

Chapter 10

Positional predicates in early Germanic

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This chapter addresses a class of adjectival modifiers that has received relatively little attention in the literature. Those modifiers, referred to here as *positional predicates*, differ from “regular” adjectives semantically, syntactically, and, at least in Germanic, morpho-syntactically. Their most outstanding syntactic property is that they precede determiners (prenominally) and combine with pronouns and proper names. On the semantic side, they do not simply modify the noun description, but denote a part–whole relation with respect to the NP referent. Starting out from modern Icelandic, Latin and Greek, I will show that items displaying the same deviant behaviour can also be identified in the early Germanic languages to varying degrees. The evidence across the Germanic languages, however, is not equally strong and we find variation, but the discussion suggests that the extant examples are remnants of a system (a class of modifiers/a special adjectival syntax) that must have been more widespread and productive in older stages of Germanic.

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss a class of adjectival modifiers that has received relatively little attention in the literature, and that will be referred to here as *positional predicates*.¹ Two examples from Icelandic are given in (1).

- (1) a. á norðanverðu nesinu
on northern peninsula.DEF
‘on the northern part of the peninsula’

¹Notable exceptions are Romero (1996) for Latin, and Pfaff (2015, 2017) for Icelandic; some relevant discussion is also found in Fischer (2001) and Grabski (2017) in the context of Old English adjective placement. The term “positional predicate” is adopted from Pfaff (2015, 2017).



- b. á ofanverðri þessari öld
on upper DEM century
'in the latter part of this century'

As the discussion will show, positional predicates are adjectival elements even though they display a number of peculiarities that clearly set them apart from “regular” adjectives; as illustrated in (1), they denote a part–whole relationship and they may precede (definite) determiners.

This chapter primarily provides an overview and tries to establish the phenomenon by showing that positional predicates are a deviant class of adjectival modifiers and constitute a worthwhile object of investigation in their own right. Moreover, I will show that it is a topic relevant to the study of (comparative) early Germanic syntax. The discussion itself will draw on data from modern Icelandic and early Germanic languages, but also from Latin and Classical Greek. A secondary, but related purpose is to motivate a separate annotation label for positional predicates in the NPEGL database, as will be explained in Section 1.1.

The structure of this chapter is as follows: In Section 2, I discuss the phenomenon and the prototypical characteristics following the exposition in Pfaff (2015, 2017) on positional predicates in modern Icelandic. Section 3 is concerned with a number of general issues of interest. First, I summarize the account of “partitive adjectives” in Latin by Romero (1996) and discuss the so-called “predicative position” in Ancient Greek. It will transpire that there is a significant overlap between those partitive adjectives occurring in the predicative position (in Latin and Greek) and positional predicates, and that, to a significant extent, they can be treated as the same phenomenon. I then compare agreement vs. genitive constructions, the latter representing an alternative strategy and, presumably, a later development. Section 4 discusses relevant data from various early Germanic languages. I will illustrate their prototypical behaviour, and point out some language-specific deviations. Section 5 concludes.

1.1 Annotated corpora and the NPEGL database

One practical purpose of the project *Constraints on syntactic variation: Noun phrases in early Germanic languages*² has been the creation of an annotated noun phrase database (NPEGL). While many annotated corpora (notably those that fed into NPEGL) use the label “Adjective” for a broad class of adjectival elements, the NPEGL annotation (see Pfaff & Bouma 2024 [this volume]) divides the class of

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modifiers into (i) adjectives (in a narrow sense), (ii) cardinal elements, and (iii) positional predicates. Since positional predicates are not an established class, this label needs to be motivated,³ which raises the following questions:

1. What are positional predicates in the first place?
2. Did they exist in the early Germanic languages? and if so:
3. Are they a relevant topic to the study of syntactic variation?

Originally, the term was used to describe a small class of modifiers in modern Icelandic that deviate from regular adjectives, syntactically and semantically, see Section 2. In the initial phase of the project, there was some evidence that we might also find items with a similar deviant behaviour in early Germanic languages. Since this is a phenomenon of potential interest to the project, a closer look at the issue was warranted. As a consequence, the annotation itself has been a part of the investigation into positional predicates in order to determine how widespread/frequent the phenomenon is in the first place. Since annotation is still in progress at the time of writing, no final results or definite numbers can be provided here. However, even though we may not find too many attestations in the extant texts, there are indications that it was a native phenomenon, not imported via scholarly translations from Greek or Latin, and, by extension, that it must have been a component of early Germanic syntax. Formulated more carefully, in all early Germanic languages, we find remnants of a presumably older system that must have been productive in Proto-Germanic and has survived through Old Norse into modern Icelandic.

