

## Stages in deflexion and the Norwegian dative

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### **Abstract:**

The four cases of Old Norse were lost in Norwegian during the Late Middle Ages. The present paper examines what happened in more detail, aiming to sort out discernible stages in the deflexion process and suggesting a relative and absolute chronology. Some Modern Norwegian (and Swedish) dialects still retain a dative case, which in itself shows that case inflection did not simply disappear. Two main phenomena will be discussed here: a) Former genitivegoverning prepositions are increasingly found with dative complements, showing that the genitive was lost as a lexical case; and b) changes in the paradigm of some pronouns and especially the demonstrative *þessi* ‘this’ indicate that marking the dative remained decisive. It thus seems that Norwegian at one stage, presumably much more widely than in present dialects, had a two-case system where dative was the only marked alternative.

**Keywords:** morphological case, case loss, Norwegian, structural vs. lexical case.

### **1 Introduction**

During the Middle Ages the mainland Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish) underwent a series of morphological changes which can be subsumed under the notion ‘deflexion’, the loss of inflectional morphology. The four-case system of Old Norse (ON) was simplified and case eventually disappeared completely as a morphological category in mainland Scandinavian, except for pronouns. So the usual story goes, an example of what Lass (1997: 288) calls a macro-story, the comparison of language stages A and B. However, this was not a clear-cut development where all cases simply disappeared in a uniform fashion. And it is of the utmost theoretical importance to map out the path from A to B in more detail and tell the ‘micro-stories’ as well. This is an attempt in that direction.

#### *1.1 Aims and objectives*

Some dialects in both Norway and Sweden have preserved the dative case to this very day; note, however, that in nouns this only applies to definite forms (see Reinhammar 1973 for an overview). There are even instances of dative where ON had genitive or, more rarely, accusative. The dative was more wide-spread earlier (Reinhammar 1973: 24–26), and perhaps even a general intermediate stage in the morphological simplification throughout the language area. This points to the relative chronology of the deflexion process, and changes in case government in the written sources may provide an absolute dating.

This paper concentrates on two phenomena: First, some ON prepositions governed the genitive. During the Late Middle Ages, however, they may be found with

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complements in other cases, a clear sign that the genitive is losing ground as a lexical case (see §2.1 on case analysis and the terminology employed here). Second, changes in the paradigm of the demonstrative *þessi* ‘this’ imply that the dative form remained distinct after the case system had started to change and other forms in the paradigm merged, and some pronominal datives deriving from genitives also show that the development was more complex than just loss of case.

The evidence presented here suggests that the genitive was lost or merged with the dative at an early stage in the deflexion process. When nominative and accusative later merged, this led to a two-case system; a system which is typologically slightly unusual, yet has parallels in other Germanic languages. The examples here are drawn from Norwegian, with some comparison with Swedish and Faroese; the general idea should in any case apply also to Swedish dative dialects. The deflexion happened earlier and left fewer traces in Danish, which will not be considered here.

## **2 Theoretical and methodological considerations**

### *2.1 Case analysis*

This paper presupposes a distinction between two types of case, which are here termed *structural* and *lexical*. These terms are also used in generative grammar, albeit with theoretical implications not intended here. Although some kind of such distinction is frequently assumed (or even taken for granted), it is understood in various ways depending on one’s theoretical stance and under a number of notions (Blake 2001: 31–33; Barðdal 2011: 621–623). The concepts are not universal, though, and Barðdal (2011) refutes the distinction between lexical and structural case as a “false dichotomy” (see further §5.3). The usage here is intended to be fairly theory-neutral, and ‘lexical case’ will be understood as case governed by a lexical head rather than by the syntactic structure (cf. e.g. Booij 2007: 105; nominative may also be used as a citation form without syntactic context).

