

# Prenominal and postnominal position of adjective attributes in Old Russian

Препозиция и постпозиция атрибутов в древнерусском языке

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This paper presents a survey of syntactic contexts favoring prenominal / postnominal placement of adjective attributes in Old Russian (focusing on possessives). The placement can be seen as conditioned by adjacent words or by constructions in which the noun phrase participates (including prepositional phrase). Yet such analysis by no means excludes more traditional motivation in terms of informational stress, but rather calls for further refinement of this motivation.

В статье рассматривается влияние синтаксического контекста на препозицию/ постпозицию атрибутов в древнерусском языке (в основном на материале притяжательных местоимений). Позиция атрибута коррелирует с ближайшим контекстом, с конструкциями, в которые включена именная группа (в том числе предложная группа). Однако такой анализ не исключает более традиционных объяснений порядка слов в терминах информационной структуры, а скорее требует дальнейшего уточнения этих объяснений.

## 0. Introduction

Modern Slavic languages mostly adhere to preposed adjectives, both in the strict sense ('descriptive' adjectives) and in a broader sense (including demonstratives, quantifiers, and possessives). We will term all these agreeing modifiers as *attributes*. The word order in nominal phrases admitted much more variation in medieval Slavic languages than it does in modern practice. The postnominal attribute placement in medieval languages was to some extent due to Greek and Latin syntax<sup>1</sup>.

Many studies of adjective placement have been focused on properties of information structure conditioning the order variation. The obvious problem is that the investigator cannot reliably extract from a manuscript source an author's intended emphasis. It is thus not surprising that the data allows for two contradictory analyses: (1) the prenominal position of at least some Old Russian (or Old Church Slavonic) attributes expressed emphasis or contrast (Delbrück 1900, 92; Berneker 1900, 108-109, 145; Lapteva 1959, 103-106; Worth 1982, 536; Nikolaeva 1986; Nikolaeva 1989, 131-132)<sup>2</sup>; or (2) the emphasized attributes were postposed (Borkovsky 1949;

Widnäs 1952, 43, 193). The difficulty in accounting for the meaning of the attribute position need not necessarily lead to “agnosticism” concerning such meaning or to the complete denial of any such meaning (as was expressed by V. Sannikov 1968, 62-64 and repeated in 1978, 174-175). Our position is that both statements do indeed originate from Old Russian data and that the underlying observations limited to specific facts are clear, but the generalized observations are misleading.

The approach adopted in the present study<sup>3</sup> differs from the above-mentioned explanations which assume that the attribute placement conveyed some invariant meaning. Our attitude is in line with the modern switch from modeling an invariant function of some grammatical category in a given language (for instance, modeling of Russian aspect) to analysis of different contexts and/or conditions of its use (see, *inter alia*, Dahl 2004, 83). Attribute placement is not a thing in itself, but rather a part of higher-level constructions.

Our study is mostly confined to the conditions overtly present in the texts. Within such an approach, the data is differentiated into groups depending on the relevant contexts. The main division is between simple and complex phrases. Simple phrases are simple noun phrases (those consisting only of two lexical items – noun and possessive) and simple prepositional phrases (simple noun phrase governed by a preposition); complex noun / prepositional phrases are those containing any extra-lexical material, with or without preposition. The linear order in simple noun phrases is sensitive to the conditions of the higher-level (clause) domain, and the linear order in simple prepositional phrases is conditioned by the preposition. Complex noun phrases, evidently, are then grouped by their inner structure.

Alternatively, the attested orders can be viewed as fixed strings of adjacent (structurally unrelated) words, in line with the view that it is rather co-occurrence paired with semantics than structural constituency that crucially determine the constructions (or, more radically, “that actually exists in language”; Bybee 2002, 130). As we limit our investigation to Old Russian, the pattern may even be generalized as “the modifier is placed close to the word X”. The effect can be compared to that of gravitation, though only to provide a technical metaphor. The discussion of the nature of these dependencies follows in the concluding section.

For example, attributes tend to adjoin prepositions, if present, while they can freely be postposed if there is no preposition (examples (1-2) are both taken from the birchbark letter № 531, dating from the beginning of the thirteenth century):

(1) *на мою сестроу* (prep + “my sister”)

(2) *сѣтроу мою*<sup>4</sup> (literally “sister my”)

The possessive is prenominal in the prepositional phrase (1) and postnominal otherwise (2).

Seen from the perspective of adjacency, phrases like (1) instantiate some close ties between preposition and attribute (although they do not form a constituent)<sup>5</sup>. Seen from the structural perspective, noun phrases like (2) are free to be conditioned by some other rules, as they are not dominated by a prepositional phrase. These two perspectives are not in any way contradictory; rather, they are to be interpreted by the more global vision of attribute placement we have elaborated.

