

Possessive preproprial determiners in North-West British English

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1 Introduction

In North-West British English (NWBE), personal names are commonly preceded by a possessive pronoun, as in 1.

- (1) Our John came to visit yesterday.

This paper aims to characterise, analyse, and typologically situate this phenomenon. In outline, §2 demonstrates that possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE are restricted to kin, non-contrastive, and exclusive and ‘royally’ plural in the first person. The analysis in §3, framed in terms of Matushansky’s (2008) theory of proper names, treats NWBE possessive pronouns with personal names as preproprial determiners – special forms of the definite article particular to personal names, as in Catalan. The person of the possessive pronoun varies according to kinship, with the availability of third person restricted by the requirement to be anteceded by a logophoric perspective centre (Sells 1987). §4 considers the typological place of NWBE, whose possessive preproprial determiners evade the predictions of Longobardi’s (1994) theory of reference. §5 concludes.

2 Characterisation

This section details the empirical subject matter of the paper: possessive pronouns with personal names in North-West British English (NWBE). We begin in §2.1 by defining the dialect area for NWBE. §2.2 provides examples of possessive pronouns with personal names from popular culture. With help from one of these examples, §2.3 characterises the meaning of possessive pronouns with personal names. Finally, §2.4 notes a general restriction to first and second person.

* As a speaker of Standard Southern British English, I am very grateful for judgements on North-West British English to Carole Spry, Lauren Holmes, and Chris Hicks’ mum. Thanks to Tim Stowell for advising, and to attendees of UCLA SynSem and BLS 43 for comments and questions. All errors are mine. This research was supported by a Graduate Summer Research Mentorship award from the University of California, Los Angeles.

2.1 Dialect area

This paper assumes a dialect area for NWBE that covers parts of the North-West of England and Northern Ireland. In England, it comprises the urbanised south of the historic county of Lancashire – now the metropolitan counties of Merseyside, dominated by Liverpool, and Greater Manchester. Also included is Belfast in Northern Ireland. Strong ferry-based contact justifies considering these English and Northern Irish areas as one dialect area, despite the intervening Irish Sea.

2.2 Examples from popular culture

Elements of popular culture associated with the North-West exemplify the phenomenon of possessive pronouns with personal names.

(2) Liverpool

Our Cilla – Cilla Black, the late singer and *Blind Date* host.

(3) Bolton

R Wayne – talent show entrant in Peter Kay's *Britain's Got the Pop Factor... and Possibly a New Celebrity Jesus Christ Soapstar Superstar Strictly on Ice*.¹

(4) Belfast

“Did you hear about our John? He's a gay man now.” – catchphrase of comedienne Catherine Tate's character, John Leary's mum.²

(5) Greater Manchester

Peter Kay's Car Share, Episode 4:³

[John and Kayleigh are colleagues. John recently began giving Kayleigh lifts to work as part of a workplace car-share scheme. Last night Kayleigh went to a Beyoncé concert. Kelly is Kayleigh's cousin, whose emigration to Australia has been discussed before, but who John has never met.]

¹ Thanks to Chris Hicks for pointing me to this one.

² For many iterations of this catchphrase, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooWIoSwEsZo> [last accessed 13/04/2017]. A particularly clear example is at 3'51'' – 3'58''.

³ A preview of this episode, containing the quoted passage at 1'09'' – 1'18'', can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TNorOgFCkWM> [last accessed 13/04/2017].

Kayleigh: Our Kelly'll be well jeal[ous] when she finds out. She's always wanted to see [Beyoncé] – she loves her.

John: How is your Kelly getting on in Australia? Has she settled in yet?

2.3 Meaning

This subsection characterises the meaning of possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE. We will see that they are (i) restricted to kin; (ii) not contrastive; and (iii) exclusive and 'royally' plural in the first person. For elucidation, reference will be made to the transcript in 5.