The distinction is not always clear-cut, and “it is common for a syntactic [= structural in my terminology] case to encode a semantic relation or role that lies outside of whatever syntactic relation it expresses” (Blake 2001: 32). It may thus be useful to talk about structural and lexical *use* of cases, as opposed to structural and lexical cases as such. The dative can be considered a structural case when it encodes the indirect object of ditransitive verbs as ‘to give’ (Booij 2007: 103–104), and the genitive clearly depends on the syntactic structure in its prototypical function as marking a possessor or a dependency relation more widely (Booij 2007: 106). Nonetheless, both the genitive and the dative are also used lexically for the direct object of certain two-place verbs and the complement of some prepositions. This differs from the regular assignment of nominative and accusative in a subject–object relation, and “stands in clear contrast to the dative case on indirect objects” (Butt 2006: 69). The genitive was used in a wide range of constructions in ON (Toft 2009 discusses adnominal and adverbial constructions), but we will here restrict ourselves to the fate of the genitive governed by prepositions.

The genitive case has survived in some Scandinavian varieties, as the old genitive ending *-s* of some declensions is now used as a phrase-final possessive clitic, which should not be analysed as a case ending on synchronic grounds (compare the same ending in English). Lexical genitive, on the other hand, has been lost or replaced by the dative. The fact that the two types of case develop along different lines adds empirical support to the claim of such a distinction.

## 2.2 Methodological considerations

I compare the relatively well-known situation in Old Norse with what is known from conservative dialects, and then try to trace the morphological changes in medieval sources. Some knowledge of the source situation is necessary in order to understand the methodological choices.

The only extant Norwegian texts from the Late Middle Ages (usually dated to 1350–1536) are charters, legal documents in a wide sense, often dealing with land trade; there are also a few cadastres, lists of land and revenue. These texts are highly stereotypical with many formulaic expressions which may conserve older constructions and linguistic forms. They also suffer from a fairly restricted vocabulary. From around 1500 Danish replaced Norwegian as the written language in Norway, and for the following period we have hardly any Norwegian texts at all. The source situation in Sweden is in this respect much better, which may explain why more research has been done on Swedish.

There are no good corpora of late medieval Norwegian. The edition *Diplomatarium Norvegicum* (DN) is available online, but only in html format (i.e. plain text). It is possible to search for text strings, but as there is no tagging or normalisation the notoriously variable spelling of medieval scribes makes searching difficult. This situation makes quantitative methods unfeasible – there is a lot of manual counting to be done for dubious benefits, as many occurrences may be considered fixed or lexicalised phrases. Therefore, I give representative examples from the medieval sources with no attempt at quantifying in absolute numbers. This will suffice to illustrate the theoretical discussion here.<sup>1</sup>

## 3 Prepositions governing the genitive

A few prepositions governed the genitive in ON and still do so in Icelandic. The most common of these are *til* ‘to’ and *millum* ‘between’.<sup>2</sup> There are some residual expressions in Norwegian which bear witness to the old genitive, like dialectal *sin(s)imellom* (cf. Swedish *sinsemellan*) ‘amongst themselves’ from ON *sín í millum*, where *sín* is the genitive form of the reflexive pronoun; Aasen (1864: 162) gives additional examples. There are also many expressions with *til* + indefinite noun + *-s* that are often called old genitives, like those in (1a). However, the nouns in (1b) had genitive endings *-ar* or *-r* in ON.

- (1) a. *til fjells/havs/lands/råds*  
to mountain/sea/land/advice
- b. *til fots/sengs*  
to foot/bed

Examples like (1b) may be explained by spread of *-s* (originally the genitive ending of most strong masculine and neuter nouns) to new declensions before the genitive was lost, but this does not seem to be attested in the sources (cf. Norde 1997: 225 on Swedish). A new genitive in *-s* is mostly restricted to strong masculine nouns with other endings, such as the consonant stem *faðir* ‘father’ (Noreen 1923: § 420 Anm. 2), and also “double” genitives like *sonars* ‘SON.GEN’ and *staðars* ‘stead.GEN’ with *-s* added to the original ending *-ar* (Larsen 1897: 245). I thus conclude that the forms in (1b) are analogical formations, not genitives (cf. Reinhammar 1992: 512–513). Note, however, that e.g. \**til bils* ‘to car’ is