As we will see, positional predicates are more versatile than regular adjectives in that they may occur in non-canonical adjective positions. For instance, they precede determiners, combine with pronouns and proper names, and, at least in Old English, they occur much more frequently and easily in postnominal position. Thus, not making a distinction amounts to missing out on potentially relevant insights. Notably, when examining adjective ordering/placement or the distribution of adjectival inflection, the results are, in all probability, more precise if positional predicates are treated as a separate class. At the same time, there are noticeable differences among the individual languages, and thus, positional predicates are clearly a topic relevant to the study of (word order) variation in early Germanic, and a separate annotation label is warranted.

³Initially, this chapter was meant to be an appendix to Pfaff & Bouma (2024 [this volume]), precisely for the purpose of elaborating on and motivating this label.

In addition to NPEGL, the following corpora/sources have been consulted for examples:

1. *Perseus* (Classical Greek) = *Perseus*
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/collections>
2. *Project Wulfila* (Gothic/Biblical Greek) = *Wulfila*
<http://www.wulfila.be/gothic/>
3. *Referenzkorpus Altdeutsch 1.1* (Old High German) = *ReA*
<https://korpling.german.hu-berlin.de/annis3/ddd>
4. *Saga Corpus* (Old Icelandic) = *Saga*
<https://malheildir.arnastofnun.is/?mode=fornrit>
5. *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary online* (Old English)
<https://bosworthtoller.com>

2 Characteristics and notable features

I will start out by looking at the properties of positional predicates in modern Icelandic, largely summarizing the exposition in Pfaff (2015, 2017). Next I will show that, based on the same criteria, cognates with rather similar properties can also be identified in the early Germanic languages.

2.1 Positional predicates in modern Icelandic

Pfaff (2015, 2017) characterizes positional predicates as expressing a temporal/spatial part-whole relation relative to the nominal referent; the respective noun denotes a temporal or spatial extension or a plurality, cf. (2).⁴

- (2) a. á **norðanverðri** eyjunni
on northern island.DEF
'on the northern part of the island'
- b. á **ofanverðu** tímabilinu
on latter period.DEF
'in the latter part of the period'

⁴Notice that the regular definite article in Icelandic is a bound morpheme occurring suffixed to the noun, and will be glossed as DEF. Note also that the glosses for the positional predicates themselves will be an approximation since there are no direct (lexical) equivalents in English.

- c. í **miðri** borginni
in middle city.DEF
'in the middle part of the city'
- d. á **öndverðri** öldinni
on former century.DEF
'in the early part of the century'

Paraphrases involving the component "x-part of the N" are a useful first approximation, but in some cases, a more elaborate translation may be called for. Consider the examples in (3).

- (3) a. í **miðjum** áhorfendum
in middle spectators
'amidst/among/between the spectators'
- b. um **þveran** heiminn
about across world.DEF
'around/across the world'
- c. eftir **endilöngu** landinu
after along land.DEF
'from one part of the country to the other'

The paraphrases may often give the impression that positional predicates are simply elements of complex adverbial or prepositional expressions. This impression may be compounded by the fact that, in most cases, they do occur as part of an actual PP.⁵ Also the glosses themselves may be misleading insofar as they involve adverbs (*across*, *along*), nouns (*beginning*), and adjectives (*northern*) that, by themselves, not always fully convey the appropriate meaning; see fn. 4.

Crucially, however, like regular adjectives, positional predicates agree in case, number, and gender with their respective noun, cf. (4).

