and its study, including: (i) are *my* and *mine* two different words or two variants of the same word? (ii) if a unitary analysis is adopted, should *my/mine* be classified as a determiner or a pronoun (or as something else)? (iii) can the unitary analysis be extended to the other items which can be used either pre- or pronominally (e.g. *this*, *that*, *some*, *any*, *no/none*) and, if so, how should the latter be classified?

The general line of argumentation in this paper will be that the English personal possessives are pronouns and that there are good reasons to treat all determiners as pronouns. In §1, we first take a brief glance at the history of the English personal possessives. We then present a number of accounts of these forms that have been proposed from the early days of the English grammatical tradition up to the advent of distributional linguistics in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the class-cleavage of the possessives into determiners and pronouns. In §2, we argue for a unitary analysis of both *my/mine* and basic genitive expressions such as *John's (car)*. We examine some proposals for treating the personal possessives as determiners (§2.1) and then argue that they are best analysed as pronouns (§2.2). In §3, we turn to the more general distinction between determiners and pronouns: again, we first consider proposals to reclassify pronouns as determiners (§3.1), before

examining the alternative, and arguably preferable, reclassification of determiners as pronouns (§3.2)

### 1. Earlier accounts of the English possessives

One of the basic descriptive difficulties raised by the English personal possessives is that there are two series of possessive forms: (i) the ‘weak’, ‘conjunct’, or ‘dependent’ *my, your, her*, etc., which are used pre-nominally or ‘conjunctly’, e.g. *Take my car*; (ii) the ‘strong’, ‘absolute’, or ‘independent’ *mine, yours, hers*, etc., which are used pro-nominally or ‘absolutely’, e.g. *Take mine*. The only exceptions are *his* and *its*.<sup>1</sup>

*My/mine, your/yours*, etc. originated as genitive case-forms of the Old English personal pronouns, but in OE, each personal pronoun had only one genitive case-form: e.g. West Saxon 1sg *mīn*, 2sg *þīn*, 3sg-m/n *his*, 3sg-f *hire*, 1pl *ūre*, 2pl *ēower* (*īower*), 3pl *hira* (*hiera, heora, hiora*), to which the dual forms 1d *uncer*, 2d *incer* may be added. Those genitive pronouns were not semantically possessive in all their uses: e.g. *þonne þū hulpe mīn* ‘when you<sub>NOM</sub> helped me<sub>GEN</sub>’ [BARBER 1993 : 118] – in Latin, by contrast, a formal distinction was made between 1sg-gen *meī* and 1sg-poss *meus, -a, -um*, for instance. As possessives, however, the OE genitive pronouns could already be used either absolutely or conjunctly (pre-and sometimes post-nominally).<sup>2</sup> The distinction between weak and strong possessives was, by and large, a Middle English innovation. It apparently first emerged as a phonologically conditioned alternation of the 1sg and 2sg possessives comparable to the modern *a/an* alternation: *mīn* and *þīn* progressively lost their final /n/ when they were used pre-nominally before a word beginning with a consonant (and sometimes also a mute <h>), yielding the reduced forms *mī* (> *my*) and *þī* (> *thy*). *Mine* and *thine* only stopped being used pre-nominally in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century [GELDEREN 2006 : 165], with remnants of that usage still observable in 19<sup>th</sup>-century novels: e.g. *Go, do mine errand to my father* (W. Scott, *Kenilworth* 1821). In the early ME period, the forms of the 3pl pronoun (including 3pl-gen *hira*) were replaced by forms of Scandinavian origin (cf.

<sup>1</sup> The absolute uses of *its* are highly restricted (*?\*This is its / ?\*Its is not here*), probably mainly for semantic reasons (cf. QUIRK *et al.* [1985 : 361-2]. Some grammarians have claimed that there is actually ‘no strong form’ *its* [MCCAWLEY 1988 : 414]. The same goes for absolute *one’s* (cf. WALES [1996 : 170]).

<sup>2</sup> In adnominal uses, 3rd person forms were indeclinable while 1st/2nd person forms agreed with the adjacent nominal expression and took (strong) adjectival inflections: *mid his freondum* ‘with his friends<sub>DAT</sub>’ v. *mid mīnum freondum* ‘with my<sub>DAT</sub> friends<sub>DAT</sub>’ [cf. SWEET 1892a : 107].

PDE *their/theirs*), a quite unusual instance of grammatical borrowing; the 3sg feminine pronoun was similarly replaced, although its origin remains disputed [WALES 1996 : 15]. In the course of the ME period, the weak/strong formal distinction was extended to the possessives ending in *-r(e)*, with the development of the strong or 'double' possessive *-s* forms, first found in northern dialects: e.g. OE *ūre* > ME *our(e)/our(e)s*.<sup>3</sup> Among other developments, *his* was progressively restricted to the masculine gender, with 3sg-neutral *its* appearing towards the end of the 16th century. Finally, in late ME, the 2pl forms *ye, you, your(s)* began to be used in ordinary speech with a singular meaning, thus instead of the 2sg *th*-forms (Early Mod. Eng. *thou, thee, thy/thine*). The later disappeared from standard English in the course of the 18th century [Algeo & Pyles 2010 : 166] although Sweet [1892a : 109] still lists *thy/thine* among 'the present forms of the possessive pronouns'.

The 'dual functioning' of the English personal possessives has always made their classification a difficult issue. In the English grammatical tradition up to 1800, for instance, possessives were classified in four main different ways according to Michael [1970 : 333]:

(i) as possessive pronouns, distinguished from personal (and other) pronouns, which apparently was the most frequent classification;

(ii) as genitive case-forms of personal pronouns, a classification which many rejected because many possessives lack the final <*s*> typical of the English genitive – instead, the genitive 'case' of *you*, for instance, was often said to be *of you*,<sup>4</sup>

(iii) as belonging to a mixed category of 'adjective pronouns' ('pronouns adjective', 'pronominal adjectives');

(iv) as (possessive) adjectives, which seems to have been a rather infrequent classification.

At a time when the determiner category did not 'exist', the general hesitation was understandably between classifying possessives as pronouns or adjectives. Those two classifications, however, were not felt to be mutually exclusive, as shown by the recognition of 'adjective pronouns' or statements such as 'pronouns possessive [are] wholly of the nature of

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<sup>3</sup> In non-northern dialects, strong *n*-forms developed instead, by analogy with the 1sg and 2sg possessives: e.g. *ourn* 'ours', *yourn* 'yours', *hisn* 'his' (strong), *hern* 'hers' (cf. WALES [1996 : 173]).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. PRIESTLEY [1772 : 86]: 'The pronouns *possessive* [...] might not improperly have been called the *genitive* cases of their corresponding *personal* pronouns, were it not that their formation is not analogous to that of the genitive cases of other words.' This argument was still used two centuries later by H. SWEET [1892b : 75].

adjectives' [PRIESTLEY 1772 : 10-11]. Definitions were often obscure; possessives could be called pronouns and yet be only discussed in the chapter on adjectives, and vice versa. As noted by Michael [1970 : 333-4] for that period (up to 1800), possessives 'are classified in ways which overlap and contradict each other; [...] desperate remedies are tried and astonishing statements made; [...] it is hard to know what is standard practice at any time or what development there is within the period'.

The disagreement over the pronominal or adjectival status of the personal possessives persisted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sweet [1892b : 75] notes that 'we can have no hesitation in regarding possessive pronouns, taken as a whole, as adjectives rather than as genitive cases of noun-pronouns.' Jespersen [1909-49, II] and Poutsma [1916] instead present both weak and strong possessives as pronouns, but Bloomfield [1933 : 203] classifies them again as adjectives. Bloomfield [1933], however, recognises different subclasses of adjectives: 'descriptive' adjectives (e.g. *blue, old, strange*) are distinguished from 'limiting' adjectives, which are organised into 'numerative' (e.g. *two, hundred, all*) and 'determiner' adjectives, themselves organised into definite determiner adjectives (e.g. *the, this, my/mine*) and indefinite determiner adjectives (e.g. *a, some, which (book)*). Both weak and strong possessives are classified as definite determiner adjectives, along with the definite article and pronominal demonstratives. For Bloomfield [1933 : 203], 'The determiners are defined by the fact that certain types of noun expressions (such as *house* or *big house*) are always accompanied by a determiner (*as, this house, a big house*).' That is, singular count nouns or nominal expressions headed by a singular count noun require the presence of a determiner, but not of a descriptive adjective (e.g. *He visited [the / \*\_ ] (big) house*).