1 See Berg (2015) for a more detailed treatment of both historical examples and modern dialect data.

2 Both derive from nouns, which then explains the genitive originating in an adnominal construction. The origin of *til* meant ‘goal’, cf. German *Ziel*. *Millum* is an old dative plural of a word ‘middle’, singular (*á/i*) *milli* is also found; Modern Norwegian (*i*)*mellom*. The various forms are reflected in the examples.

ungrammatical in modern Norwegian, so the pattern is not productive any more.

Except for such expressions, *millum* and *til* govern the dative in the dialects where this is possible, as in (2), taken from Aasen (1864: 295).

- (2) a. midt imillom hus-om  
mid between house-PL.DAT.DEF  
“right between the houses”  
b. heim til born-om  
home to children-PL.DAT.DEF  
“home to the children”

However, whereas *millum* generally governs the dative, the case government of *til* is more complicated than implied by the statements of e.g. Aasen (1864: 295) and Sandøy (2012: 328). First, residual genitives have already been mentioned; and second, the dative dialects have to a large degree replaced *til* with other prepositions, especially *åt* (which governs the dative), making examples of *til* + definite noun (where the dative has overt marking) fairly rare (Reinhammar 1992: 514–515). Nevertheless, *til* does occur with dative complements, especially words denoting persons as in (2b).

The apparent lack of *til* + dative in many dative dialects thus seems to be at least partly a consequence of the loss of the preposition itself, and it is a reasonable assumption that *til* followed the same path as *millum* and took dative complements at some stage in the historical development.

### 3.1 Medieval examples

Examples showing that the genitive is losing ground occur from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards, as mentioned rather generally by early scholars like Larsen (1897: 245) and Hægstad (1902: 24). Focussing explicitly on the prepositions here, the initial stage of change is evidenced by lack of case agreement and accusative forms, as in (3).<sup>3</sup>

- (3) a. millom sokna prest-Ø ydhar-n sira Erik-s ok yder (DN I 593, 1404)  
between parish priest-ACC you.PL-ACC, sira Erik-GEN, and you.PL.ACC/DAT  
“between your parish priest, sir Erik, and you”  
b. til nokor-n skadh-a (DN I 544, 1394)  
to any-ACC damage-OBL<sup>4</sup>  
c. mellom adernempd-an Haquon (DN I 699, 1424)  
between foresaid-ACC Håkon

In (3a) *millom* has an accusative complement, yet the apposition is in the genitive; the pronoun *yder* (ON *yðr*) has ACC/DAT syncretism. The demonstrative *nokorn* (3b) and the adjective *adernempdan* (3c) are both in the accusative. Gjøstein (1934: 126–127) gives many more examples of *til* + accusative, mostly from the period 1380–1400. The MASC.SG of adjectives and determinatives is unambiguously marked with the *-(a)n* ending, and such examples are therefore preferred here. The old accusative often survives as the base form

3 Only relevant forms are glossed; glossing is generally kept to a minimum and full translation only given when the meaning may be unclear. Nouns of declensions without a separate dative form are not marked for case. Examples from DN (*Diplomatarium Norvegicum*) are given with volume (Roman numerals) and text number, with the date of the text added.

4 Weak nouns (like *skad̄i*) have a syncretic oblique form (e.g. *skad̄a*), i.e. distinctions between the oblique cases are not morphologically marked. They are therefore glossed as OBL, since these distinctions are exactly what interests us here.

in modern Norwegian (e.g. *prest* ‘priest’ in (3a)), and many examples termed “accusative” in the literature may just as well represent a system with no case inflection at all; cf. the discussion by Norde (2001: 250–254).