First, the kin restriction: only the names of family members and very close friends (e.g. childhood friends, boyfriends and girlfriends) qualify to be preceded by a possessive pronoun. In 5, Kayleigh uses *our Kelly* to refer to her cousin Kelly. She could also have used *our Kelly* if Kelly was her aunt, sister, mother-in-law, best friend since childhood, etc. Equally, John uses *your Kelly* to refer to the kin of his interlocutor, despite not knowing Kelly himself. But as colleagues and car-sharers, Kayleigh and John would not speak of each other using *our/your*. Overall, possessive pronouns with personal names have some affective semantic content. That said, using a possessive pronoun is the default when referring to kin; pragmatic connotations arise far more from their absence. If Kayleigh referred to her cousin as simply *Kelly*, John would infer that she and Kelly had fallen out. Equally, if John referred to Kelly without *your*, then he would appear disengaged from the conversation. In sum, possessive pronouns with personal names are restricted to kin, but are also the default for kin, to the extent that they are more pragmatically powerful in their absence than their presence.

Second, possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE are not contrastive.⁴ In NWBE, a possessive pronoun does not alter the direct and unique reference of a proper name. The context in 5 contains no other Kelly, against whom Kayleigh's cousin Kelly is being contrasted. This is very different from standard English, where *our John* is strongly contrastive, requiring the discourse presence of another John associated with the addressee – *your John*.

⁴ Though the possessive pronoun may in part be spelling out the very weak contrast inherent in the direct reference of a name; i.e. the contrast between Kayleigh's friend Kelly, and all the other Kellys in the world.

Third, *our* can be exclusive and ‘royally’ plural with personal names in NWBE. In 5, the sphere of kinship for *our Kelly* is limited to Kayleigh, to the exclusion of her addressee John, who has never even met Kelly.⁵ Furthermore, first person plural *our* is not necessarily semantically plural – Kayleigh could be Kelly’s only cousin. Thus the first person plural has a ‘royal we’ flavour.⁶ Indeed, an only child could refer to their mother Mary as *our Mary*. That said, first person singular is possible – and more commonly used – within the nuclear family; a father might refer to his daughter as *my Jane*, or a wife to her husband as *my John*.

In sum, possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE are used only, and as a pragmatic default, with kin; are not contrastive, and are exclusive with a ‘royal we’ flavour in the first person plural. The next subsection shows further that possessive pronouns with personal names are generally restricted to first and second person.

2.4 Person restriction

Possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE are subject to a person restriction, as shown in 6. In general, the possessive pronoun may only be first or second person; third person is ungrammatical.

- (6) a. i. My John is a fine husband.
ii. Our Mary is hosting tonight.
b. Has your Mary been to visit lately?
c. *His/*Her/*Their Mary came to visit yesterday.

However, third person possessive pronouns are more acceptable in certain circumstances, such as in 7.

- (7) John_i said his_i Mary is coming at the weekend.

⁵ The plural is inclusive only by circumstance when speaker and addressee have the same kinship circle with respect to the referent.

⁶ The plural might not be ‘royal’ to the extent that *our* claims kinship on behalf of the speaker’s kinship group, rather than the speaker only – though NWBE speakers do not profess such an intuition.

The analysis developed in the next section will account for the general restriction to first and second person, and the nature of the third person exceptions, in terms of logophoricity (Clements 1975).

3 Analysis

This section analyses possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE as logophoric preproprial determiners; that is, logophoric (Clements 1975) D forms anteceded by a logophoric perspective centre (Sells 1987) particular to personal names (Matushansky 2008). The analysis is framed in terms of Matushansky's (2008) definite description theory of proper names. As outlined in §3.1, the semantics of proper names involves a naming convention R (Recanati 1997). The R in proper names can be reflected in a special, preproprial form of D. I justify analysing NWBE possessive pronouns with personal names as preproprial determiners in §3.2 by showing them to have the same distribution as preproprial articles in Catalan. In §3.3, I argue that NWBE motivates two advances beyond Matushansky's theory: a finer-grained R_0 , decomposed according to who bears responsibility for the naming convention R; and the logophoricity of R. §3.4 summarises.