The so-called 'post-Bloomfieldian era' saw the development of distributional linguistics (e.g. HARRIS [1960], FRIES [1952]) and with its emphasis on notions of substitution and syntactic position, the distributional approach to word-classes led to the reclassification of determiners (or 'determinatives') as a primary word-class, distinct from adjectives.<sup>5</sup> It thus notably led the cleavage of the personal possessives into two separate word-classes, *viz.* (weak or conjoint) possessive determiners and (strong or absolute) possessive pronouns.

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<sup>5</sup> A terminological distinction is sometimes made between (a) *determiner* and (b) *determinative*. In this paper, (a) designates a category and (b) designates a function, as is notably done in QUIRK *et al.* [1985]. In HUDDLESTON & PULLUM [2002], for instance, it is the other way round, with (a) designating a function and (b) a category.

The weak possessives were found to be distributionally equivalent to the articles, more specifically the definite article, and were classified as definite determiners.<sup>6</sup> As illustrated below, the weak possessives and the definite article are mutually substitutable (1a), though not in ‘possessive gerunds’ (cf. §2.2); they are mutually exclusive (1b); and they may co-occur with the same quantifiers (1c-f), with the exception of *every* (1g).

- (1) a. [the / my] (new) car  
 b. \*[the my / my the] (new) car  
 c. [the / your] [three / many] books  
 d. [all / half / twice] [the / their] money  
 e. \*[the / her] much money  
 f. \*[the / your] any problems  
 g. [\*the / her] every movement

As for the strong possessives, they were found to be distributionally equivalent, not to the definite article, but instead to full NPs insofar as they may occur as subject, predicative complement (with *be*), object, or prepositional complement (2). So, they were classified as (definite) pronouns once the initial ‘ban’ on conventional word-class labels was relaxed:

- (2) a. [My car / Mine / It / \*The] is not for sale.  
 b. This car is [mine / \*the / a great car].  
 c. You could take [this car / mine / it / \*the].  
 d. It’s not a solution to our [their problem / theirs].

## 2. Unitary treatments of the personal possessives

The popular success of the distributional method has been such that the categorial distinction between possessive determiners and possessive pronouns (and *Dthis* v. *PRNthis*, *DSome* v. *PRNSome*, etc.) is found in many contemporary English grammars and dictionaries, although some elementary grammars still call *my* a possessive adjective. While isolating determiners from adjectives may have been an improvement on former classifications of the ‘parts of speech’, however, a number of arguments militate against the class-cleavage of the English personal possessives.

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<sup>6</sup> Early distributionalists often avoided established word-class labels and favoured the use of (more or less) arbitrary letters and/or numbers. For instance, FRIES [1952 : 120] refers to nouns as ‘Class I words’ and places weak possessives in the group of words (‘Group A’) which may occur before a ‘Class I word’. Similarly, he classifies strong possessives as ‘Class I substitutes’.

The first is, ironically, distributional and more specifically syntactic. It is only for distributional-syntactic reasons that weak and strong possessives have been assigned to different word-classes. However, distributional ‘facts’ may be more complex than they seem and the distributional method may actually be used to argue against that cleavage: (i) both weak and strong possessives are distributionally equivalent to ‘basic’ genitive NPs (3)<sup>7</sup>; (ii) both weak and strong possessives may be coordinated with such genitive NPs (and hardly anything else), which is worth underlining since coordination typically, though not necessarily, occurs between units of the same type (4):

- (3) a. My car is new but [John’s / his] car is not.  
 b. My car is new but [John’s / his] is not.
- (4) a. [...] you avoid wasting your and the interviewer’s time [...]. (BNC)  
 b. So when something goes wrong, whose fault is it – yours or your bank’s? (CCCS)

Since *John’s* or *the interviewer’s* is considered to have the same categorial status in both conjoint and absolute uses, it is unclear why *his* should be treated any differently. While (1-2) may suggest that *my* and *mine* are two different kinds of words, (3-4) instead suggest that they are two formal variants of the same unit with complementary distributions, i.e. allomorphs.

The second argument is morphological: it is difficult to ignore the similarities between *my* and *mine*, *your* and *yours*, or indeed between conjoint *his* and absolute *his*; and it is also difficult to ignore the similarities between 1sg-obj *me* and 1sg-poss *my/mine*, 2 *you* and 2-poss *your(s)*, or again 3sg-fem-obj *her* and 3sg-fem-poss *her(s)*. The recognition that *I*, *me*, *my/mine* form a paradigm arguably supports the analysis of both conjoint and absolute possessives as pronouns (cf. §2.2). Given (3-4), it is then tempting to consider that personal possessives are more or less irregular forms containing a possessive or ‘POSS’ marker (e.g. *his* = ‘he’+POSS), and to identify the latter with ‘s or more perhaps specifically with the variant ‘s<sub>1</sub> used in basic genitives like *John’s (car)*. The form *one’s* also suggests that identification.

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<sup>7</sup> There are different subtypes of genitives in English, not all of which are distributionally equivalent to personal possessives: e.g. ‘classifying’ genitives such as *a women’s magazine* v. *\*a their(s) magazine*; or ‘locative’ genitives like *John’s* in *Let’s go to John’s* v. *Let’s go to his/mine* (as always, in the intended meaning: *Let’s go to his place – No, let’s go to yours instead!* is fine). Basic genitives like *John’s (car)* are sometimes called ‘determinative’ genitives [QUIRK *et al.* 1985].

The third major argument for the claim that weak and strong possessives are variants of the same units is that they have the same meanings: *his* means exactly the same in (3a) and (3b), just like *John's* does. This important argument will be developed in §2.2 alongside other arguments which particularly support the pronominal analysis of the personal possessives.

All in all, despite (1-2), the description of the personal possessives and of basic genitives in English thus appears to be both simpler and more coherent if the two following assumptions are made: (i) conjoint and absolute possessives have the same categorial status; they are variants of the same units with complementary distributions; (ii) at some level of analysis, possessives and basic genitives like *John's (car)* have the same general categorial status, and might contain the same POSS marker.

While many modern grammarians do make those two assumptions, they disagree as to whether the English possessives should be classified as determiners or pronouns – the adjective analysis has no proponent, and the ‘determiner-pronoun’ analysis (in the spirit of the former ‘adjective pronouns’) does not seem very popular either. We will first present the determiner analysis (§2.1) before turning to the pronominal analysis (§2.2), which, we will argue, is better motivated and more consistent.

### 2.1. Possessives as determiners

As noted by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century English grammarian James Greenwood [1737 : 54-5], the weak possessives *my, your*, etc. ‘are to be used when they are joined to Substantives’, while the strong possessives *mine, yours*, etc. ‘are to be used when the Substantive is left out or understood’. Such a statement can be interpreted in various ways. One of them is that both weak and strong possessives occur in pronominal position, with a weak form selected when the head N or N’ is overt, and a strong form selected when the head N/N’ is covert, null or ellipted: e.g. [*my car*] v. [*mine* ∅]. This line of argumentation has been used repeatedly and still is.

Bloomfield [1933 : 256], for instance, presents strong possessives as ‘special forms’ of the possessive determiner adjectives used in case of ‘zero anaphora’, i.e. when the adjective modifies a zero (nominal) ‘substitute’ or anaphor. However, while some absolute possessives or genitives may look elliptical, the supposedly deleted material cannot always be made explicit. This is notably the case in so-called ‘double’ or ‘post-genitives’: e.g. *a friend of John's/his* v. *\*a friend of John's/his friends*. With absolute possessives, in fact, the supposedly deleted material can never be made explicit (e.g. *\*mine car; his (car)* is misleading). Of course, the hypothesis of a ‘special form’ is

precisely aimed at accounting for this, but it may as a result seem somewhat *ad hoc*, all the more so as Bloomfield [1933] analyses *no* and conjoint *this*, *that*, *some*, etc. as determiner adjectives, but *none* and absolute *this*, *that*, *some*, etc. as pronouns. Yet, *none* in *An old car is better than none* does not seem any less ‘elliptical’ than *mine* in *Peter’s car is faster than mine*. Another difficulty with the elliptical approach is that the supposedly deleted material is not strictly recoverable in some cases: for instance, in ‘locative’ genitives such as *He went to the dentist’s / We’ll stay at John’s* (house? flat? place?; but cf. n.7), and also with some absolute possessives or genitives in predicative position. McCawley [1988 : 387], who adopts an elliptical approach (deleted N’) to absolute ‘genitives’ as a general rule, notes that in *Everything in this closet is mine*, ‘no plausible understood N’ can be supplied’ for *mine*. He concludes that ‘at least some predicate genitives occur as such in deep structure and do not have derivations involving deletion of an N’’. In the pronominal approach which is suggested in §2.2, *mine* and *none* are not any more ‘elliptical’ than *him* or *she*; and the issues of whether or not the supposedly deleted material can be made explicit or recovered are then, quite simply, non-issues.