From around 1400 onwards there are also examples with the dative, as those given in (4).

- (4) a. til þy merkebol-e (DN IV 687, 1398)  
to that.DAT property-DAT  
b. till þæima dagh (DN XXIII 66, 1399)  
to this.DAT day  
c. allt þat sem mellom þeim hafde farit (DN II 578, 1404)  
all that which between them.DAT had passed

Both the demonstrative and the noun in (4a) have dative forms, but only the demonstrative in (4b). However, forms like *dagh* with no ending instead of the older *degi* in MASC.SG.DAT are known already in ON (Noreen 1923: § 358, 3). Many of the oldest examples are pronouns like (4c), which may also represent a change in the pronoun system, rather than case government (cf. Gjølstein 1934: 122). What eventually happened with the pronouns was a restructuring of the system where the old dative form took on a general oblique meaning, except in dialects where a dative form was retained as such.

It should be noted that *theirra millum* ‘them.GEN between’ is a very common phrase in the charters and occurs throughout the Middle Ages. However, late occurrences should be considered lexicalised, as we do find evidence of change even in this phrase, e.g. (4c). Consider also that Faroese still has *teirra millum*, although the genitive case is generally lost (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 178).

Throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century we continue to find dative forms, also of nouns, as in (5).

- (5) a. till fulned-e (< ON *fullnaði*; AB: 188, c. 1433)  
to fullness-DAT  
“completely”  
b. mellom henne oc hennar twem systr-om (DN I 985, 1495)  
between she.DAT and her two.DAT sisters-DAT

(5b) makes a distinction between the possessive *hennar* and the pronominal dative *henne*, which in some texts have the same form (because of vowel reduction and loss of final *-r*, see §3.2); in *twem systrom* both the numeral and the noun have traditional dative forms.

Cadastres often mention how some land was acquired, as in (6). Examples (6a) and (6b) are written on the same sheet of paper in 1501 and added to an older cadastre for the Nidaros archdiocese.

- (6) a. gaff domkirkio-nne i øres leigho (AB: 15, 1501)  
gave cathedral.OBL-the.DAT 1 øresleige [an amount]  
b. gaff til domkirkio-nne sin jordh Borga (AB: 15, 1501)  
gave to cathedral.OBL-the.DAT her land Borg

(6a) has an indirect object, (6b) a prepositional phrase; both have the beneficiary *domkirkionne* ‘the cathedral’ in the dative and the two ways of expressing the same meaning were ostensibly equivalent. Norde (1997: 151) mentions similar constructions with the verb *gifa* ‘give’ in Swedish, and the parallel expressions may be the explanation: The semantic role beneficiary should always be in the dative, even though *til* used to govern the genitive.

### 3.2 Morphosyntactic or phonological change?

Some of the possible examples are inconclusive, as it might be difficult to distinguish between morphosyntactic and phonological change. Several phonological changes left the genitive and dative forms similar or even identical. Consider (7):

- (7) til æfenligh-ri æigh-u (DN XIII 16, 1341)  
to eternal-? ownership-OBL

The adjective looks like the ON dative *æfinligri*, yet may stem from genitive *æfinligrar* with loss of final /r/ and reduction of unstressed /a/ to schwa. Both changes are well attested in Norwegian and this explanation is favoured by Seip (1955: 305) and Gjøstein (1934: 117); they then explain the final <i> as influence from the preceding vowel. In such cases one needs to consider the orthography of the entire text. The one in question has no other example of complete reduction of /a/ (only partial reduction, written <æ>) or loss of final /r/. This should indicate that *æfenlighri* is indeed a dative form, as it would be a strange coincidence for two general phonological changes to be expressed only in this particular word. The phrase in (7) is very common and similar examples abound. Note also that (7) is earlier than the examples given as (3–4) above on replacement of the genitive, and will thus give an earlier dating of the change if it is accepted as a genuine example of dative.