3.1 Matushansky's theory of proper names

To analyse possessive pronouns with proper names in NWBE, I draw on Matushansky's (2006a, 2008, 2015) definite description theory of proper names. Proper names most often appear in argument position 8a, but can also appear in predicative position 8b.

- (8) a. Alice called this morning.
 b. Call me Alice.

Taking names in predicative position to be basic, Matushansky argues that proper names are two-place predicates. In addition to the standard individual argument slot, they have a second argument slot for the naming convention R (Recanati 1997). R relates an individual with the phonological string of a name. Thus the lexical entry for a name, e.g. *Alice*, is as in 9 (Matushansky 2008:592,ex.58).

- (9) $[[\text{Alice}]] = \lambda x \varepsilon D_e . \lambda R_{\langle e, \langle n, \langle \rangle \rangle} . R(x) (/æ\text{l}i\text{s}/)$
 where n is a sort of the type e (a phonological string).

First, Catalan preproprial articles and NWBE possessive pronouns are restricted to proper names of people 12a, 13a. They do not extend more broadly to proper nouns, such as local town names¹⁰ 12b, 13b.¹¹

- (12) a. i. En Pere ii. Na Maria
 b. (*En) Barcelona
- (13) a. i. Our Peter ii. Our Mary
 b. (*Our) Liverpool

Second, modifying a name with a restrictive relative clause disallows the special form 14a, 15a, forcing the use of the standard definite article 14b, 15b (cf. Matushansky 2006a:303f.,ex. 44).

- (14) a. *En Joan que coneixia ja no existeix. (Longobardi 1994:657,ex.93)
 b. El Joan que coneixia ja no existeix.
- (15) a. *Our John that I used to know no longer exists.
 b. The John that I used to know no longer exists.

Third, when names are pluralised the special form is disallowed 16a, 17a, forcing use of the standard generic article – definite in Catalan 16b, null NWBE 17b.

- (16) a. *Ens Peres són trempats. (cf. Longobardi 1994:656,ex.92)
 b. Els Peres són trempats.
- (17) a. *Our Peters are clever.
 b. Peters are clever.

¹⁰ The preproprial article is grammaticalised in some place names; e.g. Castellar de n'Hug, a municipality in Berguedà, Catalonia.

¹¹ Speakers of both Catalan and NWBE vary in their acceptance of the special preproprial form with pet names (i), probably correlating with their tolerance of its anthropomorphising connotations.

(i) a. % En Roc
 b. % Our Fido

Fourth, when names are in predicative position in an explicit naming construction (recall 8b), the special preproprial form is impossible.

- (18) Va resultar que *(en) Johnny el van anomenar *(en) Jonathan
go-3SG turn.out that the Johnny him go-3PL name the Jonathan

‘It turned out that Johnny had been named Jonathan.’ (Matushansky 2008:581,ex.21)

- (19) It turned out that *(our) Johnny had been named *(our) Jonathan.

Overall, NWBE possessive pronouns with personal names exhibit the same distribution as Catalan preproprial articles. This shared distribution justifies analysing NWBE possessive pronouns with personal names as preproprial forms, reflecting a relation between D and R₀ (Matushansky 2006a). The next subsection explores two ways that NWBE prompts further development of Matushansky’s theory

3.3 Decomposing R₀, and logophoricity

NWBE motivates two advances beyond Matushansky’s theory: first, a finer-grained R₀, decomposed according to who bears responsibility for the naming convention; and second, the logophoricity of R (Clements 1975).

First, I propose that possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE motivate a finer-grained distinction in Matushansky’s R₀ according to who bears responsibility, by virtue of kinship, for the naming convention in force between speaker and hearer. Recall from §2.4 that possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE are generally restricted to first and second person. In 6, repeated here, the relation between D and R₀ has a different morphological reflex according to which discourse participant is responsible for R₀: speaker R_S (*my/our*) 6a, or addressee R_A (*your*) 6b. This decomposition of R₀ will be further refined to include third parties R_T (*his/her/their*) 6c as we reconsider the status of third person in terms of logophoricity.