Zero elements are also fundamental in the way many generative grammarians analyse possessive/genitive constructions. Within the framework of generative grammar, however, the development of X-bar theory and of the so-called ‘DP hypothesis’ (determiner-as-head) has led to the conclusion that personal possessives *cannot* occupy the head D position within DPs. This means that even weak possessives are *not* distributionally equivalent to *the* (unless the distribution of latter is also reinterpreted). This also shows again how distributional ‘facts’ like (2), which are still regularly used to justify the analysis of weak possessives as ‘central determiners’ in English, may be differently interpreted. In X-bar theory, the head position in a phrase can be filled by a word or a morpheme, but not by a phrase. In [<sub>DP</sub> *the boy’s reply*], consequently, *the boy’s* cannot occupy the D node of the matrix DP; and if ‘lexical’ and ‘grammatical’ possessives occur in the same syntactic position, then neither can *his* in [<sub>DP</sub> *his reply*]. It has also been noted that articles and possessives co-occur in a number of languages such as Italian, Portuguese, Catalan, and Hungarian: e.g. It. *il mio libro* ‘my book’ (lit. ‘the my book’), but this particular fact, too, has received quite different interpretations.<sup>8</sup>

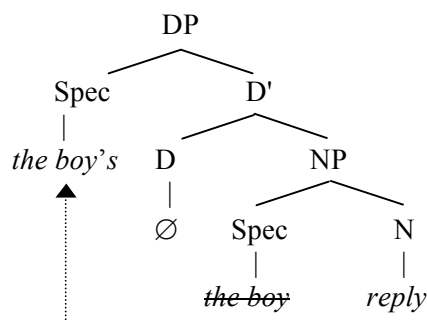
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<sup>8</sup> For instance, GIORGI & LONGOBARDI [1991: 153sq.] take the contrast between It. *il mio libro* and Engl. \*[*the my / my the*] *book* as evidence that English possessives are Ds while Italian possessives are As. RADFORD [1988 : 171-2] uses similar examples to argue that both Italian and English possessives are Ds and that ‘multiple determiner



Among generative grammarians, a fairly popular proposal in recent years has been that in surface structure possessive expressions such as *the boy's* and *his* occur in the 'specifier' position of a DP headed by a 'null possessive determiner' (e.g. BARKER [1995], LOBECK [1995], RADFORD [1997], CULICOVER [1997]) – in alternative analyses, of a DP headed by an 'agreement' element (e.g. ABNEY [1987], HAEGEMAN & GUÉRON [1999]) or some other kind of (phonologically null) functional category. The main function of the null D<sub>POSS</sub> is to assign genitive case to the 'possessor'; its 'presence' in the D slot is claimed to explain why a possessive cannot co-occur with an article (which then suggests a different analysis for It. *il mio libro*, for instance). The following figure illustrates the analysis of [<sub>DP</sub> *the boy's reply*] found in Radford [1997]:

(5) 'Derivation' of *the boy's reply* (Radford [1997])



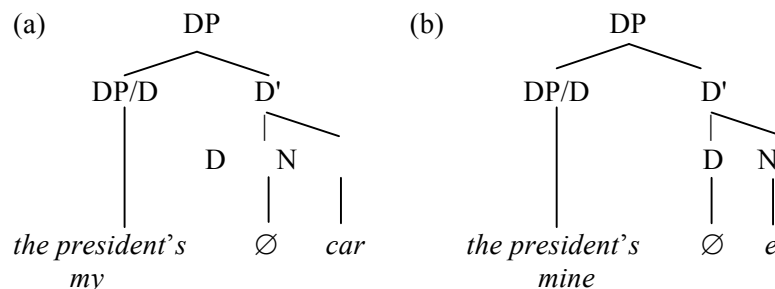
The explanation goes roughly as follows: *the boy's* originates as a non-genitive DP (*the boy*) in the specifier position of the NP contained within the matrix DP, for only there (it seems) can it be assigned its theta-role ('replier') by the head N. Then, [*the boy*] 'moves' up to the higher DP-specifier position, where it is assigned genitive case (marked 's) by the null possessive determiner (∅) occupying the head D position.

As for the difference between weak and strong personal possessives, Radford [1997] accounts for it by invoking another empty element. A weak possessive form is 'spelled out' by the PF (Phonetic Form) component of the grammar if the head noun of the NP contained within the matrix DP is 'lexically realised'; a strong possessive is spelled out instead if that head is an 'empty category' (*e*) – a kind of null pronominal element whose antecedent is to be identified in the co(n)text.

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sequences' are allowed in Italian but not in English. Using 'evidence' from Hungarian, ABNEY [1987 : 172sq.] concludes that the English possessives are Ds, but that they occur as DP-specifiers (as in (6)).

(6) Surface structures of *the president's/my car* and *the president's/mine* (Radford [1997])



Various criticisms could be formulated against (5-6), concerning the multiplication of zero elements, the postulation of a special null D which occurs only in 'genitive' expressions, or the fact that the English possessives are determiners which never occur in D position – all the more so as Radford [2004 : 39] finds it 'plausible' that *he* and *him* are determiners which do occupy that position. It might also be noted that the analogy between possessive constructions (more generally NPs/DPs) and clauses – the analogy which partly motivates the suggested derivation of *the boy's reply* and the movement of *the boy* from an original position where it can be assigned its theta-role – is much less obvious whenever the head noun cannot be attributed an argument structure, hence cannot assign any theta-role (e.g. *the boy's car*, *Bill's house*, *my shirt*).<sup>9</sup> It might further be noted that absolute possessives/genitives are, here again, claimed to involve some kind of zero anaphora (*e*), which was previously argued against. A more general issue is the nature of the so-called 'specifier' position. The philosophy of X-bar theory is that every phrase in every language conforms to the universal X-bar phrase schema, in which the specifier is the daughter of a maximal projection and the sister of an intermediate, one-bar projection:  $XP \rightarrow \text{Spec}, X'$ ;  $X' \rightarrow X, YP$  (e.g. HAEGEMAN 2006). However, because the approach is essentially configurational, it seems that just about 'anything' could be a specifier so long as it precedes the head of the phrase which contains it – in fact, so long as it precedes whatever it combines with at some level of representation, since movements are allowed. For instance, it has been claimed that *my* is the specifier of [<sub>DP</sub> *my car*], but it has also been claimed (e.g. RADFORD [2004]) that *very* is the specifier of [<sub>AP</sub> *very tall*], that *straight* is

<sup>9</sup> As noted by LYONS [1999 : 292], 'With phrases like *John's car*, *her house* it is less clear that the possessive gets its  $\theta$ -role from the noun, which does not seem to have an argument structure, but some writers at any rate treat these cases in the same way as [examples like *John's arrival*, *her disgust at his behaviour*, *the town's destruction*].'

the specifier of [<sub>PP</sub> *straight to the door*], that *John* is the specifier of [<sub>IP/TP</sub> *John works*] or again that *that* is the specifier of [<sub>CP</sub> *that John works*]. Auxiliaries also used to be regarded as specifiers of VPs, ‘perhaps with time adverbials associated’ [CHOMSKY 1970: 210]. Besides, it is unclear how many specifiers a DP may contain, for functional projections within DPs have multiplied in the past years, each of which opens its own ‘Spec’ position (see, for instance, ALEXIADOU *et al.* (2007, 575) for a most impressive DP structure): in addition to Spec-DP and Spec-NP, a DP may now also contain positions such as Spec-AgrP (Agreement Phrase), Spec-NumP (Number Phrase), Spec-GenP (Gender Phrase), and Spec-nP (outer/light noun Phrase). Now, if *John* can be the specifier of [*John works*] and *very* can be the specifier of [*very tall*], then, surely, *my* can be the specifier of [*my car*]. But if anything seems possible, then something must be wrong. Aware of these difficulties, some formal linguists have suggested more restrictive applications of the term *specifier*: Pollard & Sag [1994 : 358 *sq.*], for instance, distinguish specifiers from subjects. McCawley [1982 : 24] overtly rejects the notion as ‘a syntactic category which plays no role in syntax’.<sup>10</sup> Taylor [2000 : 143-144] similarly concludes his examination of specifiers in very negative terms: ‘failure to give conceptual foundation to the categories that one postulates effectively deprives linguistic theory of all constraints on the possible, thus opening the way to analyses that defy rational evaluation, and which violate both intuition and common sense’.