⁵However, in principle, they can occur in noun phrases not embedded under a preposition, e.g. as part of a subject or where the noun phrase itself is used as an adverbial expression:

- (i) a. **öndverður** veturinn var kaldur
beginning winter.DEF.NOM was cold
'the beginning of the winter (was cold)' ~ 'the winter in its early part (was cold)'
- b. **öndverðan** veturinn (kom hann heim)
beginning winter.DEF.ACC (came he home)
'at the beginning of the winter (he returned)' (adverbial accusative)

- (4) a. *í miðj -um bænum*
in middle -M.DAT.SG town.DEF.DAT.SG (M)
b. *í mið -ri borginni*
in middle -F.DAT.SG city.DEF.DAT.SG (F)
c. *á miðj -u sumrinu*
in middle -N.DAT.SG summer.DEF.DAT.SG (N)
d. *um miðj -an mánuðinn*
about middle -M.ACC.SG month.DEF.ACC.SG (M)
e. *um mit -t hverfið*
around middle -N.ACC.SG neighbourhood.DEF.ACC.SG (N)

One striking feature of positional predicates is that they usually occur in definite noun phrases, and even if the noun is not overtly marked for definiteness, the interpretation is definite nonetheless (5).

- (5) a. *í miðjum bæ -num*
in middle town -DEF
'in the middle of the town'
b. *í miðjum bæ*
in middle town
'in the middle of the town'
'in the middle of a town'
'in a middle of the town'

In this context, it must be pointed out that “regular” adjectives in definite noun phrases occur in the so-called weak inflection (6).⁶

- (6) a. *í stór-a bæ-num*
in big-WK town-DEF
'in the big town'
b. *í falleg-a bæ-num*
in beautiful-WK town-DEF
'in the beautiful town'

Positional predicates, in contrast, consistently have strong inflection (7).

- (7) a. *í miðj-um bæ-num*
in middle-STR town-DEF
b. **í miðj-a bæ-num*
in middle-WK town-DEF

⁶While the strong inflection is largely a PIE heritage, the weak inflection is a Germanic innovation/phenomenon; the strong/weak distinction has survived into most modern Germanic languages. Traditionally, it has been associated with (the semantic expression/morphological marking of) definiteness, even though this is a simplification, both diachronically and e.g. for modern German (Ratkus 2011, Pfaff 2017, 2019, Rehn 2019, Petrova 2024 [this volume]).

As an extension of the above observation that positional predicates combine with definite noun phrases, we find that positional predicates can also modify proper names and personal pronouns, as in (8).

- (8) a. á sunnanverðri Ítalíu
on southern.STR Italy
'in the southern part of Italy'
- b. Við sáu á og brú í henni miðri
we saw river and bridge in PRN.F.DAT.SG middle.F.DAT.SG.STR
'We saw a river and a bridge in the middle of it'

Notice that positional predicates follow the pronoun, as in (8b),⁷ whereas they *precede the noun* in the other examples discussed so far. This is the default situation in modern Icelandic – even though we may find postnominal occurrences as well, with no apparent difference in meaning (9).

- (9) a. að aftanverðu húsinu b. að húsinu aftanverðu
to back house.DEF to house.DEF back
'to/at the back of the house' 'to/at the back of the house'

Finally, positional predicates precede determiners such as demonstratives, the freestanding article, pronominal possessives and quantifiers. This differs significantly from the position of “regular” adjectives (between determiner and noun), cf. (10).

- (10) a. á ofanverðri þessari öld
on latter DEM century
'in the latter part of this century'
- b. í miðri hinni alþjóðlegu fjármálakreppu
in middle.STR ART international.WK financial.crisis
'halfway through the international financial crisis'
- c. meðan hún var í miðri sinni ræðu
while she was in middle her speech
'while she was giving her speech'
- d. í miðri allri þeirri pólitísku óróleika
in middle.STR all DEM political.WK unrest
'in the midst of all that political turmoil'

⁷Occasionally, positional predicates may be found preceding a pronoun. However, Einar Freyr Sigurðsson (p.c.) points out that the post-pronominal position is more natural (or the default).

- e. í miðjum öllum öðrum leikmönnum
 in middle all other players
 ‘amidst all other players’

This position is not merely an option: they *cannot* follow a determiner (11).

- (11) *á þessari ofanverð-ri / ofanverð-u öld
 on DEM latter-STR / latter-WK century

In (both Old and modern) Icelandic, positional predicates appear to form a closed class; i.e. there is only a small class of elements displaying the set of properties described above. The list in (12) is essentially an exhaustive(?) list.⁸

- (12) Positional predicates in (Old and modern) Icelandic: inventory

a. miður middle	f. neðanverður lower part	k. vestanverður western part
b. þver across, transverse	g. framanverður front part	l. austanverður eastern part
c. endilangur along	h. aftanverður back part	m. norðanverður northern part
d. öndverður former part	i. utanverður outer part	n. sunnanverður southern part
e. ofanverður latter/upper part	j. innanverður interior part	

This brief summary shows that the behaviour of this class of modifiers differs considerably from the behaviour of regular adjectives in terms of syntax, semantics and, at least partially, morphosyntax, which justifies treating them as a separate group.