I have here only given a few examples, but it does seem that as long as we have a case-marking written Norwegian language (i.e. until it was replaced by Danish around 1500), we find dative forms replacing older genitives after *til* and *millum*. And this system is intact when we get dialect data 350 years later.

## 4 Demonstratives and pronouns

### 4.1 The demonstrative *sjá/þessi*

Changes in the paradigm of the demonstrative *sjá* or *þessi* ‘this’ may also shed some light on the status of the case system. The old nominative *sjá* is hardly found in charters, and disappears from Norwegian manuscripts as well towards 1300 (Rindal 1987: 86). The singular paradigm around 1300 is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Singular paradigm of *þessi* ‘this’ c. 1300

	MASC	FEM	NEUT
NOM	þessi	þessi/þessur	þetta
ACC	þenna	þessa	þetta
DAT	þessum/þeima	þessa(r)ri	þessu/þvísa
GEN	þessa	þessa(r)rar	þessa

Some of these forms are peculiar to Norwegian and not common in Old Icelandic, such as FEM.SG.NOM *þessur*, an analogical formation based on *nǫkkur* ‘some’ and *ǫnnur* ‘other’ (feminine forms of *nǫkkurr* and *annarr*, respectively). The datives *þeima* and *þvísa* show the origin in the demonstrative *sá* ‘that’ with an added particle (to *þeim* and *því* respectively); *þeima* is also the dative plural of all genders. Neuter *þvísa* disappears after

1300, with late examples in 1320 and 1327 (DN I 160 and I 193). Masculine *þeima* disappears a hundred years later, the last examples known to me are from 1414 and 1418 (DN VI 390 and I 657). In what seems like a standard paradigmatic levelling process these forms are replaced by *þessum* and *þessu* with the stem *þess-* and endings from the strong adjectival inflection. Notice that we saw an example of *til þeima* above (4b), which indicates that the changes in case government preceded the disappearance of the form itself.

One might expect that the levelling process would continue; however, it is actually the odd form out, MASC.SG.ACC *þenna*, that starts spreading. Around 1400 *þenna* (often written *thenne*) replaces the older forms in MASC.SG.NOM and FEM.SG.NOM/ACC; an early example is FEM.SG.NOM *þenne* (DN II 412, 1370). The new form apparently spread from Sweden (possibly Denmark, but Swedish influence was generally stronger at that time) and is first found in royal charters. Singular *þessi* is occasionally found well into the 15<sup>th</sup> century, but may be copied from older charters and soon become rarer than forms with *þenn-*. The development of *þessi* can be seen as part of the more general merger of nominative and accusative which took place in other parts of the inflectional system during the 15<sup>th</sup> century and left a paradigm with a common nominative/accusative form as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Singular paradigm of *þessi* ‘this’ c. 1500

	MASC	FEM	NEUT
NOM/ACC	thenne	thenne	thette
DAT	thessom	thessa/-o	thesso

Table 2 also includes the change from <þ> to the digraph <th> reflecting scribal practice. The genitive is left out as it was probably restricted to fixed phrases by 1500; there are in any case few examples of what would have been in the genitive according to ON grammar. However, some texts retain a dative form with the *thess-* stem, which has survived into modern dialects. Pettersen (1991: 405), for instance, finds only *thess-* in western Norwegian texts from 1450–1500.

Interestingly, the feminine dative form is usually a short one identical to the neuter, rather than the older and longer *þessari* (cf. Table 1). There are examples of dative *þessari* until 1440, all the last ones from the Gudbrandsdal area which still has a fairly archaic dialect. There is considerable variation in the final vowel, which is probably at least in part a written phenomenon. Consider the examples given in (8), all with feminine nouns after prepositions that govern the dative, with three different final vowels in *thess-*:

- (8) a. hia thessa minn-e gerdh (DN V 609, 1432)  
with this.DAT my-DAT decision
- b. j moth thesso gafw-o (DN IV 928, 1452)  
against this.DAT gift-OBL
- c. med þessæ skilgrein (DN IV 936, 1456)  
with this.DAT understanding

The spread of *thenne* strengthened the opposition between a syncretic nominative/accusative form and a separate dative form, making the distinction rely on different stems rather than different endings, endings which in many dialects were prone to phonological reduction. When stem suppletion became the main marker of the dative, the ending became redundant. This may be the reason for the new short form and the

different vowel endings in FEM.SG.DAT.