## 2.2. Possessives as pronouns

It is certainly more common to find the English personal possessives globally analysed as pronouns rather than determiners. The pronominal analysis is arguably better motivated, whether historically, morphologically, syntactically, or semantically.

Historically, conjoint/absolute couples like PDE *my/mine* are variants of what was a single genitive-case personal pronoun in OE (cf. §1). In itself, this may not be significant: the alternation between *my* and *mine* is no longer phonologically conditioned; and over time, a word (or a particular

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. MCCAWLEY [1982: 23-4]: ‘[...] the various kinds of ‘Specifier’ [mentioned in Chomsky’s ‘Remarks on Nominalization’ (1970)] have nothing more in common than that in English they precede what they are combined with. They do not have even that in common in Japanese, where auxiliaries follow main verbs and determiners precede nouns, or in Swahili and Malay, where auxiliaries precede main verbs and determiners follow nouns. [...] None of Chomsky’s vague allusions to similarities between different kinds of ‘specifier’ mentions any rule which would treat the three different kinds alike; it would surprise me if there is such a rule. Chomsky appears to have committed himself to a syntactic category which plays no role in syntax.’

use/variant of a word) of a given kind may become a word of another kind (conversion) or even an affix ('morphologisation', e.g. *-ment* from Lat. n. *mens, mentis*). The historical argument, however, may seem relevant insofar as OE genitive pronouns already had both conjoint and absolute uses.

From a morphological point of view, it is commonly considered that *I*, *me*, and *my/mine* form a case paradigm, which they do historically, and that *my/mine*, *your(s)*, etc., are genitive-case personal pronouns (and *whose*, the genitive form of *who*). However, if *his* and *John's* involve the same grammatical morpheme, then (*John's*) should be analysed as a genitive case inflection, too, which many scholars have argued against. In an alternative analysis, *my/mine* is a possessive pronoun, rather than a genitive personal pronoun, and 's is not a case inflection (although what else it can be is not entirely clear).<sup>11</sup> While not addressing the issue, we will argue below that *his* and *John's* do contain the same POSS morpheme. It may be added that recognising the paradigm *I*, *me*, *my/mine* while classifying *my/mine* as a determiner, as is done by Radford [1997] and many other generative grammarians (cf. 5-6), seemingly implies that (all) personal pronouns may have to be reclassified as determiners (cf. §3.1).

From a syntactic point of view, it has already been noted that both weak and strong possessives are distributionally equivalent to, and may be coordinated with, basic genitives such as *John's (car)*. If the latter are analysed as NPs (and not as null-headed DPs), then this suggests that personal possessives behave like nominal expressions. In that case, the syntactic behaviour of the strong forms *mine*, *yours*, etc., is unproblematic, since they may occupy basic NP positions (e.g. subject, object, prepositional complement), like other pronouns. As for the weak possessives, different proposals have been made by scholars who take them to be pronouns, notably: (A1) they are pronouns which assume a determinative function within NPs; (A2) they are pronouns which function as NP-heads – an analysis which will be presented in §3.2.<sup>12</sup> Analysis (A1) is fairly common and notably found in QUIRK *et al.* [1985] and HUDDLESTON & PULLUM [2002].

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<sup>11</sup> The usual argument against the analysis of 's as a case inflection is that it does not really attach to a noun (despite *John's car*) and always occurs at the end of an NP (e.g. *the King of England's daughter*), even if the final word of the NP is not a noun (e.g. *the girl I talked to's sister*). For QUIRK *et al.* (1985, 328), 's is 'not a case ending' but an 'enclitic postposition'; Taylor [2000 : 116 *sq.*] proposes instead that it is a determiner. More radically, some scholars have argued that English does no longer have a case system (e.g. HUDSON [1990], BARKER [1995], ROSENBACH [2002], BLEVINS [2006]).

<sup>12</sup> A third proposal, which has been made by some generative grammarians, is that possessives are PRNs which occur either as DP-specifier (cf. §2.1) or in some Spec position within a DP (e.g. HAEGEMAN & GUÉRON [1999]).

Both these grammars analyse possessives as genitive personal pronouns but also recognise a class of determiners, which notably includes the articles and the conjoint demonstratives. The necessary assumption is then that the relations between category and function tend to be 'many to many' rather than 'one to one': the D-function is not limited to members of the D-category (conversely, the members of the D-category may not be limited to the D-function). For instance, HUDDLESTON & PULLUM [2002 : 356-7] consider that the D-function may be filled by basic determiners (e.g. *the, this*), by genitive PRNs/NPs (e.g. *his, the boy's*) and, more peripherally, by weekday names and temporal 'pronouns' (e.g. *Sunday morning, tomorrow night*), non-genitive NPs of the type [*what/that + size/shape/colour*] (e.g. *What size hat do you take?*) and PPs with a cardinal numeral as complement of the preposition (e.g. *They sold about 15,000 tickets*).

A frequently mentioned syntactic argument for analysing not only strong, but also weak possessives as pronouns is that the latter may occupy at least one position which is typical of NPs, *viz.* subject of a 'subordinate -ing clause':

- (7) a. I don't mind [your inviting him].  
 b. There's no point in [your being in such a state of terror]. (BNC)

That analysis is quite common (e.g. JESPERSEN [1909-49], VISSER [1972], QUIRK *ET AL.* [1985], HUDDLESTON & PULLUM [2002]), but arguably not right. To begin with, it implies something of a 'distributional oddity': if *your inviting him* is a clause with a genitive subject, why is that subject a weak possessive and not a strong one? In subject position, a strong possessive might be expected and yet is unacceptable (*\*I don't mind yours inviting him*). In addition, *this, that, any* and *no* may be found instead of a weak possessive, but not, significantly, the absolute *none* (of which *no* is historically a reduced form). It appears that it is systematically the conjoint variant of these items that is used in this construction, which seems confirmed by the fact that even *the* apparently used to be fairly common in it:

- (8) a. It sure is frustrating this playing well and still losing. (BNC)  
 b. She wondered what had been the use of all that trying to get clean on the train if they were now lost in a place where nobody would ever find them [...]. (BNC)  
 c. There isn't any telling what they will do. [Quirk *et al.* 1985: 1066]  
 d. There can be no mistaking Delphinus. (BNC)

d. Nothing in his life | Became him like the leaving it. (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, c.1603)<sup>13</sup>

In so-called subordinate *-ing* clauses, weak possessives are often said to contrast with personal pronouns in the accusative (objective) case, e.g. [*your/you inviting him*], and genitive NPs with plain, common-case NPs, e.g. [*Peter's/Peter inviting him*] The difference is typically described as a stylistic choice between a genitive and a non-genitive subject, although additional factors have been noted. However, as Abney [1987] has notably shown, a distinction needs to be made between possessive or 'Poss-*ing*' gerunds like [*your inviting him*] and accusative or 'Acc-*ing*' gerunds like [*you inviting him*], for the properties of the two constructions are quite different.<sup>14</sup> Abney's proposal is that accusative gerunds are (subordinate) clauses, while possessive gerunds are DPs which contain a nominalised VP – part of the idea, here, is that the scope of the nominalising morpheme *-ing* is not limited to the verb form but extends to the whole VP (cf. also LANGACKER [1991] and TAYLOR [2000], who analyse DPs as NPs). A more detailed examination of gerunds would lead us beyond the scope of the present study. Let us simply note that if expressions like [*your inviting him*] are NPs or DPs rather than clauses, then it is distributionally coherent that they should involve a weak possessive rather than a strong one. (The same goes for *this*, *that*, *any*, and the use of *no* rather than *none*.) Weak possessives may be pronouns, but they have no independent uses.

Finally, it may be argued that the pronominal analysis of the English personal possessives is semantically motivated:

- (9) a. You could take his car.  
 b. You could take his.  
 c. You could take John's car.  
 d. You could take John's.