2.2 Positional predicates in early Germanic

In Section 2.1, the following characteristics of positional predicates for modern Icelandic were identified, see (13).

⁸If it were not for the elements *miður*, *þver*, *endilangur*, they could also be construed as one morphological class; notice that the other elements are morphologically complex dividing into a locational component plus the suffix *-verð-*; cf. Engl. *(back)-ward(s)*; Germ. *(rück)-wärts*.

- (13) (i) temporal/spatial part-whole relation (noun denotes temporal/spatial extension or plurality),
(ii) agreement in case, number and gender with the rest of the noun phrase (like “regular” adnominal adjective),
(iii) strong adjectival inflection (in spite of occurring in definite contexts),
(iv) combining with definite noun phrases, including pronouns and proper names (definite interpretation even when not overtly marked as definite),
(v) preceding (definite) determiners,
(vi) (default position: prenominal and post-pronominal),
(vii) (paraphrase by PP/adverbial expression).

Outside Icelandic, positional predicates are not found in the modern Germanic languages. However, based on the criteria discussed in Section 2.1, we can diagnose items in the early Germanic languages that appear to display the same properties. A brief illustration using the item ‘middle (part-of)’ is given in (14)–(18).

(14) Old Icelandic

- a. í **miðju** héraði-nu
in middle.STR district-DEF
‘in the middle of the district’ (Saga, Vopnfirðinga saga)
b. að **miðjum** Noregi
towards middle.STR Norway
‘towards Mid-Norway’ (Saga, Egils saga Skallagrímssonar)

(15) Old English

- a. of **middre** þære bremelpyrnan
from middle.STR DEM bramble.bush
‘from the middle of the bramble bush’ (NPEGL, OEng.458.602)
b. on **middum** ðinum temple (Lat. in medio templo tui)
in middle.STR your temple
‘in the middle of your temple’ (<https://bosworthtoller.com/22789>)

(16) Gothic

- a. in **midjaim** laisarjam
in middle.STR teachers
‘in the midst of the doctors’ (Wulfila, Luke 2:46)

- b. pairh **midja** Samaritan jah Galeilaian
 through middle.STR Samaria and Galilee
 ‘through the midst of Samaria and Galilee’ (Wulfila, Luke 17:11)
- (17) Old High German
- a. in **mítemo** iro ríngē
 in middle.STR their circle
 ‘in their midst’ (ReA, O_Otfr.Ev.4.19)
- b. Untar **mitten** íu
 among middle.STR you (DAT.PL)
 ‘among your midst’ (ReA, T_Tat13)
- (18) Old Saxon
- a. an **middian** dag
 on middle.STR day
 ‘in the middle of the day’ (NPEGL, OSax.444.216)
- b. under iu **middeon**
 among you middle.STR (DAT.PL)
 ‘among your midst’ (NPEGL, OSax.367.476)

Apart from the fact that the items in question are etymologically related, these examples also display the syntactic peculiarities of positional predicates in modern Icelandic (preceding determiners, strong inflection in definite contexts, combining with pronouns, etc.). Thus they are suggestive evidence of the idea that positional predicates and/or something akin to a positional-predicate syntax may be found in early Germanic. Individual occurrences may not be overly frequent in the extant texts, and for some languages merely a handful of attestations have been identified (so far). But various examples suggest that the peculiarities are not merely the result of adaptation in the process of translation.⁹ The deeper implication of this observation is that we are looking at a phenomenon native to the early Germanic languages, and that, even where we only find few attestations, the respective examples can be viewed as remnants of an older system that must have been productive in Proto-Germanic.

However, before examining the data from early Germanic in more detail in Section 4, I will take a look at Latin and Ancient Greek, and discuss the syntax of positional predicates and alternatives to the agreement construction.

⁹See e.g. (15b), where the position of the possessive is postnominal in the Latin source (in parentheses), but prenominal in the Old English rendering; the noteworthy observation is here that the item *middum* precedes the possessive in the latter.