Yet another factor that should be taken into account is lexical idiosyncrasies. Noun-attribute order depends on both elements and on the pair as a whole. For example, in Slavic languages “prototypical” adjectives (‘big’, ‘small’, ‘good’, ‘bad’) are prenominal more often than those derived from nouns, primarily those with affix *-ьск-* (the most convincing data comes from late texts, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, cf. corpus frequencies on Russian texts presented by M. Widnäs (1952, 72-73, 82) and some less formal observations in Kovtunova (1969, 67-72). The “prototypical” adjectives tend to be preposed worldwide (Dahl 2004, 235), while the derived ones, at least in Slavic, are mostly postposed. The well-known view on possessive adjectives as special syntactic forms of nouns (sketched, for example, in Marojevich 1989, 122-125 and Marojevich 1998), can easily be extended to other derived adjectives, as they clearly correspond to the underlying nouns. Consequently, the postnominal placing of derived adjectives can reflect their association with synonymous postnominal noun phrases (*князь новгородьскіи ~ князь Новагорода*), cf., along the same lines, Gebauer 1886, 374 on Old Czech and Horálek 1955, 238 on postnominal agreeing possessives (such as *наи*) as influenced by postnominal genitive possessives (such as *его*).

Because word order depends on lexical items, it is reasonable to limit the investigation into other dependencies to the homogeneous groups of phrases that are relatively frequent in the texts. One such group is noun phrases consisting of noun and agreeing possessive (ex. *твои конь* ‘your horse’), as they abound in virtually any text. The other convenient phrase is *князь великии / великии князь* ‘grand duke’, which frequently occurs in chronicles and official documents. The present paper is limited to these two phrases.

Within the chosen approach we can only observe stochastic tendencies, that is, a relative frequency of patterns. Generally, we are not in a position to formulate strict rules (some strict statements do exist, but they are operative only within small segments of the material and may be statistically irrelevant). Taking into account parameters beyond the main scope of the paper (primarily in the domain of information packaging) would surely make the predictions more precise. We come close to, but do not enter deeply into, the domain.

This paper falls into four parts. The first section gives a general background, drawing on the ratios of prenominal and postnominal possessives in Old Russian language varieties. The

second section presents two relatively uncontroversial cases of “local” context dependencies (labeled above as the “gravitation” effect). The third section deals with a puzzle posed by case conditioning word order in NP. We hypothesize that the postnominal placement in the nominative case was primarily conditioned by position in the clause (preverbal theme). The closing section 4 summarizes the data and focuses on general approaches in explaining the data presented.

### 1. Language varieties

Here we present data on how language varieties in question differ with respect to the proportion of prenominal and postnominal possessives. This overview will be of some use for the following discussion.

The most evident contrast is one between ecclesiastical texts (thus, in the New Testament prenominal possessives occur very rarely) and secular ones (in legal codes prenominal possessives clearly dominate). The full picture, though, is somewhat more complicated.

Ecclesiastical registers of Old Russian literacy should be seen in connection with Old Church Slavonic texts. The quantitative variation across the latter was studied by R. Večerka (see also Schaeken 1987, 148-149 on the *Kiev Folia*). The translations of the New Testament and the Psalms contain but a tiny number of prenominal possessives: 0,2% of possessives are prenominal in the *Psalterium Sinaiticum*, and 4% are prenominal in the Gospels and *Enina Apostol*; the euchologion (*Euchologium Sinaiticum*) and homilies (*Glagolita Clozianus*) show about 20% of preposed possessives, while hagiographic texts (*Codex Suprasliensis*, *Vita Methodii*, and *Vita Cyrilli*) – 32-38% (see Večerka 1989, 77). The postposition of possessives stems from Greek, but such placement was generalized in the translations of the Gospels: scarce Greek prenominal possessives were translated by postnominal ones (the opposite occurrence being relatively infrequent; cf. Večerka 1989, 79 and Horálek 1954, 227).

East Slavonic manuscripts of the Gospels seem to follow their Old Church Slavonic originals. At the same time, we can state that at least some of the East Slavonic hagiographic texts show smaller ratios of prenominal placement than Old Church Slavonic texts of the same genre. Thus, in a 1000-line sample from the *Life of St. Andrey the Fool* (рус. *Андрей юродивый*; Old Russian translation, made in the twelfth century, published in Moldovan 2000) one finds 22% of prenominal possessives (contrasted to 30-38%, obtained by R. Večerka). Almost the same ratio (21%, 19 out of 92 examples) is found in a sample (3r-30v) from the *Sinai Patericon* (a translation of the Greek *Λειτουργιον*, carried out in the eleventh-twelfth centuries in Kiev Rus', published in Golysenko and Dubrovina 1967).