*His* means the same in (9a-b), just like *John's* does in (9c-d), and at some level of analysis *his* and *John's* may both be regarded as possessive expressions of the type [NP<sub>x</sub>-POSS]. Whether their use is conjoint or absolute, they both

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<sup>13</sup> Other examples with *the*: *My attention was fixed on another subject, the completing a tract which I intended shortly to publish.* (GOLDSMITH, *Vic. of W.*, 1766) / *The having to fight with that boisterous wind took off his attention.* (DICKENS, 'The Chimes', 1844) / *His present engagement might only end in his being exposed like a conquered enemy in a Roman triumph, a captive attendant on the car of a victor, who meditated only the satiating his pride at the expense of the vanquished.* (W. SCOTT, *Bride of Lam.*, 1909).

<sup>14</sup> For an exposition of those differences, the interested reader is referred to ABNEY [1987 : 108 sq.].

designate some entity which is 'possessed' by, or more generally related to, the 'possessor' NP<sub>x</sub>. In the terminology of Cognitive Grammar (e.g. Langacker [1987, 1991, 2008]), they designate a grounded instance of a type of 'thing', thus a 'thing', which makes them nominal expressions.<sup>15</sup> Since [NP<sub>x</sub>-POSS] designates the possessed and not the possessor, it might further be argued that POSS is the head of the construction (e.g. that *John's* is headed by 's).

*His* is not any more 'elliptical' than *him* but it is semantically more complex, since it does not designate 'him' but an entity which is conceived as possessed by, or related to, 'him'. *His* is also more abstract than *him*: both are definite and designate an entity which is assumed to be uniquely identifiable in the current discourse co(n)text (CDC), but *him* further specifies that what it designates is a male human or animate being (other than the speaker and the addressee), while *his* may designate any kind of 'thing' (animate or inanimate, concrete or abstract, etc.: e.g. someone's car, mother, shoulder, age, behaviour, etc.). Similar remarks could be made about *John's* v. *John*. It is in fact POSS that is extremely schematic. When *John's/his* is used absolutely, what it designates is to be identified with some salient entity in the CDC but the identification of the intended referent is then almost entirely context-dependent, since by itself *John's/his* provides very little information for the identification of that referent. When *John's/his* is used conjointly, by contrast, the adjacent nominal expression provides additional information for identifying the intended referent: it specifies what type of 'thing' the whole structure designates an instance of. As a result, the conjoint use is far less constrained: e.g. as an answer to *How can I go there?*, (9a/c) might be felicitous, while (9b/d) might not. In other words, the high schematicity of POSS arguably explains why expressions such as *John's* and *his* are typically used conjointly rather than absolutely.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In CG, the term *thing* is not restricted to physical objects and is to be understood in a more abstract, schematic sense that covers all kinds of conceptual reifications. In its technical definition, 'a thing is characterized schematically as a set of interconnected entities, grouped and reified to form a unitary entity for higher-level cognitive purposes' [LANGACKER 2008 : 136]. All nominal expressions, including 'determiners', are claimed to designate or 'profile' a thing, as opposed to relational expressions (e.g. verbs), which are said to profile a 'relation'.

<sup>16</sup> A simple search of the BNC (2008-11-27) returned the following number of occurrences: *my* 145.250, *mine* 6.067; *our* 92.314, *ours* 1.658; *your* 132.598, *yours* 4.059; *their* 251.410, *theirs* 976.

### 3. Beyond possessives: the determiner v. pronoun distinction

It is quite possible to adopt a unitary analysis of *my/mine* and yet treat determiners and pronouns as two distinct word-classes. Bloomfield [1933], for instance, analyses both weak and strong possessives as (determiner) adjectives but makes a categorial distinction between *Athis* and *PRNthis*, *ASome* and *PRNSome* or *ANO* and *PRNnone*. Similarly, Quirk *et al.* [1985] and Huddleston & Pullum [2002] both analyse *my/mine* as a genitive personal pronoun, but distinguish between *Dthis* and *PRNthis*, *DSome* and *PRNSome*, *Dany* and *PRNany*, etc.

Adopting a unitary analysis of *my/mine*, however, does raise the question of whether this approach can be extended to other and perhaps to all 'determiners/pronouns'. In effect, it has often (and long) been argued that the categorial distinction between conjoint and absolute possessives, demonstratives, quantifiers, etc. is artificial and uneconomical since most of the items concerned can be used with or without a 'following' nominal expression:<sup>17</sup>

- (10) a. I could use [his car / his].  
 b. Did you see [that bird / that]?  
 c. [Some vagrants / Some] were barefoot.  
 d. [Most vagrants / Most] were in rags.  
 e. I don't have [any change / any].  
 f. [Few neighbours / Few] attended the meeting.  
 g. [Which book / Which] do you like best?  
 h. Monday or Tuesday? — [Either day / Either] will do.

Merging determiners and pronouns into a single word-class may be desirable, but it raises some difficulties. First, some formal and/or semantic differences may be noted between certain conjoint/absolute couples. Formal differences may be observed between *my/mine*, *no/none*, or again between the pronominal *some*, which may be weak /s@m/, and the pronominal *some*, which is always strong /sVm/. Such differences need not be problematic since it is generally accepted that a particular item may have different formal realisations (e.g. allophony, allomorphy, inflected forms). As for semantic differences, it may be noted, for instance, that in its conjoint uses the interrogative *what* may be joined to a noun with either personal or non-

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. JESPERSEN [1992(1924) : 84]: 'There is [...] not the slightest reason for thus tearing asunder *my* and *mine*, or, even worse, *his* in "his cap was new" and "his was a new cap" or *this* in "this book is old" and "this is an old book" and assigning the same forms to different "parts of speech," especially as it then becomes necessary to establish the same sub-classes of adjectives (possessive, demonstrative) as are found in pronouns.'

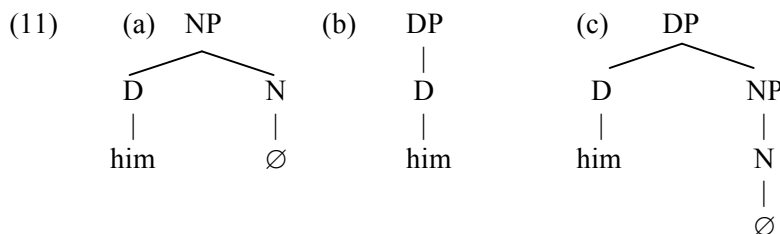


personal reference (e.g. *What [actor/book] do you like best?*), while in its absolute uses it is limited to non-personal antecedents (*What do you like best?*). Such differences, however, need not be problematic either: all grammarians of English probably agree that *this/these* and *that/those* are respectively the singular and plural forms of the determiners and/or pronouns THIS and THAT; yet, in their absolute uses, the singular forms *this* and *that* are limited to non-personal antecedents (e.g. *that* cannot refer to a person in *I know that* and *\*that who helped you* is ill-formed), while the plural forms *these* and *those* may have personal or non-personal antecedents (e.g. *those who helped you*). Thus, formal and/or semantic differences may be recognised without abandoning a unitary analysis of determiners/pronouns.

What is arguably more problematic is that the most basic determiners – the articles – seemingly cannot be used pronominally (e.g. *\*[the \_ ] is good*), while the most basic pronouns – the personal pronouns – seemingly cannot be used pronominally (e.g. *\*[it book] is good*). This is certainly one of the main reasons why the determiner *v.* pronoun distinction is generally maintained. Here again, however, distributional ‘facts’ may be differently interpreted. Indeed, different solutions have been suggested, partly depending on the proposed reclassification, namely, (i) reclassifying pronouns as determiners (§3.1), or (ii) reclassifying determiners as pronouns and, indeed, as ‘nouns’ (§3.2). As we will try to argue, a unitary analysis of all ‘determiners/pronouns’ is worth considering and if a reclassification is to be made, then (ii) seems preferable.

### 3.1. Reclassifying (personal) pronouns as determiners

Within the framework of generative grammar, personal (and other) pronouns have long been analysed as determiners (e.g. POSTAL [1969], ABNEY [1987], RADFORD [1997], LYONS [1999], PANAGIOTIDIS [2002], ROEHRS [2005]), although this analysis is not shared by all generative grammarians. Among the many proposals that have been made, the following may be mentioned:



Our main focus here will be analysis (11a); (11b-c) will only be briefly discussed at the end of this section. (11a) is the analysis proposed by P. Postal in his frequently cited article, ‘On so-called “pronouns” in English’, a

paper which seems to have initiated the generative analysis of personal pronouns as determiners.<sup>18</sup> In it, the English personal pronouns are claimed to be definite determiners of null-headed NPs – Postal [1969] calls them ‘definite articles’, but uses the term *article* to designate all determiners.

