
For many English speakers, wh-movement of a possessor requires pied-piping of the containing possessed DP (1):

1. Mary is the author [CP [DP whose new book] they said [TP t1 is good]]. (Possessor pied-pipes possessed DP)

However, Davis (2020, 2021) shows that about half of speakers also permit possessor extraction configurations, in which long-distance wh-movement or topic/focus fronting separates the possessor from the Saxon genitive morpheme ['s] as in (2):

2. Mary is the author [CP who they said [TP [DP t1’s new book] is good]]. (Possessor extracted from possessed DP)

Based on a new study of 17 speakers who are typically capable of possessor extraction as in (2), I show that such movement has an un-noticed restriction. Though 14/17 speakers accepted possessor extraction of a full DP by topic/focus fronting (3), all rejected extraction of possessive pronouns like my, our, your, etc. (4):

3. I don’t think John’s cat is particularly cute, but Mary1, I’ve always said [t1’s cat] is really adorable. (Possessor extracted by topic/focus fronting)

4. * I don’t think John’s cat is cute, but our1/your1, I’ve always said [t1 cat] is really adorable. (Pronominal possessor can’t be extracted by topic/focus fronting)

I argue that such elements are immobile because they are portmanteau morphemes which express a non-constituent unit—a possessive D and the possessor in its specifier—via morphological spanning (Bye & Svenonius 2012, Merchant 2015, Svenonius 2016, a.o.). Further, I argue that this finding entails that phase spell-out applies to entire phases at once (Fox & Pesetsky 2005, Ko 2014, a.o.).