3 Positions and agreement

3.1 Latin and Greek: The “predicative” position

Romero (1996) examines the “partitive reading” of certain adjectives in Latin which she contrasts with a “restrictive reading”. Some examples are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Restrictive and partitive readings of Latin adjectives; adapted from Romero (1996: 361)

	Restrictive reading	Partitive reading
<i>summus mons</i> (title of the article)	the highest mountain	the top of the mountain (= ‘the highest part of’)
<i>primo vere</i>	the first spring	at the beginning of the spring
<i>in ultima platea</i>	on the last square	at the end of the square
<i>in imo dolio</i>	in the deep jar	in the bottom of the jar
<i>in media insula</i>	in the middle island	in the middle of the island

As with the Icelandic examples in Section 2.1, the interpretation is definite, even though Latin does not, for the most part, give any overt cues in terms of definiteness marking or configuration. But we do find occurrences with proper names and pronouns; the examples in (19) are from Romero (1996: 364).

- (19) a. in **ultima** Phrygia b. in **medios** eos
 in final Phrygia in middle them
 ‘at the end of Phrygia’ ‘in their midst’

Classical Greek, on the other hand, overtly distinguishes between two constellations, traditionally referred to as “attributive” and “predicative” position. It must be stressed that “predicative position” here is close to a technical term defined with reference to the article position.¹⁰ An adjective occurs in the attributive position if it is preceded by the definite article (either pre- or postnominally), but in the predicative position if it either precedes the article prenominally or occurs without article in postnominal position. With “regular” adjectives, this

¹⁰So it should not be confused with what may otherwise also qualify as a “predicative position” (e.g. the complement of a copula verb).

terminology is straightforward, distinguishing attributes from (secondary) predicates (20).¹¹

- (20) a. Attributive position
 ho agathos anēr or ho anēr ho agathos
 the good man the man the good
 ‘the good man’
 b. Predicative position
 agathos ho anēr or ho anēr agathos
 good the man the man good
 ‘the man is good’ (or: ‘being good, the man ... did this or that’)

With certain other modifiers, however, this distinction directly correlates with the restrictive and partitive readings illustrated in Table 1, cf. (21).

- (21) a. Attributive position
 hē eschatē nēsos or hē nēsos hē eschatē
 the outermost island the island the outermost
 ‘the outermost island (out of several islands)’ → restrictive reading
 b. Predicative position
 eschatē hē nēsos or hē nēsos eschatē
 outermost the island the island outermost
 ‘the outermost *part of* the island’ → partitive reading

Thus Greek overtly marks a structural distinction between the restrictive and partitive readings that is not normally visible in Latin. I will follow Romero in assuming that the underlying structure is the same: even though Latin does not have articles, adjectives with the partitive reading occur in the predicative position, but adjectives with the restrictive reading occur in the attributive position.

3.2 “Attributive” vs. “predicative” position in (Old) Icelandic?

It transpires that there is a significant overlap between “adjectives with a partitive reading”/“adjectives in the predicative position” and “positional predicates”. Some further clarification is in order, though. Notice that, although the class of adjectives that can occur with a partitive reading in Latin and Greek is subject

¹¹Examples (20) and (21) are taken from Bornemann & Risch (1978: 169–171), but comparable examples can be found in most grammars or textbooks of Ancient (= Classical or Biblical) Greek.

to semantic restrictions – ordering adjectives (ordinal numerals or superlatives), adjectives that express a temporal/spatial dimension (*deep, high, low ...*) etc., it is not immediately clear that they constitute a closed class in the strict sense.

On the other hand, we have seen that positional predicates in Icelandic do form a closed class, and, differently from Latin and Greek, they do not give rise to a restrictive/partitive ambiguity themselves. In order to produce such a contrast, different lexical items will have to be used (22).

- (22) a. Ordering adjective (superlative) → restrictive reading
 á nyrst-u eyju-nni
 on northern.SUPL-WK island-DEF
 ‘on the northernmost island (out of several islands)’
 b. Positional predicate → partitive reading
 á norðanverð-ri eyju-nni
 on northern-STR island-DEF
 ‘on the northernmost part of the island’

Due to the suffixal nature of the definite article in Icelandic, the two readings in (22) do not seem to visibly correlate with a structural distinction; the only apparent difference stems from the choice of a different lexical item. There is, however, a visible morphological distinction: the (restrictive) ordering adjective carries the weak inflection, cf. (22a), whereas the positional predicate is strongly inflected, cf. (22b), see (7).¹² Pfaff (2015, 2017) shows that this morphological difference in inflection does, in fact, correlate with a structural difference arguing that “adjectival inflection is a diagnostic for structural position”: weakly inflected adjectives occur in the c-command domain of the article, whereas the strongly inflected adjective is merged outside the projection comprising noun and definite article. This external position, in turn, can essentially be equated with the