- (6) a. i. My John is a fine husband. ii. Our Mary is hosting tonight.
b. Has your Mary been to visit lately?
c. *His/*Her/*Their Mary came to visit yesterday.

Third person possessive pronouns are not outright ungrammatical with personal names in NWBE. Consider the minimal pair in 20. For sure, third person is ungrammatical out of the blue, as in 20a; but 20b is vastly improved, where *his* has the overt antecedent *John*.¹²

- (20) a. *His_i Mary came to visit yesterday. cf. 6c
 b. John_i said his_i Mary came to visit yesterday. = 7

However, having an antecedent is necessary but not sufficient for third person to be acceptable. Consider further the minimal pair in 21. In 21a, *speaking of* frames *Bill* as a topic, and the sentence is highly marked with *Bill* and *his* coindexed; whereas in 21b, *according to* imbues *Adam* with perspective over the main clause, and the sentence is grammatical.¹³

- (21) a. ??Speaking of Bill_i, his_i Mary is visiting at the weekend.
 b. ?According to Adam_i, his_i Mary is visiting at the weekend.

Considering the minimal pairs across 20 and 21 together, the unacceptable 20a and 21a lack a (perspective-bearing) antecedent for the possessive pronoun, which the much-improved 20b and 21b have. In 20a *his* lacks an antecedent altogether; while in 21a *Bill* is available as an overt antecedent, but – as a topic – lacks perspective. By contrast, *his* in 20b is anteceded by *John*, who takes perspective over the indirect statement; and in 21b by *Adam*, from whose perspective the main clause is reported. In sum, third person possessive pronouns are grammatical with personal names only if a logophoric perspective centre (Sells 1987) serves as their antecedent.

Since third person possessive pronouns can be grammatical with personal names, third party kinship responsibility for the naming convention R_T (*his/her/their*) should be added to our

¹² The data in 20 and 21 have the same status with *her* and feminine antecedents. However, *their* is ungrammatical in (ii), on either a gender-neutral third person singular reading, or ‘royal plural’ reading. *Their* is only grammatical with a plural, perspective-bearing antecedent, as in (iii).

(ii) *John_i said their_i Mary came to visit yesterday.

(iii) The Smiths_i / [Angie and Bob]_i said their_i Bella came to visit yesterday.

I have no explanation for why the ‘royal we’ reading should be possible with *our* + personal name, but an analogous ‘royal they’ reading is impossible with *their*.

¹³ For the contrast in perspectivisation in (21), consider the minimal pair in (iv) (Dubinsky and Hamilton 1998:688,ex. 15). *According to* makes *John* a perspective-bearer, which cannot serve as the antecedent for the antilogophoric epithet *the idiot*. *Speaking of*, by contrast, does not imbue *John* with perspective, leaving *John* free to serve as antecedent for *the idiot*.

(iv) a. *According to John_i, the idiot_i is married to a genius.
 b. Speaking of John_i, the idiot_i is married to a genius.

decomposition of R_0 . The fact that the grammaticality of third person is determined by logophoricity is easily reconciled with the grammaticality of first and second person: speaker and addressee are inherently logophoric as centres of perspective in the discourse. Overall, therefore, R is logophoric (Clements 1975): possessive pronouns are grammatical with personal names if they are anteceded by a logophoric perspective centre (Sells 1987).¹⁴

3.4 Summary

This section has analysed possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE as logophoric preproprial determiners. In terms of Matushansky's (2008) definite description theory of proper names, preproprial forms reflect a relation between D and R_0 – the contextually salient naming convention in force between the speaker and the hearer. This treatment was justified for NWBE on distributional grounds, by comparison with Catalan. Further, NWBE motivated two advances beyond Matushansky's theory. First, R_0 can be decomposed into R_S (*my/our*), R_A (*your*), and R_T (*his/her/their*), according to who bears kinship responsibility for the naming convention. And second, R is logophoric (Clements 1975), since responsibility for R_0 must lie with a logophoric perspective-bearing antecedent (Sells 1987).