In the remainder of this article we do not follow R. Večerka, and we count only simple NPs. The reason is that contexts of complex NPs, conditioning the possessive placement, show uneven distribution across the texts (phrases of special kinds abound in one text and are almost entirely absent in another). Consequently, the ratio for simple NPs can differ from that for complex NPs in either direction. In our sample from the *Life of St. Andrey the Fool*, the possessive pronoun is preposed in 22% of the overall data (25 out of 116), as we have already mentioned, and in 15% of simple noun phrases (that is, 15 examples out of 100). The difference of 7% between the two calculations stems from the difference between the postnominal position in simple phrases and the prenominal position after adjectives (e.g., *честьна □ сво □ оуста* line 713). The other text we analyzed in the previous paragraph, the *Sinai Patericon*, shows no statistical difference between simple and complex NPs (both contain 21% of prenominal possessives), as phrases with both possessive and adjective are quite rare in this text.

Thus, for simple NPs, East Slavic hagiographic texts show 10-20% of prenominal possessives:

15% in the *Life of St. Andrey the Fool* (or at least in the 1000-line sample from it);

15% in the *Life of Theodosius of Kiev* (Old Russian *Феодосии Печерьскыи*, twelfth century, Uspensky manuscript (Kn'azevskaya, Demyanov, and L'apon 1971);

21% in the *Sinai Patericon*.

The smallest ratio – 8% – of preposed possessives is found in a sample (folia 8b – 16g) from the *Life of Boris and Gleb* (twelfth century, Uspensky manuscript; Kn'azevskaya, Demyanov, and L'apon 1971). Such a rare occurrence of preposed possessives in the *Life of Boris and Gleb* can presumably be attributed to its imitation of Gospel language (both texts describe voluntary martyrdom).

Special investigation into possessive placement in Church Slavonic should treat the citations and some set phrases separately, but our only goal here is to present the possessive placement as a sociolinguistic variable.

Secular legal texts provide a sharp contrast to the ecclesiastical works just analyzed, as these laws mostly contain NPs with prenominal possessives: 81% (21 out of 26 examples) in the legal code *Pravda ruskaya* (according to the Troitzky manuscript, fifteenth century); 78% (29 out of 37 examples) in the Smolensk agreements<sup>6</sup>; and 84% in the Pskov legal code *Sudnaya gramota* (fifteenth century).

The chronicles lie somewhere in between ecclesiastical and secular texts, as they narrate secular events within a Christian framework; the possessives are preposed in 49% of simple NPs in the First Novgorod Chronicle (according to the Synodal copy, 79 out of 171 examples), 58% in the Volyn' Chronicle (Ipatiev copy, beginning from 1260, 140 out of 240), and 67% in the

Pskov Chronicle (Stroev copy, most of the text dates from the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries). Small explored samples of two translated historical narratives, Flavius Josephus' *Jewish War* (translation presumably carried out in the eleventh century in Kiev Rus') and the Byzantine Chronicle of Gregory Hamartolos (East Slavic translation also dating from the eleventh century), seem to show the same ratio as the Novgorod and Volyn' chronicles, that is, about 50%.

Some cases complicate the picture of a continuum between ecclesiastical (Church Slavonic) and secular (East Slavic) language varieties. Here we skip some legal Church Slavonic texts with a predominance of preposed possessives and turn to some "deviant" secular texts. One is the epic poem the *Igor' Tale* (Old Russian *Слово о пълку Игоревѣ*, likely dating from the twelfth century), with only 17% of preposed possessives in simple NPs (2 out of 12). We could presumably attribute the postnominal possessives in the *Igor' Tale* to the almost unparalleled poetic genre of the text (the Galician Chronicle, very unusual in its poetics and attributed by some to the same author as the *Igor' Tale*, has an even more insignificant number of preposed possessives – 7%). Another possibility is to suggest that the perceived sociolinguistic variable captured something in between the score in simple NPs and the overall score. Complex NPs, occurring relatively rarely in most of the texts, constitute two-thirds of the NPs in the *Igor' Tale*. As the possessive is mostly preposed in complex NPs (see section 2.2), the text presents an overall sense of basically preposed possessives.

Birchbark letters, containing 54% of prenominal possessives in simple NPs (65 out of 111), are the most crucial texts for our analysis. In the ratio of preposed possessives, why do the birchbark letters coincide not with the legal codes (such as the *Pravda ruskaya*), but with the chronicles? Apart from a couple of examples, the NPs with postnominal possessives can hardly be accounted for as ecclesiastical or bookish. The solution essential for our argument relies on the assumption that the postnominal position of possessive can be derived via transformation of basic order, that is [possessive - noun] (the theoretical background of the assumption is discussed in the last section). Thus, the legal codes (with their more rigid syntax) represent the basic order, while the letters allow for much more "informal" syntax with split NPs and word order variations.

Finally, the valuable figures in Sirotinina 1965/2003, 17-18 should be mentioned for those who wish to explore further the proportion of prenominal and postnominal possessives in texts of different styles and from different periods.