¹²Notice the following example also involving an ordering adjective (comparative form):

- (i) á nyrð-ri eyjunni
 on northern-CMPR island.DEF
 ‘on the northern island (out of two islands)’; ‘the island to the north’

Here, the ending *-ri* is the comparative morpheme and should not be confused with the formally identical feminine dative singular strong ending *-ri* in (22b). The comparative inflection in Icelandic is even more impoverished than the weak inflection, expressing no case distinctions and no gender/number distinctions other than neuter singular: *-ra* vs. the rest: *-ri*. Crucially, it does not alternate between two sets of endings, and in this sense, the distinction strong vs. weak cannot be meaningfully applied in the first place. Compare the positioning of the two modifiers ending in *-ri* in (24a): pre- vs. post-article (= predicative vs. attributive).

predicative position, cf. (20b) and (21b), which also makes reference to the article position. An example illustrating this contrast even better is the following where a descriptive, predicative adjective occurs with a definite noun. Here, the weakly inflected adjective receives a restrictive interpretation, but the strongly inflected version of the same adjective receives an appositive interpretation (23).

- (23) a. Predicative adjective (weakly inflected) → restrictive reading
full-i strákur-inn
drunk-WK boy-DEF
'the drunk boy'
- b. Predicative adjective (strongly inflected) → appositive reading
full-ur strákur-inn
drunk-STR boy-DEF
'the boy, who happens to be drunk' (Pfaff 2017: 300)

Even though not entirely identical, this contrast is comparable to the one observed with "regular" adjectives in attributive vs. predicative position in (20). The upshot is that the weak vs. strong inflection in these examples is indicative of a structural difference akin to the attributive vs. predicative position in Greek.

Of course, this structural difference is made visible if a freestanding determiner is present, as was already illustrated in (10): positional predicates precede determiners and are strongly inflected, while regular adjectives follow the determiner and are weakly inflected if the determiner is definite, cf. (10b) and (10d). Consider also the examples in (24) from Old Icelandic and Old English.

- (24) a. nær mið-ri hinna vestri byggð
near middle-STR ART western.CMPR settlement
'near the middle part of the western settlement' (Saga, Landnámabók)
- b. in midd-re þære micl-an cirican
in middle.STR DEM great-WK church
'in the middle of the great church' (NPEGL, OEng.803.266)

In (24a), the adjective preceding the freestanding article has a partitive reading ("middle part of"), while the one following the article has a restrictive reading (= "not the eastern settlement"). The same goes for (24b) where we see, once more, how strong vs. weak adjectival inflection correlates with the pre- vs. post-article position.

In short, even though positional predicates may be a closed class in Icelandic (and in the extant early Germanic languages), it can be shown that they have the same structural properties as adjectives occurring in the predicative position in Greek. Romero (1996) argues for Latin and Greek that this predicative position is a DP-external position, and Pfaff (2015, 2017) independently arrives at the same conclusion on the basis of Icelandic data, but largely for the same reasons. Technical details notwithstanding, we can state that occurring in this position is the single most important structural property of positional predicates, from which most other properties derive, and which sets them apart from “regular” adjectives.

For clarification, I point out that the term “positional predicate” as introduced in Section 2.1 strictly speaking conflates three distinct aspects:¹³

- (i) modifier with certain semantic properties that
- (ii) occurs in the predicative position and (as a consequence)
- (iii) has a partitive reading.

For the most part, I will look at these aspects in conjunction,¹⁴ but in Section 4.7, I will discuss the idea that the partitive interpretation may be one possibility of a larger spectrum of readings.

3.3 Agreement vs. dependent case

As already mentioned, cf. (4), one configurational key property of positional predicates is that, like regular adjectives, they agree in case, number and gender with the semantic head noun denoting the “source location”. But there is an obvious similarity to constructions involving a corresponding noun and dependency

¹³In addition, the predicative position is associated with the strong inflection in Germanic, a phenomenon not applicable to Latin and Greek. Pfaff (2015, 2017) argues that the weak inflection is essentially definiteness concord indicating that the adjective is merged in the c-command domain of a definiteness feature in D⁰, which corresponds to the attributive position. With adjectives merged outside the definiteness domain (= predicative position), on the other hand, the weak inflection cannot be triggered, and by default, the adjective is strongly inflected.