The development of *þessi* shows paradigmatic changes which worked to make the dative form distinct and demonstrates the importance of the dative case in the inflectional system at that time. Notice also that the new dative forms made the paradigm more unlike that of *þen* ‘that’ (which replaced older *sá*).

#### 4.2 Feminine possessives and pronouns

Dative forms of some personal pronouns and possessives in modern dialects derive from old genitive forms. Clear examples are the pronouns *henna* and *henner* ‘her’, both from ON genitive *hennar*. *Henna* is the dative form e.g. in Romsdal, where ON final vowels were reduced to schwa, but preserved before consonants like final /r/, which was itself subsequently lost. *Henna* must thus derive from genitive *hennar*, not from dative *henni*, which should have given /hɛɲe/ by regular sound change (Sandøy 2012: 320). This was first pointed out by Mo (1917) in the dialect of Rindal (Møre og Romsdal county); Mo also demonstrated that the same argument is valid for feminine dative forms of possessives, e.g. *mina*, *sina* ‘my, her (reflexive)’: In dialects with reduction or apocope of final vowels these forms must stem from the ON genitives *minnar*, *sinnar*, where /a/ was protected by the final /r/. Masculine forms, on the other hand, are mostly the old datives, e.g. *mino(m)* < ON *mínum*, with or without loss of final /m/ in various dialects.

This points to a merger of cases rather than the mere loss of genitive. The reason why the old genitive forms were selected may be that they were more distinct. This is the same argument as the one usually brought forth to explain why dative is only marked on definite forms in modern dialects.

In south-eastern Norway final /r/ is preserved, but all unstressed vowels reduced to schwa, which gives *hennar* > *henner* (Larsen 1917), used as an oblique form in a nominative–oblique distinction similar to plural *vi* – *oss* ‘we – us’. This development is best explained by an intermediary stage where *henner* became the dative form and subsequently oblique through a merger of accusative and dative which is typical for the pronoun system. Although the dialects with *henner* are outside the modern dative area, there is thus reason to believe they also had a two-case system at some historical stage. Today, *henner* has in some dialects been re-analysed as an emphatic form which can also be used in subject position in a system without case distinction even in third person pronouns. The old genitive form has then made a full cycle into a subject position formerly reserved for the nominative.

### 5 Discussion

The examples above have shown various instances of the dative replacing the genitive, and some where genitive forms survived as datives. Although not included in the present discussion, verbs which used to take direct objects in the genitive are now similarly found with dative objects in some dialects (Reinhammar 1973: 158–164). Together, this points to a more large-scale merger of the two cases, where lexical genitives were replaced by datives; i.e. lexical case became identical to the dative. Possessive genitives, on the other hand, remained in use, although -s became the sole genitive ending and was eventually re-analysed as a phrase-final clitic rather than a case ending.

Examples of accusative for genitive suggest that the genitive was the first case to be lost. It is at this point interesting to compare with the development in Faroese: Faroese is still at the stage Norwegian reached around 1400, with nominative, accusative and dative, but no (productive) genitive (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 61–62, 433–434). The merger of

nominative and accusative has never taken place there, as it did in Norwegian.

There was probably a difference between nouns and other word classes, as especially some determinatives are inflected for accusative also in texts that make no distinction in nouns, which often had *NOM/ACC* syncretism already in ON. Weak nouns distinguished between a nominative and an oblique form in ON, both ending in a vowel. During the Late Middle Ages there was an increasing tendency to write all final vowels as <e> due to Danish influence, making potential case distinctions hard to trace in the written sources.

