

A Typologically Informed Analysis of Genitive of Negation in Early Germanic

The genitive of negation (GenNeg) is a typologically rare morpho-syntactic phenomenon (Miestamo 2014) whereby the direct object of a transitive verb and the subject of an existential verb receive the genitive case under negation. In Europe, the phenomenon is a common trait of the so-called “Circum-Baltic” area (Koptjevskaja-Tamm & Wälchli 2001), and, as such, it appears in various modern Balto-Slavic (BSl.) and Balto-Finnic (BFin.) languages (Arkadiev 2015). Historically, it was assumed that Old Church Slavonic texts of the 10th c. contained the first historical records of GenNeg (Lunt 1974). Recent investigations (Bucci 2020) showed, however, that traces of GenNeg can be found also in the *Gothic Bible* (1a), translated in the 4th c. CE (text attested from the 6th), as well as in other Early Germanic (EG) languages (7th-14th c. CE), such as Old High German, Old Dutch (1b), Old English, and Old Norse-Icelandic (1c).

- (1)
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|---|---|-----------|------------------|------------------|----------|------|
| a | ni | habaida | diupaizos | airpos | | |
| | NEG | have.PAST | deep.GEN | earth.GEN | | |
| | ‘it didn’t have deep earth’, Gothic (<i>Gothic Bible</i> , Mk. 4:5) | | | | | |
| b | an | arbeithe | manno | ne | sint | |
| | PREP | work.DAT | men.GEN | NEG | are.PRES | |
| | ‘there is nobody at work’, Old Dutch (<i>Altniederfränkische Psalmen</i> , Psalm LXXII) | | | | | |
| c | og | hafði | ekki | orða | við | hann |
| | and | have.PAST | NEG | words.GEN | with | with |
| | ‘and didn’t talk to him’ (lit. ‘had no of words with him’), Old Norse-Icelandic (<i>Grettis saga Asmundarsonar</i>) | | | | | |

It is not far-fetched to assume that GenNeg began spreading in the Baltic area before the Germanic *Völkerwanderung* of the 4th c. CE, when both Germanic and BFin. populations were in close contact, as suggested by a) numerous Proto-Germanic (PG) loanwords in BFin. (Kylstra & Sirkka-Liisa 1991), b) a common initial stress feature (Schrijver 2014), and c) other shared morphosyntactic phenomena, such as “genitive of quantification”, cf. Finn. *kolme pientä porsasta*_{part.sg} ‘three little pigs’, Russ. *pyat’ mal’chikov*_{gen.pl} ‘five boys’, Goth. *fimf þusundjos waire*_{gen.pl} ‘five thousand men’ (Lk. 9:14).

It can be further assumed that GenNeg did not enter in Germanic via BSl., since BSl. populations entered in contact with Germanic only after the Migration period (Germanic loanwords in Slavic are, indeed, either Gothic or Old High/Low German, Pronk-Tiethoff 2013). It follows that BSl. either already had GenNeg or acquired it after contact with BFin. languages from the 5th c. CE onwards (Veenker 1967). GenNeg seems therefore to have first been shared between Germanic and BFin. languages. GenNeg is a compulsory feature in modern BFin. languages (Lees 2015), but not in EG, where it is attested only in the ancient stages. Considerable variation is found, on the contrary, in BSl: GenNeg is obligatory in Polish (Przepiórkowski 2000) and Lithuanian (Arkadiev 2016), still productive in East Slavic (Timberlake 1986), and restricted to fixed and idiomatic expressions in Croatian (Browne 1993) and Latvian (Berg-Olsen 2009).

Under the hypothesis that GenNeg always follows the same diachronic cline (from obligatory to restricted, Kagan 2013), a typological comparison can contribute to our understanding of the GenNeg pattern in EG as well. This is exactly what this paper sets out to do. It will be discussed how GenNeg in EG languages appears in the same fashion as in BSl. languages with a restricted GenNeg, namely with possessive (1a,c) and existential (1b) expressions, as well as in emphatic (i.e. discourse motivated) environments. The paper argues further that GenNeg can be reconstructed for PG, and that its speakers might have contributed to the spread of the phenomenon in the Baltic area.

Keywords

Early Germanic languages, Negation, Case, Baltic area, Genitive of negation

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