A product of its time and place, Postal's approach is radically transformational: ‘in the deepest structures’, as the author [1969 : 213] puts it, personal pronouns are represented as sets of ‘syntactic’ features (e.g. /+Animate/, /+Human/, /+P1/, /-P2/, /-P3/, /+Nominative/, etc.). They afterwards undergo a number of transformations which may modify these features or even add new ones. In the course of the derivation, a rule of ‘segmentalization’ transforms a given set of features into an NP whose determiner is a particular ‘article’ (e.g. *I, you, him*) and whose head is an abstract pronoun equivalent to *one*. The latter is eventually deleted by the application of an obligatory rule of ‘pronoun deletion’ without which ‘our so-called pronouns would in fact have the terminal forms \**Ione, \*usones, \*heone, \*itone* (or perhaps better \**itthing* analogous to the indefinite *something*)’ [*id.* : 213].

The facts discussed by Postal [1969] cannot all be presented here. We will also ignore the issue of whether Postal's transformational analysis is even remotely plausible from a psychological point of view, as well as some of the difficulties raised by that analysis which are noted by Postal himself. Instead, we will examine three important claims made by Postal to justify his analysis: (C1) personal pronouns are definite NPs and the (in)definiteness of an NP is generally marked by a particular ‘article’; (C2) a parallel may be drawn between personal pronouns and reflexive pronouns: the latter are definite NPs in which *-self/-selves* is a noun, and *my-, your-, him-, etc.* are ‘genitive-type definite articles’ (*id.*, p.201); (C3) expressions such as *we men, us Americans, you guys, etc.*, are NPs in which *we, us, and you,* are definite ‘articles’, just like *the* is in *the men*.

Concerning (C1), it may be noted that while personal pronouns may be said to ‘behave like’, or to be ‘functionally equivalent to’, etc., full definite NPs, they are not, properly speaking, (noun) phrases. This is more than a detail, for the analysis of *him* as [<sub>NP</sub> *him* ∅] partly depends upon it. Secondly, it is debatable whether ‘[i]n large part, but by no means completely, definite or indefinite status [in NPs] is indicated superficially by a particular article’ [*id.* : 203-4]. The DP hypothesis is a generalisation of that claim, with all N(P)s becoming complements of some overt or null determiner. Postal

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<sup>18</sup> The paper in question was first printed in 1966 and reprinted in 1969. It is referred to either as POSTAL [1966] or as POSTAL [1969] in the literature.

[1969 : 204] concedes that ‘proper nouns are definite even though they occur without explicit article’, but never considers that possibility for personal pronouns. If it is further envisaged that the English ‘zero article’ might be a mere descriptive artefact (e.g. BEREZOWSKI 2009) and that plural count nouns and non-count nouns ‘determined by zero’ are simply not determined, then, all in all, quite a significant number of English ‘NPs’, both definite and indefinite, might in fact be bare nominals.

Concerning (C2), reflexive pronouns are indeed nominal expressions of the type [X-*self/selves*] in which *self/selves* is a kind of noun, but there is a notable distinction between the 1st and 2nd-person reflexives, in which X is a weak genitive pronoun (*my-, our-, your-*), and the 3rd-person reflexives, in which X is an objective pronoun (*him-, her-, it-; them-*). Postal does not mention that distinction and proposes that the elements filling the X slot are all ‘genitive-type definite articles’ [*id.* : 201]. That proposal seemingly implies a more complex grammar in which, for instance, there is *him*<sub>OBJ</sub> and *him*<sub>GEN</sub>, *them*<sub>OBJ</sub> and *them*<sub>GEN</sub>, etc.; but it further appears to be actually inconsistent with Postal’s own system of transformational rules.<sup>19</sup> Provided that a morphological compound such as *myself* and a syntactic phrase such as *my book* may receive the same kind of analysis, we can only reiterate what was noted in §2.2. As for 3rd-person reflexives like *themselves*, they look more like appositive expressions, so that the reflexive paradigm might illustrate the graded nature of the distinction between determination and apposition, as might (C3).

Claim (C3) concerns what is sometimes called the ‘pronoun-noun’ construction, of which Postal [1969 : 218] notably gives the following examples:

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<sup>19</sup> For POSTAL [1969], a form like *himself* results from the application of a number of transformational rules to a set of abstract features. ‘Reflexivization’ is one of these rules, and it has the additional effect of adding the feature /+Genitive/ before ‘segmentalization’ occurs [*id.* : 212-213]. Despite the feature /+Genitive/, however, the surface form of the P3 sg. masc. reflexive is *him-self* and not *\*his-self*. POSTAL [1969 : 213, fig.2] in fact attributes the feature /+Genitive/ to what is finally ‘segmentalized’ as *self*, and not to the first part of the ‘phrase’ (*him*). In that case, however, it is quite unclear why the P1 sg. reflexive should be ‘segmentalized’ as *myself* and not as *\*meself*, for instance. The formal distinction between P1/P2 and P3 reflexives is not accounted for. In fact, it becomes even unclear why *my* and *him* are called ‘genitive-type’ determiners in the first place. Besides, if *self/selves* ‘must be taken as a noun stem as we see clearly in such phrases as *the expression of self in our society*, *selfish*, *selfless*, etc.’ [*id.* : 201], should we assume that *self* is also inherently /+Genitive/ in those other uses?

- (12) a. He didn't like us Americans  
 b. Who insulted you men?

The usual view on such expressions is that they are cases of apposition (e.g. JESPERSEN [1909-49, II : 46, 85]; QUIRK *et al.* [1985 : 352]), i.e. they involve two coreferential nominal expressions, with the second providing additional information for the interpretation of the first and, indeed, possibly serving a disambiguating function (e.g. with *you*, in the absence of a formal singular/plural distinction). Postal [1969 : 217 *sq.*], however, rejects the appositionive analysis and advocates instead what may be called the determinative analysis: such expressions are 'among the strongest evidence' for analysing the English personal pronouns as 'articles', for 'in such sequences we actually find the so-called pronouns *we/us* and *you* as *articles in surface structures*' [*id.* : 219].<sup>20</sup> Since then, expressions like *we linguists*, *you boys*, etc. have often been presented as a crucial piece of evidence for reclassifying personal pronouns as determiners (e.g. RADFORD [1997], LYONS [1999], PANAGIOTIDIS [2002], GHOMESHI *et al.* [2009]). Transformational rules and other theory-internal arguments left aside, however, they do not so clearly justify that reclassification.

In 'standard' English, the pronoun-noun construction is a rather marginal and 'familiar' use of only *we/us* and plural *you* (e.g. *\*I student do not appreciate you teacher*). This fact may be variously interpreted but can hardly be taken as strong evidence for reclassifying *all* personal pronouns as determiners. Thus, Huddleston & Pullum [2002 : 374] adopt the determinative analysis of [*we men*], but consider that only *we* and pl. *you* (and not *they*, for instance) are determiners as well as personal pronouns.<sup>21</sup> The determinative analysis of [*we men*] and similar expressions does not provide any truly obvious solution for the unacceptability of *\*I student* and *\*you teacher*, although proposals have not been lacking. By contrast, the appositionive analysis offers a rather simple explanation, since singular count

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<sup>20</sup> Postal's first argument for rejecting the appositionive analysis is that expressions such as *we men* and *you children* cannot be 'derivatives from appositionive relative clauses' – an analysis unduly attributed to JESPERSEN [1909-49, II : 85] – since they may occur in environments where *we, who are men* and *you, who are children* cannot [*id.* : 217-219]. However, there is no reason to presuppose that appositions should be 'derivative' in the first place.