In analysing possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE as preproprial determiners, we might expect to find typological similarities between NWBE and languages that allow definite articles in general, or preproprial forms in particular, with personal names. The next section identifies what those typological predictions might be, and considers why they are not borne out in NWBE.

4 Typology

This section considers how NWBE evades the typological predictions that arise from analysing possessive pronouns with personal names as preproprial determiners. §4.1 introduces Longobardi's (1994) theory of reference and the typological predictions it makes for languages that allow articles with proper names. In §4.2, we see that these predictions are not borne out for NWBE, whose preproprial determiners escape the parameters of Longobardi's typology.

¹⁴ Taking 'antecedence' literally would mean adopting a theory where speaker and addressee are syntactically represented – e.g. Speas and Tenny (2003), Wiltschko (2015).

4.1 Longobardi's theory of reference

Longobardi (1994, 2005, 2008) develops a Topological Mapping Theory (TMT) of reference – ‘topological’ in being a theory of the interpretation of nominals that makes exclusive reference to their structural position in DP. Thus TMT distinguishes between proper names, common nouns, and generics in terms of different interactions between D and N. With common nouns, N defines a range for the variable introduced by a substantive, referential D operator. With generics, D is not a substantive operator, leaving N to refer generically to the class or kind, rather than any specific instantiation of the class. With proper names, D is also not a substantive operator. Rather, to achieve direct reference, N has the strongest possible relationship with D, raising and substituting for it.¹⁵ N-to-D raising can occur either in the overt syntax, or covertly at LF.

The realisation of non-substantive D is parameterised. Since D comes to be identified with Person (Longobardi 2008), the parametric divide is between strong person languages and weak person languages.¹⁶ In strong person languages like Italian, all interactions between D and N must be overtly realised. In addition to substantive definite articles appearing with common nouns, non-substantive D is realised as an ‘expletive article’ with generics 22a, both (i) plural and (ii) mass; and with proper names 22b also (i), unless (ii) the name raises to D overtly.

- (22) a. i. *(I) castori sono mammiferi. (cf. Longobardi 1994:630,ex.39a,40a)
 the beavers are mammals
- ii. *(II) vino è fatto di uve.
 the wine is made of grapes
- b. i. *(II) mio Gianni (cf. Longobardi 1994:623,ex.28)
 the my John
- ii. Gianni mio

¹⁵ That proper names originate in N makes the spirit of Longobardi's theory compatible with Matushansky's definite description theory of proper names from §3.

¹⁶ And also, perhaps, languages in which Person is not grammaticalised at all, e.g. Japanese (Longobardi 2008).

In weak person languages like English, on the other hand, only substantive definite articles – i.e. those with common nouns – are overtly realised. Non-substantive D remains null with generics 23a, both (i) plural and (ii) mass, and with proper names 22b.

- (23) a. i. (*The) beavers are mammals.
ii. (*The) wine is made out of grapes.
b. (*The) John telephoned.

In sum, strong person languages demand that non-substantive D be realised, requiring expletive articles with both generics and un-raised proper names; whereas weak person languages do not realise non-substantive D, and so lack expletive articles with both generics and proper names. The next subsection attempts to situate NWBE in this typology.

4.2 The typological evasiveness of NWBE

Longobardi (1994:631f., note 28) claims that ‘no dialect of English appears to admit anything like *il Gianni*’ – i.e. expletive articles with proper names. However, NWBE *our John* does look somewhat like *il Gianni*. Moreover, §3 analysed possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE as preproprial determiners.

Perhaps, then, possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE are syntactically expletive, realising a non-substantive D. That would make NWBE a strong person language. In strong person languages, non-substantive D must always be realised, so we expect to find expletive articles with generics as well as proper names. Yet in NWBE, examples with generics 24a, both (i) plural and (ii) mass, and other proper names 24b are ungrammatical.