### 5.1 *The marked case*

When the nominative and the accusative merged, the dative was left as the only *marked* case, whereas examples as (3) with accusative for genitive point to a situation with three cases. Again the picture emerging from the sources is in accordance with Faroese. There the old genitive prepositions now govern the accusative. Recall that there were such examples in Norwegian as well (example (3) above). However, when the nominative and accusative merged in Norwegian, dative became the only marked (non-nominative) alternative. As this merger did not take place in Faroese, the accusative remained a marked alternative in that language. As a general exception *til* is still found with old genitive forms of place names (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 179). A similar phenomenon, where *til* occurs with former genitive forms of farm names, is also found in my own dialect (Meldal, Sør-Trøndelag county) and surrounding areas.

A prime example of dative as the marked case is appositions to possessive phrases, which may be in the dative both in medieval texts and modern dialects. Sandøy (2012: 321) gives a striking example from a modern dialect (9a), and similar constructions are reported by Mo (1917: 71). More general confusion of dative and genitive is also attested in medieval sources, as shown in (9b–c; 9b quoted from Larsen 1897: 247), and Larsen (1897: 246) claims that such examples are very common (“yderst almindelige”).

- (9) a. Ta her e båt'n hass Knut, sãn-a vår-e  
This here is boat-the his Knut, son-DAT our-DAT  
“this is the boat of Knut, our son”
- b. eruingi-um Karl-s Smidzsyn-i (early 15<sup>th</sup> c.)  
heirs-DAT Karl-GEN Smid's son-DAT  
“to the heirs of Karl, son of Smid”
- c. samtykt systræbarn-om þeiræ (DN III 864, 1464)  
consent sisters-children-DAT their  
“consent of their sisters' children”

Examples such as (9) show how dative came to be the sole alternative when something was to be morphologically marked. Norde (2001: 257–258) suggests that during the breakdown of the case system prepositions could “take complements of whatever case that still happened to be marked inflectionally”, by what she calls “the principle of formally marked grammatical relations”. This is a way of accounting for such apparent mix-ups in case agreement as (9) and (3a) above. However, the genitive was still formally marked by the suffix *-s* and should by this explanation be possible. The only way to account properly for the facts is thus to assume an early loss of lexically governed genitive and the identification of lexical case with the dative.

### 5.2 *A two-case system*

After the loss of the genitive and the subsequent merger of nominative and accusative

Norwegian had a two-case system, and it might not be appropriate to use the term ‘dative’ at all. In two-term case systems terms such as ‘default case’ and ‘marked case’, or ‘direct’ and ‘oblique’, are more common (Arkadiev 2009). This would in my opinion be most suitable from a purely synchronic point of view. Indeed, there is some tradition in Norwegian dialectology for using *sideform* ‘side form’ instead of dative. Nonetheless, the modern marked case is clearly descended from the ON dative: The forms or formatives are usually the same or explainable by regular sound change, with the exception of the mentioned pronouns deriving from genitive forms. And its functions remain by and large the same, i.e. as indirect object, direct object of certain verbs, with certain adjectives, and as complement of some prepositions, e.g. in the very typical dative–accusative alternation with spatial prepositions, which is now a dative–nominative alternation.

This system is typologically somewhat puzzling, although not without parallels (Næss 2009: 578). The marked alternative in a two-case system usually covers a wide semantic field and take on rather diverse functions (Blake 2001: 156), whereas the Scandinavian dative is used more or less like the ON dative. Also, the nominative–accusative opposition is usually taken to be the most basic one in attempts at establishing case hierarchies, as those given by Blake (2001: 155–160), i.e. languages with a dative case will usually have an accusative as well. When case systems are simplified, the dative will usually take on the functions of the accusative, as happened in the Romance languages (Næss 2009: 575). Indeed, Norwegian pronouns developed in this fashion.