## 2. Possessive placement: simple cases

### 2.1. Preposition gravitation

In simple noun phrases governed by prepositions, attributes tend to stand after prepositions. This observation was first made by Dean Worth 1985. The data in his article were limited to phrases with the adjective *новгородьскыи* ‘Novgorodian’ in a set of Novgorodian parchment documents. The papers Minlos 2008 and Minlos 2010 presented similar data with a variety of attributes from other Old Russian texts with tables like 1 and 2 below. Here AN is the order [Attribute Noun], NA – [Noun Attribute], the notation “- prep” ~ “+ prep” indicates whether the NP is governed by a preposition or not. (See note 6 above on the Smolensk agreements.)

Table 1. Smolensk agreements (thirteenth-fourteenth centuries)

|        | AN | NA |
|--------|----|----|
| + prep | 17 | 1  |
| - prep | 12 | 7  |

The most visible feature of Tables 1 and 2 and similar tables presented in previous articles is the tiny number of examples with postposed attributes in prepositional phrases (the relevant cell is shaded grey), but one should take into account that the overall number of prepositional phrases is usually smaller than that of phrases without prepositions. Actually, what matters most for the present study is the contrast between phrases that are headed by prepositions and phrases that are not (regarding the ratio of AN and NA occurrences). The contrast can be expressed as a difference: the percentage of AN groups after a preposition (in other words, the probability of AN phrases in the context of a preposition) minus the percentage of AN groups with no preposition. The bigger the difference, the sharper the contrast. For example, the numbers in Table 1 can be summarized in the following way: the count of AN groups after the preposition is 17 out of 18, that is, 94%, whereas the count of AN groups without preposition is 12 out of 19, that is, 63%. The difference is 94% - 63% = 31%.

Table 2. Old Russian legal code (*Pravda ruskaya*) according to the Troitzky manuscript (fifteenth century)

|        | AN | NA |
|--------|----|----|
| + prep | 5  | 0  |
| - prep | 16 | 5  |

Table 2 can be summarized as follows: AN after prepositions – 5 out of 5 (100%), AN elsewhere – 16 out of 21 (76%), the difference being 24%. While in the *Pravda ruskaya* the rule “no postnominal possessives after a preposition” has no exceptions, the contrast is not as sharp as in the Smolensk agreements (the absence of “deviant” examples carries less weight when the relative rarity of PPs is taken into account).

The birchbark letters (twelfth-fifteenth centuries), mostly from Novgorod, get the best score<sup>7</sup>. AN after prepositions occurs 28 times out of 35 (80%), AN elsewhere – 37 out of 86 (43%). The difference is 36%.

The numbers in each separate table are so small that they do not meet the requirements of statistical relevance, but as the pattern recurs in different unrelated texts (and with different phrases), the tendency in general appears to be valid.

The crucial questions concern the limits of this tendency. Dean Worth set the limits along the animacy distinction: the preposition influences the word order in NP only when the noun is inanimate. The paper Minlos 2011 argues that such a division is problematic and that the word order is actually conditioned by the presence of a preposition irrespective of the semantic properties of the noun. There seems to be some difference in attribute placement between NPs denoting humans and other NPs, which is an issue for a paper-length discussion, but it does not undermine the power of the preposition.

Other limits are situated in time, space, and sociolinguistic varieties. Which languages / language varieties adhered to the word order tendency we have outlined above? As preliminary investigations show, the pattern was spread among medieval Slavic languages of all three subgroups. The language of ecclesiastical texts did not consistently follow the pattern. On the one hand, our sample from the *Life of St. Andrey the Fool* shows a clear tendency for prepositional phrases to favor prenominal possessives (the difference 29% - 9% = 20% being quite reliable). On the other hand, the presence of a preposition had no influence on possessive placement in the *Life of Theodosius of Kiev*: simple phrases with AN order occur in 17 out of 112 examples (14%) after prepositions and 18 out of 132 (precisely the same proportion, 14%) without prepositions. The contrast between these two hagiographic texts is precisely what we would expect, taking into account that the *Life of St. Andrey the Fool* seems to be, for the most part, a collection of secular stories<sup>8</sup>.

## 2.2. The floating quantifier *къждо* 'every'

The distributive quantifier *къждо* 'every' can be used as a “floating” attribute, that is, it may not be a part of the respective noun phrase (“distributive key”), while it still agrees in



gender with it. In example (3) the distributive key is *воемь* ('to soldiers'), the distributive share – *по голуби* ('a pigeon'):

(3) *Вольга же разда □ воемь по голуби комуждо*

(*Povest' vremennykh let* according to the Lavrentian copy)

The distributive share should meet some syntactic description; see Testelets 2001 on modern Russian usage. One option is a subject or direct object noun phrase, receiving the preposition *по* in the construction, as illustrated in (3); the other option is a prepositional phrase with a reflexive pronoun, as in (4):

(4) *Сынове его разидошася кождо въ свою волость*

(Kiev Chronicle according to the Hypatian copy, s.v. 1126)

The possessive *свою* is obligatory in the cited context (\**кождо въ волость* would be ungrammatical).