<sup>21</sup> In informal speech, [*them N-s*] is not so uncommon: e.g. *See them guys over there?* / *Well them biscuits are horrible then?* (BNC). Radford [2004 : 40] further notes that *they boys* is 'grammatical in some non-standard varieties of English' such as the variety spoken in Bristol, England. Besides, the pronoun-noun construction is found in other languages, not all of which display the limitations of the standard English construction to 1/2pl pronouns (e.g. PANAGIOTIDIS [2002], BHAT [2004], FURUYA [2008]).

nouns normally need to be determined in English, hence the contrast between *\*I student* and *I, the president of this assembly/John Watson, do solemnly declare...* As for the unacceptability of *\*they/them boys* (in standard English), such structures might be pre-empted by the already established *these/those boys*, which is semantically quite close. Whether this 'gap' actually supports the determinative analysis, however, is debatable. Adopting the appositive analysis, it may have to be recognised as an idiosyncratic property of the pronoun-noun construction. While this may not seem most satisfactory, constructions (in the cognitive or construction grammar sense) actually tend to have idiosyncratic properties: it is quite possible to recognise a general [NP<sub>1</sub> NP<sub>2</sub>] appositive schema (e.g. *Merlin the Wizard / my friend John / Jack's friend Iris*) and various subtypes, including the pronoun-noun construction, the pronoun-numeral construction (e.g. *What are you two doing?*), or the vocative [*you* + N!] in which sg./pl. *you* is followed by an undetermined singular count noun or nominal 'epithet' (e.g. *You stupid idiot! / You fools!*). As noted by Lyons [1999 : 27], *\*I idiot!* is not acceptable while in German *Ich Esel!* lit. 'I donkey!' ('Silly me!') is fine, which seemingly illustrates another kind of idiosyncratic gap. Besides, it is also fairly typical of constructions that some of their instances may become fixed expressions: [*you guys*] may be considered as an established 2nd-person plural pronoun in the language of many speakers of English – primarily, but no longer only, of American English.<sup>22</sup>

Another difficulty with the determinative analysis which assimilates [*we men*] to [*the men*] is that some prosodic differences may be noted between those two expressions: in [*the 'men*], *the* is typically unstressed and the whole expression is pronounced as a single intonation unit; in [*'we 'men*], *we* typically carries some stress and a slight pause is possible between the two constituents, which is excluded in [*the men*] or [*these men*]. In support of the determinative analysis, however, it may be noted that *all we/you Americans* is fine, like *all the/these Americans*, and unlike *\*all we/you (are proud)*.

Finally, there is a fact which is not consistent with Postal's [1969] analysis [*we men*] as a [D N] structure headed by N. Grammatically, [*we men*] is 1pl (like *we*), not 3pl (like *men*): if a head is to be recognised, it is *we* rather than *men*. When a pronoun is coreferential with such an expression, it

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<sup>22</sup> Other dialectal or regional examples include *you all, y'all, you'uns* in American English; and *you lot* and *you chaps* in British English (cf. MONTGOMERY [2001 : 149], WALES [1996 : 74]).

agrees in person and number with its first element, not with the following noun.<sup>23</sup>

- (13) You guys shouldn't be proud of [yourselves/\*themselves], should [you/\*they]?

That difficulty may be avoided by adopting the DP analysis illustrated by analyses (11b-c) above, since *we* can then be claimed to be the head of [DP [D *we*] [N *men*]]. However, Abney [1987], who popularised the DP analysis, proposed that personal pronouns are 'intransitive' determiners, i.e. determiners which do not take an NP complement, as opposed to 'transitive' determiners like *a* and *the* (cf. 11b). This proposal eliminated what was apparently felt to be an undesirable consequence of Postal's [1969] hypothesis, namely, that (surface) personal pronouns almost systematically involve the deletion of some abstract (pro)nominal element (e.g. \**heone* > *he*). However, if personal pronouns are intransitive determiners, then [*we men*] cannot be a DP in which *men* complements *we*. Abney [1987 : 179] is obviously aware of the problem, but does not address it. He writes that 'as Postal (1966) observes, there are situations [e.g. *we men*, *you boys*] in which personal pronouns also behave like determiners'; but he adds, in a footnote [*id.* : 179, n.86], that if it is indeed the case that such expressions are 'merely appositives', then they '[fail] to provide evidence for the categorial identification of pronouns with determiners'.

Since then, many generative grammarians seem to have instead adopted analysis (11c), which is essentially a DP version of Postal's [1969] proposal. Panagiotidis's [2002 : 13 *sq.*] main argument for doing so is quite typical of the generative approach to syntactic phenomena: determiners are functional heads and all other functional heads take lexical complements, so if pronouns are determiners, then they should take lexical complements too; if none is visible, then it must be covert. Thus, in most of their uses, *I*, *you*, *him*, etc. are null-complemented Ds occurring as DP-heads; in [*we men*] and possibly [*himself*], instead, the lexical complement is overt. This, however, does not change anything about the other problems that have been pointed out: the treatment of \**I student*, the relation between [*we men*] and [*we the men*], and the possible prosodic differences between [*the 'men*] and [*'we 'men*].

To sum up, while expressions such as *we men*, *you boys*, etc., have been regularly taken as evidence for reclassifying *all* personal pronouns as determiners, they do not clearly support that reclassification, which, even among generative grammarians, remains controversial. Such expressions are

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<sup>23</sup> Similarly, in French, *nous (les) Français* 'we French people', used as subject, triggers a 1pl (not a 3pl) agreement on the verb: e.g. *Nous les Français [pensons/\*pensent] que...*

seemingly best analyses as cases of apposition, but they do raise analytical difficulties which illustrate the graded nature of the distinction between apposition and determination. Historically, ‘determiners’ actually often emerge as pronouns in appositive-like constructions (cf. §3.2). All in all, none of claims (C1-C3) makes an undisputable case for a reanalysis of the English personal pronouns as determiners.

### 3.2. *Reclassifying determiners as pronouns*

Hudson’s Word Grammar [1984, 1990] is one of the frameworks in which determiners are analysed as pronouns. In WG, the words traditionally called *determiners* are pronouns and pronouns are themselves a kind of ‘noun’, along with proper and common nouns, so that ‘a determiner is itself a type of noun’ [HUDSON 1990 : 272]. The possibility of using *this, that, my/mine, no/none, some, any, (n)either*, etc., with or without a following nominal expression in positions such as subject, object, and prepositional complement, is taken as evidence that these items are essentially nominal, whether semantically or distributionally. In Hudson’s analysis, [*this book*] is an NP headed by PRN*this*, with N*book* as complement, and such an NP may be reduced to its head. This analysis is similar to the DP hypothesis except that *this* is ultimately considered to be a kind of noun, so that the phrase it heads is an NP.

In Hudson’s approach, pronouns have different valency requirements, just like verbs: some cannot take a complement (e.g. *somebody, myself, it*), others require a complement (e.g. *a(n), the*) and most can be used with or without a complement (e.g. *this, some, my/mine*). In fact, the word *determiner* does not have any theoretical status in WG: it is only regarded as a loose way of referring to pronouns which have or may have a common ‘noun’ as their complement.<sup>24</sup> The grammatical difference between the pronominal and pronominal uses of *his* or *this* is thus described in terms of transitivity, as is done for verbs and prepositions: *his* is a pronoun which can be used ‘transitively’ (*I took his book*) or ‘intransitively’ (*I took his*) and its categorial status is not affected by this difference, just like the categorial status of a verb is independent of its complementation.

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<sup>24</sup> WG is a type of dependency grammar, i.e. syntax is essentially based on binary dependency relations rather than constituency. In the WG analysis of [*the red car*], *the* is complemented by the common noun *car* (and not by the phrase *red car*) while A*red* is an adjunct (predependent) of *car*. According to HUDSON [1990 : 272], postulating a rule that the complement of a pronoun can only be a common noun predicts the ungrammaticality of *\*the a car* and *\*the she*, for instance.

One of the difficulties with Hudson's proposal is perhaps the claim that in [*the book*], *the* is the head and *book* is its complement. It may seem preferable to the DP analysis insofar as it does not require postulating a great number of null-headed DPs – with proper nouns, with ‘zero’ determined non-count and plural count nouns or nominals, but also, as we have seen, with possessives for many generative grammarians. However, it shares some of the problems raised by the DP analysis: in [*the book*], *the* is phonologically dependent and *book* seems to determine the meaning of the whole phrase. Indeed, the selectional properties of such a phrase appear to be determined by its (head) noun: for instance, a verb may require that its arguments be animate (*\*The sunglasses were eating*) or inanimate (*\*He scolded the chair*), but verbs usually do not require that their arguments be (in)definite [HUDDLESTON & PULLUM 2002 : 358]. As a possible compromise, some grammarians have suggested that in structures such as [*the book*], the article and the noun *both* designate the same entity as the whole NP, so that *both* may be considered as heads (e.g. LANGACKER [1991 : 142 *sq.*], CROFT [2001 : 257 *sq.*]). This again suggests that there is only a graded distinction between determination and apposition. From that point of view, dual functioning items like *this, some, any, no/none* have essentially the same (pro)nominal meaning in both their conjoint and absolute uses, like *my/mine* (cf. §2.2). They are, in a very broad sense of the term, ‘nouns’.