This typologically unusual two-case system does in fact have parallels elsewhere in Germanic. Even standard New High German has very few oppositions between nominative and accusative (at least if we leave out personal pronouns), and colloquial German has basically lost the genitive and is on the same typological stage as Faroese. Alemannic dialects of German have gone further and show a development similar to Norwegian dialects, resulting in a two-case system (Seiler 2003: 223–227). Wipf (1908: 119) even reports similar examples of old FEM.SG.GEN pronominal forms being used as datives in a Swiss German dialect.

### 5.3 *Lexical and structural case again*

Barðdal (2011: 627) sets up three predictions from the lexical vs. structural case dichotomy, and as they are not borne out in Icelandic she refutes the dichotomy altogether and claims that all case is lexical. Barðdal discusses verbal arguments in Icelandic and does not consider other types of case marking – indeed, since the theoretical concern is with core verbal arguments, such case marking is most widely studied (Butt 2006: 71; cf. that Toft 2009 also omits prepositional genitives).

Barðdal’s second prediction deals with language change and states that structural case should increase in frequency over time while lexical case should decrease in frequency since it should not be productive; this prediction does not hold for Icelandic (Barðdal 2011: 627, 633). Another prediction on language change might be that lexical case should be more vulnerable in processes of morphological simplification. And this actually seems to be the case in other languages which have developed from the same structure as Icelandic.

It is likely that the genitive continued to be used for marking possessive (syntactic) relations after it was lost as a lexical case, cf. Delsing (1999: 90) on Swedish: “attributive genitive is the only construction to survive [after c. 1300]”. It would be very difficult to explain all the genitive forms, especially of personal names (which abound in charters), in later texts otherwise. It should be noted, though, that even the possessive genitive is very rare in modern Norwegian dialects (it has now partly been reintroduced through Danish/bokmål, but that is another story).

Thus, the loss or retention of the genitive depended on its use as a lexical or structural case, and the internal chronology of the deflexion, with lexical genitive being lost first, adds empirical support to such a distinction. Furthermore, whereas lexical case marking in the dative dialects is retained with the dative replacing the genitive, structural genitive disappears, being replaced by other syntactic constructions (e.g. prepositional phrases or possessive pronouns instead of genitive to indicate possession). Since the fate of structural and lexical genitive is so different, I maintain that the distinction is useful.

## 6 Conclusion

Some modern dialects make a distinction between nominative and dative, a system that was geographically more widespread earlier. Written sources show the chronology in this development from the four-case system of Old Norse. From the late 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards we find accusative and dative replacing the genitive governed by prepositions, indicating that the genitive was lost as a lexical case. This loss was probably completed before 1400 in most of the language area.

Accusative for older genitive is mainly found before or around 1400; later, we find either uninflected forms or dative. This points to a subsequent merger of nominative and accusative, which took place during the 15<sup>th</sup> century and left dative as the only *marked* form. This led to a two-case system which, as shown by changes in the paradigm of *þessi*, was strong enough to reshape grammatical structure.

There were of course differences between innovative and conservative dialects, and the dates suggested here are rough approximations. There were also word-class differences, although I have not looked systematically at that yet. Nonetheless, I suggest that the relative chronology was the same throughout the language area, and that the two-case system was a general intermediate stage in Norwegian. Although the dative has been in gradual decline since the Middle Ages, this remains the system until the present day in some dialects.

Too little attention is paid to intermediate stages in standard accounts of language history – generally as well as in the history of Scandinavian specifically. This is unfortunate, both because the details of any linguistic change is theoretically interesting, and because features like the functions of the dative in modern dialects and lexical residues like the old genitive forms in dative function (e.g. *henna*) can only be explained by paying attention to the chronology of the morphological simplification. The deflexion process that started in part of the language area already in the High Middle Ages has not yet come to an end, and the final story in all its details is yet to be written.

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