¹⁴Point (i) expresses merely a semantic restriction for Latin and Greek, but for Germanic, the qualifier “with certain semantic properties” is tantamount to belonging to a closed class. It could be worthwhile studying that class as such, notably, the etymology of the items based on Proto-Germanic *-*verb-*, as was suggested by a reviewer; see Section 4.6. These originally had a directional meaning and were adjectival in nature, but have developed into adverbs in most Germanic languages (Germ.: *rück-wärt-s*; Engl. *back-ward-s*), except for Icelandic.

marking on the semantic head noun (cf. English *the middle of the city*).¹⁵ We can distinguish as in (25).

- (25) a. in [_{DP} *middle*-AGR [the city]-AGR] (positional predicate)
 b. in [_{DP} (**the**) *middle* [_{DP} **the** city]-GEN] (corresponding noun)
 c. in [_{DP} (**the**) *middle* [_{PP} **of** the city] (corresponding noun)

Differently from a positional predicate, a corresponding noun does not constitute an agreement construction with the rest of the noun phrase, but instead establishes a second agreement domain. In particular, it takes the semantic head noun as a – PP or genitive DP – dependent, and may have its own article. Moreover, in languages with morphological gender marking, the noun may have a gender value different from the semantic head noun. These points are illustrated with the following Old High German examples: the item *mitti* can either be an adjective (displaying adjectival inflection) or a feminine noun (displaying nominal inflection). In the former case, it agrees with the head noun, while in the latter case, it occurs with its own article and takes the semantic head noun as a genitive complement (26).

- (26) a. *mitti* + adjectival inflection
 in **mitt-an** thén uueizi
 in middle-M.ACC.SG.STR [DEM wheat]-M.ACC.SG
 ‘amidst the wheat’ (ReA T_Tat72)
 b. *mitti* + nominal inflection
 die **mítti-nâ** der-o bóum-o
 the middle-F.NOM.PL [DEM tree]-M.GEN.PL
 ‘the middle part(s) of the trees’ (ReA, N_Mart_Cap.I.14-37)

Obviously, it is useful to keep these points in mind in order to distinguish positional predicates from etymologically related nouns, but it also allows us to pay attention to subtler distinctions. Compare the examples in (27) from Classical Greek.

¹⁵Likewise, certain adverbs modifying a PP could be mentioned in this context; cf. German:

- (i) a. mitten in der Stadt (ii) oben auf dem Turm
 middle [_{PP} in the city] up [_{PP} on the tower]
 ‘in the middle of the city’ ‘at the top (part) of the tower’

- (27) a. en *mesē* *tē* *polei*
 in middle.F.DAT.SG the.F.DAT.SG city.DAT.SG (f)
 (Perseus, Isokrates; To Philip, speech 5, Section 48)
- b. en *mesō* *tēs* *poleōs*
 in middle.N.DAT.SG the.F.GEN.SG city.GEN.SG (f)
 (Perseus, Plutarch, Sertorius, chap. 18)
- both: ‘in the middle of the city’

Example (27a) shows a straightforward use of the positional predicate *mesos* ‘middle’ displaying agreement in (feminine) gender, case and number. Example (27b), on the other hand, involves the neuter singular form taking the semantic head noun as a genitive complement. In this latter case, it is not immediately clear whether *meson* should be construed as a genuine noun or a nominal use/nominalized version of the adjectival form.¹⁶ There is some variation between authors/genres; most notably, in the Greek of the New Testament, the use of the genitive construction appears to dominate, and at least the item *mesos* ‘middle’ is only found in the genitive construction. This will be of particular relevance for the discussion of Gothic.

4 Positional predicates in early Germanic

In Section 2.2, we saw that (etymologically related) items displaying (some of) the same syntactic peculiarities as in modern Icelandic, see Section 2.1 and (13i–v), can be found in all early Germanic languages. This is a strong indication that positional predicates and their properties really belong to the inventory of early Germanic syntax. At the same time, we also find various deviations and interesting variations among the attested languages. In this section, I will point out and discuss the most noticeable features/deviations for each language.