At least in some variety of Old Russian the word order in the construction was fixed, that is [floating quantifier – preposition – possessive pronoun – noun]. Most of the examples are extracted from chronicles.

Kiev Chronicle: *сынове его разидошася кождо въ свою волость* (1126); *и повел □ имь Всеволодъ чинити гати комуждо своему полку* (1144); *и тако по □ хаши кождо въ сво □ товары* (1150, f. 140v); *поткоша вси к ни<sup>м</sup> кождо въ свои бродь* (1152, f. 162); *и тако оугадаша кождо въ свои домь . по □ хати* (1152, f. 165); *ингы □ воєводы □ ставиша . и кн □ зи когождо оу своихъ людии* (1182, f. 219v); *и поиде . когождо во сво □ вежа* (1185, f. 224v);

Halich Chronicle: *когождо ихъ со своими вои* (1211, f. 248v); *киждо со своими кн □ зьми* (2x, 1224, f. 252);

Novgorod Chronicle: *кождо съ своими бояры и дворяны* 1218 (there is one example where the possessive pronoun is postposed; the peculiarity of the example is that the floating quantifier is detached from the NP: *придоша кождо десятии въ дома своя* 1237);

The *Life of St. Andrey the Fool*: *кождо въ свои домь* (line 415); *кождо на сво □ мь лист □* (810); *кождо по сво □ му гла<sup>с</sup>* (811).

As the pattern under discussion includes prepositions, we should clarify the impact of prepositions on possessive placement in the cited texts. In the secular texts analyzed above, the very presence of a preposition would trigger the prenominal placement of the possessive, and thus the prenominal examples would be uninformative. The situation in the narratives, however, is different. While the preposition seem to favor prenominal possessives in some of the texts, postnominal placement is more frequent even in PPs.

**Kiev Chronicle (a fragment dated from 6620 to 6656 was counted):** simple prepositional phrases with possessives show [possessive – noun] word order in 23 groups out of 83 (which makes 28%), simple noun phrases show the word order in 21 groups out of 128 (16%).

Halich Chronicle: simple groups governed by a preposition with a prenominal possessive comprise 7% (6 out of 90 examples), groups with no preposition show the same rate – 7%, that is, 14 out of 202;

Novgorod Chronicle: prenominal possessives appear in 40 out of 59 examples of PPs (68%). The ratio differs from that in phrases with no preposition (39 out of 102 examples, which constitutes 38%);

The *Life of St. Andrey the Fool*: 9 out of 31 examples (29%). The ratio in prepositionless phrases is 9%, as we mentioned in 2.1 above.

Thus the consistent prenominal placement of possessives in the construction with a distributive quantifier cannot be interpreted within the prepositional gravitation synchronically, though it may stem from this tendency. It also may be the case that it is some semantic features of these phrases (for instance, their role in information structure) that trigger the prenominal placement (the floating quantifier selects for emphasized possessive). We believe that the fixed construction with close syntactic and semantic ties between quantifier and possessive is of crucial importance. In contrast with preposition gravitation, the word order in the construction with *къждо* allows for almost no exceptions in these texts.

### 3. A controversial case about case

The postposed attributes are especially characteristic for the NPs in nominative case, as noted by M. Widnäs concerning the phrase *князь великии* ‘grand duke’ in Russian state documents of the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries (Widnäs 1952, 43-44, 49). Given that phrases in nominative case are never governed by a preposition, the postnominal attributes might have reflected the impact of the preposition-free context (see 2.1). Thus we have to classify the data into three groups: phrases in nominative case (Nom.); phrases in oblique cases without preposition (Obl., -prep); and those in oblique cases in PPs (Obl., + prep). First we test the case generalization against data quite close to that studied by M. Widnäs: testaments and treaties of Russian grand dukes, published in Cherepnin 1950. The following results are based on a sample of about twenty texts dating from the fifteenth century (entries 16-41 of Cherepnin’s edition, excluding peace treaties with grand duke of Lithuania Vitautas, which present somewhat different language).

The rate of AN groups in the sample is as follows:

Nom.: less than 1% (1 out of 108)

Obl., - prep.: 83% (130 out of 156)

Obl., + prep.: 99% (85 out of 86)

The results for the phrase *князь великий* obtained from the Pskov Chronicle (according to the Stroev copy, mostly written in the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries) were first presented in Minlos 2008 and later, with some corrections, in Minlos 2011:

Nom.: 5% (10 out of 186)

Obl., - prep.: 68% (134 out of 198)

Obl., + prep.: 78% (94 out of 121)

The contrast between nominative and oblique cases is much sharper than that between PPs and NPs with no preposition. Consequently, the data does not support the assumption that the postnominal attribute placement in nominative is a mere emergent epiphenomenon of preposition-free use of the nominative groups. Still, some impact of prepositional phrases is possible: the groups in oblique cases might be preposed by analogy with the same groups governed by preposition (for instance, Dat. Sg. *великому князю* ‘grand duke’ might have the order of constituents influenced by the prepositional phrase *къ великому князю*).