- (24) a. i. (*The/*Our) beavers build dams.
ii. (*The/*Our) milk is white.
b. (*The/*Our) Liverpool is a beautiful city. cf. 13b

The data in 24 show that NWBE, despite having possessive preproprial determiners, is not a strong person language. This breakdown in the predicted correlation between articles with proper names and with generics cannot be attributed to the form of the articles – i.e. that Italian expletive articles

have the same form as substantive articles *il*, whereas NWBE has special preproprial articles *our* vs. *the*. Returning to Catalan, which has special preproprial articles 25b, we also find expletive articles with generics 25a, both (i) plural and (ii) mass.

- (25) a. i. *(Els) tigres son mamífers.
the tigers are mammals
ii. *(La) llet es de color blanc.
the milk is of colour white
- b. i. En Pere ii. Na Maria =12a

To summarise, if NWBE possessive pronouns with personal names were, in Longobardi's sense, expletive articles, we would have expected to find expletive articles with generics, as in Italian and Catalan. We are left needing to reconcile our analysis of possessive pronouns with personal names as preproprial determiners with NWBE not being a strong person language.

As an avenue to reconciliation, consider that for NWBE and Italian to be comparable along the strong/weak person parameter would be to say that *our* is, like *il*, an expletive article. However, *our* is not semantically expletive, since it carries possessive and affective semantic content. Syntactically, too, there are structural differences between *our* and *il*, assuming that English possessive pronouns straddle spec-DP and D (Abney 1987; Matushansky 2006b). Therefore NWBE possessive preproprial determiners are not expletive in the sense relevant to Longobardi's typology.

Overall, despite having possessive preproprial determiners, NWBE is not a strong person language. The prediction that languages that allow articles before proper names require articles with generics is not borne out for NWBE. NWBE's preproprial determiners escape the parameters of Longobardi's typology by being neither expletive, nor unitary heads.

5 Conclusion

This paper set out to characterise, analyse, and typologically situate possessive pronouns with personal names in NWBE. We characterised possessive pronouns as being used only – and as a pragmatic default – with kin; not contrastive; exclusive with a ‘royal we’ flavour in the first person plural; and generally restricted to first and second person. We analysed NWBE possessive pronouns with personal names as logophoric preproprial determiners. Following Matushansky’s (2008) theory of proper names, we treated NWBE possessive pronouns as preproprial forms, as in Catalan, reflecting a relation between D and R₀ (Recanati 1997) – the contextually salient naming convention in force between speaker and hearer. Further, NWBE motivated the decomposition of R₀ into R_S (*my/our*), R_A (*your*), and R_T (*his/her/their*) according to who bears kinship responsibility for it; with the logophoricity (Clements 1975) of R requiring responsibility to lie with a logophoric perspective-bearing antecedent (Sells 1987), limiting the availability of third person possessive pronouns. Lastly, we considered the typological place of NWBE as a language with preproprial forms, but lacking articles with generics. NWBE is not subject to the prediction of Longobardi’s (1994) theory of reference that the two should pattern together, since NWBE possessive preproprial determiners are neither semantically expletive, nor syntactically unitary heads.

It is left to future research to consider the relationship between possessive pronouns with personal names and with common nouns. In NWBE, possessive pronouns are also used with common nouns such as *lad*, *mam*, or *kid* 26, though the kin restriction still holds.

(26) Manchester

Our kid – Oasis lead guitarist Noel Gallagher, with reference to younger brother and ex-bandmate Liam.

More broadly, it remains to explore links between NWBE and other English dialects. Possessive pronouns can be used with personal names in North-East English, where in Tyneside English the first person plural has the special form *wor* (Beal et al. 2012). Beyond possessive Ds with names, the definite article is more extensively used in extreme northern (Buchstaller and Corrigan 2015) and Celtic (Hickey 2007) varieties of English.

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