The proposal to reclassify determiners as pronouns, rather than to reclassify pronouns as determiners, presents another advantage: when the words usually called determiners in English are examined, it appears that the vast majority of these items – technically an open-class if numerals are included – can also be used pronominally. As noted by Hudson [1990 : 269], only *four* of them seem to be limited to pronominal uses: *every* (unlike *each*), relative *whose* (unlike interrogative *whose*), and the articles *a(n)* and *the*. By contrast, the number of pronouns which cannot be used pronominally is proportionally much higher: neither can the personal pronouns (with the possible exception of *we* and pl. *you* under the determinative reading of *we/you men*), nor can the interrogatives *who* and *whom*, nor can the relatives *who* and *whom*, nor can the various kinds of compound pronouns (*someone, anything, nobody, himself, each other*, etc.). To that extent, it may seem more coherent and, at least, more economical to reclassify Ds as PRNs than to proceed the other way round: from a descriptive point of view, the number of untypical category members is kept to a minimum.

In addition, there are grounds for thinking that some of the remaining ‘exceptions’ may not, in fact, be exceptions at all. As regards *every*, this word



is rather strictly limited to pronominal uses, unlike other quantifiers.<sup>25</sup> This limitation might be due, at least partly, to the existence of a number of well-established pronominal alternatives, namely, the ‘indefinite’ pronouns *everyone*, *everybody*, *everything*, etc. Given that *every* is part of a class of quantifying items which may be used either pre- or pronominally, and notably given its semantic relation to *each* (etymologically contained in *every*), it may seem desirable that it should be treated like the other quantifiers – in this approach, as a pronoun.

The relative *whose* is usually taken to be the genitive form of the pronominal-only pronoun *who*, so that if *my/mine* is notably classified as a pronoun on account of the series *I*, *me*, *my/mine*, then *whose* might be expected to be a pronoun as well given the series *who*, *whom*, *whose* (but see §2.2) The relative *whose* is typically limited to pronominal uses in PDE but it could be used pronominally in earlier stages of English and it developed from the interrogative *whose*, which can still be used either pre- or pronominally: e.g. *Whose (books) are these?* Besides, the relative *whose* may not (yet) be entirely limited to pronominal uses PDE, although many speakers might find the following ‘partitive’ expressions unacceptable:

- (14) a. Baltazar told us of a man he knew, [a chicken of whose] had been stolen by a puma. (J. MEYERSON, *Tambo*, 1990)  
 b. I was going to visit Lucy, [a friend of whose] had told us of the accident [HUDDLESTON & PULLUM 2002 : 472].

As for the articles *a(n)* and *the*, there are also reasons to analyse them as pronouns. The first is historical: articles are often derived from pronouns, notably in Germanic and Romance languages. English *a(n)* is a weakened form of OE numeral *án* ‘one’ and *the* is ‘the reduced and flexionless stem of OE demonstrative *se*, *seo* (later *þe*, *þéo*), *þæt*’ (OED), from which PDE *that* also developed. The demonstrative ‘force’ of *the* may still be felt in expressions such as *nothing of the kind* or *something of the sort*. Many other English ‘determiners’ originated as pronouns, including the conjoint demonstratives, *wh*-words, and, of course, the weak personal possessives (cf. §1). In languages such as German and French, significant formal similarities may also be noted between articles and pronouns: e.g. Germ. *der / die / das* may be (in usual terms) a definite article, a demonstrative determiner, a demonstrative pronoun, or again a relative pronoun (e.g. *Der Mann, der den Wagen gekauft hat* ‘the man who bought the car’); Fr. *le / la / les* may be a

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<sup>25</sup> Absolute uses of *every* are certainly very untypical, but here is what seems to be one, found in the BNC: ‘I could have told you every single item of food I had in the cupboard [PAUSE] every, down to the last bean!’

definite article or a personal pronoun (e.g. *la voiture* 'the car' / *je la regarde* 'I'm looking at her/it'). It is precisely because the articles are reduced forms, both phonologically and semantically, that they are intrinsically dependent and clitic-like. A way of integrating the articles into the pronoun category is then to analyse them as weak forms with phonologically strong pronominal counterparts, as in the case of *my/mine* and *no/none*, for example. As regards the indefinite article, pronominal *a(n)* seems to be completed by pronominal *one*: e.g. *Do you want [a cookie / one]*?<sup>26</sup> The case of the definite article is more complex. The demonstratives *this* and *that* might be regarded as the strong counterparts of *the*, but the distributions of *the* and *this/that* are not complementary, while those of the other weak/strong couples are. Assuming that 1st and 2nd-person, but not 3rd-person pronouns, can be used pronominally, Hudson [1984] argues that the definite article is in fact in complementary distribution with *it* and *they*: e.g. *Where is [the / \*it] book?* / *Where is [\*the / it]?* This idea is also proposed by Panagiotidis [2002], although one may wonder why the hypothesis is not extended to all 3rd-person pronouns (e.g. *Where is [the teacher / (s)he]?* / *Where are [the books / them]?*). Using similar arguments, but further considering phonological differences, Lyons [1999 : 27 sq.] proposes a more elaborate account: 'the third-person pronouns *he, she, it, they*, when unstressed, represent pronominal forms of the definite article, but in addition some of them, when stressed, also represent forms of a demonstrative'.

As a final note, the general reclassification of determiners as pronouns is not necessarily compromised by the persistence of one or a few 'pronominal-only pronoun(s)'. A small number of untypical members in a linguistic category is not unexpected, particularly so in a prototype model of categories. To take just a couple of examples from other English word-classes, English adverbs are, as a general rule, invariable, but a very few nonetheless have inflectional comparative and superlative forms (e.g. *soon, late*). Similarly, English adjectives may, as a general rule, be used either attributively or predicatively, but here again, a few adjectives are predicative-only (e.g. *asleep, afraid, amiss*), while a few others are attributive-only (e.g. *former, utter, and late* in the sense of 'deceased'). Exceptionless linguistic categories or rules are seldom, if ever, encountered – or, to quote E. Sapir's [1921] famous pronouncement, 'all grammars leak'.

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<sup>26</sup> This pronominal variant of *one* must notably be distinguished from its 'nominal' variant in which *one* is equivalent to an N or N', but not a full NP: e.g. *the blue one / the one I like*.

#### 4. Summary and conclusion

The English personal possessives originated as genitive case-forms of the Old English personal pronouns. Each of the latter had only one genitive form, which could have both conjoint and absolute uses. Over time, a formal distinction was progressively established between the conjoint and absolute possessives, resulting in the modern distinction between *my* and *mine*, *your* and *yours*, etc. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the advent of distributional linguistics led to a cleavage of the possessives into (weak) determiners and (strong) pronouns, which may be observed in many English grammars and dictionaries. However, several factors, including distributional ones, suggest that at some level of analysis weak *his*, strong *his* and also basic genitives like *John's (car)* should all be treated alike, as possessive or genitive expressions. Adopting the DP analysis, many generative grammarians have proposed that such expressions are determiners or determiner phrases which occur as specifiers in DPs headed by a null possessive determiner. That analysis, however, raises various issues, beginning with the validity of the notion 'specifier'. By contrast, the more common analysis of *my/mine*, *your(s)*, etc. as pronouns seems rather well motivated, not only historically, but also grammatically and semantically: *his (car)* and *John's (car)* are both nominal expressions.

A unitary analysis of the personal possessives in turn raises the issue of whether determiners should be distinguished from pronouns at all, since most of the items concerned have both conjoint and absolute uses. A number of generative grammarians have proposed to reclassify pronouns as determiners, but there is little convincing evidence for analysing *I* and *they* as determiners, whether in the NP or DP analysis. Instead, there are reasons to think that the words usually called determiners are, like *my/mine*, nominal expressions. If determiners and pronouns are to be reunited into a single word-class, it seems preferable to reclassify determiners as pronouns than to proceed the other way round for a variety of reasons – distributional, semantic, historical, and methodological. Over the centuries, however, the items that may be used both pre- and pronominally have been the object of constant reanalyses and reclassifications and the debate is certainly far from being closed.

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