The next controversy concerns the possibility of reinterpreting the found correlation, to connect the word order in NP with NP placement in the broader domain, especially in the domain of the clause. The comparative investigation of the Pskov Chronicle is limited to a comparable subset – that is, to immediate constituents of verbal clauses (235 phrases). Thus we have excluded numerous genitive noun-modifying NPs<sup>9</sup> and NPs governed by a preposition, with the result being that the subset mostly consists of nominative NPs with postnominal adjectives (186 out of 235 phrases in question, that is 79%, are nominative subjects).

Within the given subset the correlation between adjective placement and case is as follows (somewhat less sharp than within the set as a whole):

Nom.: 5% of prenominals (10 out of 186)

Obl., - prep.: 59% (29 out of 49)

Subject nominative phrases stand in pre-verbal position in 149 out of 186 examples (80%), and oblique prepositionless phrases are post-verbal in 36 out of 49 examples (73%). Could it be that the main parameter is the NP’s position within the clause, not its case? The impact of position can be measured in the following way:

Pre-verbal: 9% of prenominals (14 out of 162)

Post-verbal: 34% (25 out of 73)

The correlation between adjective placement and NP placement is weaker than the case correlation, if estimated as a difference (34% - 9% = 25% is smaller than 59% - 12% = 47%). It follows from these considerations that in the Pskov Chronicle, the main factor favoring

postnominal placement in *князь великий* is nominative case (or subject syntactic role), not clause position.

The reverse holds true for the Vilno Chronicle, the oldest surviving fragment of the annals of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the manuscript comes from the turn of the sixteenth century and describes the events of the years 1341-1395). In the Vilno Chronicle the main parameter determining the linear position of the attribute *великий* (sic; the adjective ending is mostly spelled *-ый* in the text) in the group *князь великий* / *великий князь* is the linear position of the group relative to the verb.

Our results are obtained from the subset of the relevant phrases: we counted only groups consisting of the phrase *князь великий* (in either order) + proper name which are immediately governed by a verb. The subset numbers 85 examples.

The strength of correlation can again be expressed as a difference between two percentages. The difference is 41% for case:

Nom.: 22% of prenominals (14 out of 61)

Obl., - prep.: 63% (15 out of 24)

The contrast concerning NP position within a clause is stronger (65%):

Pre-verbal: 11% of prenominals (6 out of 56)

Post-verbal: 76% (22 out of 29)

The conclusion we draw from these figures is that in the Vilno Chronicle, the noun group in question before the verb tends to contain (89%) postnominal adjectives (*князь великий Ягаило дал был Полтеск брату своему князю Скургаилу*); noun groups immediately after the verb mostly (76%) contain prenominal adjectives (*и нача великий князь Витовт добывати града*).

Another way of evaluating these two correlations is to draw a line between two groups: “good” examples, that is, those that follow the tendency, and “bad” examples, those that do not. For example, the NA groups in nominative and AN groups in other cases follow the correlation of case and word order. This method of evaluation produces the same result: the Vilno Chronicle better fits the linear description and the Pskov Chronicle – the case description. Most likely there are some systems which equally meet both descriptions, as phrases in nominative case (subjects) are mostly preverbal, and other groups are mostly postverbal, and the two descriptions largely overlap.

We hypothesize that postnominal placement was initially conditioned in (East) Slavic, among other factors, by the pre-verbal thematic position within the clause. According to this view, the motivation by case might have been an epiphenomenon: nominative case phrases were never preceded by a preposition and were mostly followed by a verb, and oblique case phrases

were preceded by either a preposition or a verb. The system then evolved: the motivation by preverbal position was lost, while the motivation by case was easier to maintain. Thus we see the NA order in nominative case opposed to AN order in oblique cases as a feature that emerged as a generalization from the usual contexts.

Although for now this view lacks clear empirical support, at least with the phrase *князь великий ~ великий князь*, because Russian chronicle records of the thirteenth-fifteenth centuries seem to show almost no structural distribution of these two variants (some records contain mostly the AN variant, some others – mostly the NA variant). A thorough investigation into the distribution of other noun phrases is still needed. Another objection to our hypothesis is that it relies heavily on SV order, which is by no means the exclusive word order in early Slavic texts, whereas the reverse (VS) order was very common; see, for example, McAnallen 2009 for a descriptive account and Slioussar 2008, 284 for generative suggestions concerning the language shift.

At any rate, why could the preverbal position condition the NA order?

Patterns presenting a possible analogy are operative in modern Russian. Graschenkov (2007, 47) notes that the inversion *вашего сына работа* (instead of *работа вашего сына*) seems neutral in clause-initial position (5) and strange in other positions (6):

(5) **Вашего сына работа** мне не понравилась.

(6) ? Мне не понравилась **вашего сына работа**.

The postposed demonstratives and possessives are of quite limited use in modern Russian. Thus, postnominal possessives are absent in formal written language (an example of such a text is *Здоровский, Проблемы инфекции и иммунитета* in Sirotnina 1965/2003, 18) and count for about 20% of colloquial modern Russian (Turner 2010).

According to our observations, postnominal possessives in modern colloquial Russian occur mostly in clause-initial or at least preverbal NPs, such as (7-9), which are taken from blogs (collated on the Russian National Corpus, [www.ruscorpora.ru](http://www.ruscorpora.ru))<sup>10</sup>:

(7) **А вещи мои** лежат в купе который стоит в коридоре.

(8) **Волосы мои** не густые (в свое время сильно выпали), тонкие, стригусь коротко.

Significantly, all three [Noun - possessive] phrases from Michael Sholokhov cited in Sirotnina 1965/2003 also stand at the beginning of clauses. The same word order is fossilized in the fixed expressions *сил моих нет* and *в большинстве своем* (which is always thematic). One of the sources of the construction is “the dislocation of NP<sub>poss</sub> to the right [...] in Russian narrow focus constructions” (Rodionova 2001, 15, with a convincing example). But narrow focus is not an obligatory condition for such word order, as can be shown by example (9), drawn from the same thesis:

(9) – *Что случилось?*

– *Шея моя болит.* (Rodionova 2001, 2)

In (9) the entire phrase ‘my neck’ is focused, and the postnominal position of the possessive *моя* in reference to a body part can reflect an unnecessary redundancy, as *Шея болит* would be interpreted in the same way. The redundancy interpretation of postnominal possessives is put forward in Sirotnina 1965/2003, 16-20 for modern Russian and in Šmilauer 1930, 147 for sixteenth-century Czech<sup>11</sup>.

Another considerable class of postnominal attributes is demonstratives. Postnominal demonstratives are accounted for as markers of “referential quantification” in Topolin’ska 1974, 237. Although the term “referential quantification” is somewhat unclear, her example is of the type we are discussing:

(10) *Konferencja ta była niespodziewanie udana* ‘that conference was, curiously enough, successful’

The same kind of examples can be cited from a novel by Viktor Astafiev (Пролетный гусь, 2000):

(11) *На станции той, промышленной, с заводскими трубами и чёрными тополями в отдалении, царило пьянство.*

(12) *В барже той отбывал исполнять свои обязанности остаток политотдела армии (...).*

(13) *Щит тот стараниями и неусыпным надзором был дотащен до Берлина и там уж, после капитуляции врага, сдан куда-то на хранение.*

(14) *Название то и прилепилось к городу.*

Widnäs supposes that postnominal placement is characteristic of the first mention of a referent, whereas prenominal placement is characteristic for the subsequent ones (she attributes the hypothesis to A.A. Potebnja on p. 9, but unfortunately does not refer to a precise page of Potebnja, vol. 3). The basis for this belief is apparently derived from the clauses with clause-initial NA phrases (cf. Widnäs 1952, 43), but I take the generalization as invalid. On the contrary, the postnominals are often found in most given (in other words, most thematic) NPs, which are quite common in the preverbal position.

The objective of placement in thematic position is to put thematic accent on the constituent. Technically, in generative grammar such placement is seen as a movement of the phrase to the left. Postnominal attribute placement is likewise viewed as noun movement past the attribute. The postnominal placement of the attribute in the thematic NP might be the best way to place the thematic accent of the noun, if the attribute is unaccented and is easy to place in a sort of Wackernagel position.

#### 4. Why be postnominal?

As we have proposed from the beginning, attribute position before or after the noun need not immediately reflect any meaning or any value in information structure. The relevant terms to discuss the attribute placement could be independent modifier as opposed to incorporated modifier. An independent attribute need not even be placed close to its noun head (an element can exhibit independence only in morphosyntactically rich systems, see Bhat 1994, 168 on adjectives and, for a general overview, Haiman 1985, 67-69). An incorporated modifier, on the contrary, has a fixed position in the noun phrase.

The paradox of Slavic attribute placement lies in the coexistence of two patterns: 1) the closest units (first of all, place names; see Berneker 1900, 110) show adjective – noun order; and 2) attributes under contrastive stress are preposed. The first pattern induces a perception of noun – adjective order as less tight, with the adjective being more independent (which we think is correct) and more important for information structure (which we think is false). The preposed attribute is more tightly incorporated into the noun phrase and, even so, it is a preposed attribute that can bear contrastive stress – which might be some evidence of its independence.

Cross-linguistically, “prenominal modifiers are syntactically more tightly integrated into the noun phrase than postnominal modifiers” (Croft and Deligniani 2001, 12), and cf. also Dahl 2004, 225-236 on the “contrast between tighter preposing constructions and looser postposing ones” (some of the relevant examples are cited in Givón 2001, 12). Within the generative framework, prenominal attributes are mostly deemed as a manifestation of basic structure and postposed attributes are analyzed as involving movement of the noun to the head of a functional projection. This N-raising analysis of the postposed adjectives has been developed since the early 1990s for Romance, Semitic, Celtic, and, to some extent, Slavic languages in works by G. Cinque, G. Langobardi, Ur. Shlonsky, and others, see Cinque 1994. The facts confirming the theory are partially the same as those noted by W. Croft, T. Givón, and Ö. Dahl (the postnominal attributes might be more independent and more inflected), but there is important evidence of a different kind as well.

As noted in 1.1 in connection with the birchbark letters, at least for some Slavic attributes the prenominal position can be deemed as basic and the postnominal – as a derived one. This immediately explains the fact that close units show the adjective – noun pattern (the structure of such units is fixed and is not accessible for word order alternations). We adopt the hypothesis (or technical agreement) that attributes became postnominal via noun movement to the left (not via attribute movement to the right). Some constructions (idiomatic units, prepositional phrases, and contrastive stress placed on attribute) force the order to be fixed, or, technically, block noun movement<sup>12</sup>. The nature of this movement may lie outside the noun phrase.

At the same time, when an emphasis is placed on possessive, the possessive is prenominal (as was stated in Delbrück et al.; see the Introduction). Examples (15-17) from the Novgorod First Chronicle (Synodal copy) are intended to illustrate the pattern:

(15) *убиша Володимири князя Андрея **свои милостьници*** (s.v. 1174)

(16) *над гробомъ княгининымъ Ярославлѣи Володимирица, юже уби **свои пасынокъ** в Медвѣжи головѣ* (s.v. 1243)

(17) *и убиша князя велика Миндовга **свои родици*** (s.v. 1263)

The fragments contain information of a similar kind: ‘the man / woman was killed by his / her (own) retinue / son-in-law / relatives’. We suppose that the emphasis (that can be conveyed by *own* in English) is quite likely in these passages.

The reverse, though, generally does not hold true: prenominal possessives are not necessarily emphasized. It is just that emphasis works the same as a prepositional phrase (or a prepositional phrase combined with a floating quantifier): it blocks the noun – possessive inversion (which is otherwise forced by some higher-level construction or by stylistic needs).

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<sup>1</sup> Attribute placement is an easy target for foreign impact. For example, declinable possessive pronouns (as well as some other attributes) are mostly preposed in secular Old Russian and Old Serbian, but mostly postposed in Church Slavonic (influenced by Greek). The attributes are preposed in most Bulgarian dialects, but generally postposed in dialects influenced by Romanian (see Mladenov 1969, 161 and Stojkov 1967, 326-327).

<sup>2</sup> According to Delbrück 1900, 92 and Gianollo 2005, 85-88, the same holds true for possessive pronouns in Latin, cf. also Blass and Debrunner 1979, 234 and Steyer 1968, 46 on New Testament Greek.

<sup>3</sup> I am much indebted to Olga Mitrenina, Claudia Jensen, and Ilya Itkin for their valuable comments and general encouragement.

<sup>4</sup> The standard spelling would be *сестроу*, the letter *c* being omitted due to scribal error.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the explanation proposed by D. Worth: “inanimates are forced into the order pAN by the obligatory syntactic coherence of the prepositional phrase, the opening of which is signaled by prepositional phrase and the closure of which is signaled by the governed noun (note the tendency to mark the continuation of phrase by prepositional repetition in the rare cases where inanimates occur in the order pNA)” (Worth 1985, 543), where we can read simply “nouns” instead of “inanimates”.

<sup>6</sup> Agreements of Smolensk princes with their Western counterparts are: 1) the agreement of an unknown Smolensk prince with Riga and Gotland (1220s); and 2) the agreement of Smolensk with Riga and Gotland (with six texts grouped in two versions and dated between the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries); the appropriate publication is Sumnikova and Lopatin 1963. The Smolensk-German agreements are a collection of nearly identical documents. Here, we count only portions of these texts in which the readings differ, that is, we do not count each instance in which identical texts recur.

<sup>7</sup> Almost all data concerning the birchbark letters comes from Zaliznyak 2004, with minor amendments: №387 from Zaliznyak 1986 and №962 from Zaliznyak and Yanin 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Moldovan 1996 for some details.

<sup>9</sup> Many of the nominative phrases in Cherepnin 1950 are vocative phrases (thus not an integral part of the clause).

<sup>10</sup> More detailed corpus analysis of Modern Russian is currently being carried out by V. Podlesskaya.

<sup>11</sup> “The belonging is sufficiently expressed by the meaning of substantive” [«přislušnost jest dostatečně určena významem substantiva»]

<sup>12</sup> It is interesting to note that in some Slovak dialects the reduced acc. fem. *moj* (instead of *moju*) occurs only in prepositional phrases: *na tu□oj veru*, *na tu□oj prau□du*, *na tu□oj dušu* etc. (Habovštiak 1965, 256). The phonetic reduction of the possessive correlates, as we may guess, with tighter integration into the construction