4.1 Old Icelandic

As illustrated in (12), we find the same items occurring as positional predicates in Old Icelandic and modern Icelandic. Some examples are given in (28).¹⁷

¹⁶Differently from Germanic, nominal and adjectival inflection are form-identical in Greek.

¹⁷The *Saga Corpus* contains a bit more than 500 relevant examples (queries based on the items in (12) together produce 637 hits, but among them, we find a small number of PPs without an overt noun). NPEGL contains 69 annotated instances (at the time of writing).

- (28) a. *í öndverðu liði-nu*
 in front.part.STR troops-DEF
 ‘in the foremost part of the army’ (NPEGL, OIce.803.935)
- b. *þú situr á austanverðu landi en vér á vestanverðu landi*
 you sit on eastern.STR land but we on western.STR land
 ‘You are (based) in the eastern part of the country, but we in the western part of the country’
 (Saga, Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða)
- c. *eftir endilöngum setaskála-num*
 after along.STR building-DEF
 ‘from one end of the building to the other’ (Saga, Eyrbyggja saga)
- d. *ofanverðan þenna vetur*
 latter.STR this winter
 ‘in the latter part of that winter’ (NPEGL, OIce.548.527)

We find both pre- and postnominal occurrences, even though the prenominal position seems to be dominant, cf. (29).^{18,19}

- (29) a. *of þvera götu-na*
 over across.STR road-DEF
 ‘across the road’ (NPEGL, OIce.902.814)
- b. *um á-na þvera*
 about river-DEF across.STR
 ‘across the river’ (Saga, Vatnsdæla saga)
- c. *á ofanverðum dögum Haralds Sigurðarsonar*
 on latter.STR days [Haraldur Sigurðarson]-GEN
 ‘in the latter days of Harald Sigurðarson’ (Saga, Heimskringla)

¹⁸*Saga Corpus*: 415 prenominal vs. 67 postnominal occurrences; NPEGL: 61 vs. 4.

¹⁹Notice that positional predicates are consistently strongly inflected even when following a definite noun, i.e. a noun carrying a suffixed definite article, cf. (29b). In contrast, “regular” adjectives are normally weakly inflected in this constellation:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (i) a. <i>í á-nni helg-u</i>
in river-DEF holy-WK
‘in the holy river’
(Saga, Heimskringla) | b. <i>sverð-ið góð-a</i>
sword-DEF good-WK
‘the good sword’
(Saga, Gull-Þóris saga) |
|---|--|

Thus, in Old Icelandic, inflection can be used as a diagnostic also in the postnominal position: weak inflection ~ attributive position, strong inflection ~ predicative position.

- d. á dögum Hákonar hins ríka öndverðum
on days [Hákon the mighty]-GEN beginning.STR
‘in the early days of Hákon the mighty’
(Saga, Egils saga Skallagrímssonar)

In the context of names and pronouns, there appear to be certain restrictions. We find both pre- and postnominal occurrences with place names, cf. (30a) and (30b), but only postnominal occurrences with names of persons, cf. (30c).

- (30) a. yfir Borgarfjörð þveran
over Borgarfjörður across.STR
‘across Borgarfjörður’ (Saga, Laxdæla saga)
- b. á framanverðu Reykjanesi
on front.part.STR Reykjanes
‘at the front part of the Reykjanes peninsula’ (Saga, Gull-Þóris saga)
- c. Hann tvíhenti spjótið á Þóri miðjum
he hurled spear.DEF on Þór middle.STR
‘He hurled the spear right at Þór’ (Saga, OIce.822.459)

Likewise, only post-pronominal occurrences are found (31).

- (31) a. bóndinn féll um hann þveran
yeoman.DEF fell about him across.STR
‘the yeoman fell over him’ (Saga, Brennu-Njáls saga)
- b. Bolli skýtur að honum spjóti og kemur á hann miðjan
Bolli shoots at him spear and comes on him middle.STR
‘Bolli shoots a spear at him and it hits him squarely’ (Saga, Íslendingaþættir)

Beyond that, positional predicates are rather versatile and may occur in unexpected constellations. For instance, in (32), the positional predicate appears to have been stranded, while the lower part of the noun phrase has been fronted to the clause-initial position.

- (32) þessa nótt hina sömu kom Mörður [ofanverða t]
this night the same came Mörður latter-part.STR
‘Later that very same night, Mörður showed up’ (Saga, Brennu-Njáls saga)

In some cases, we find neuter forms of positional predicates, de facto acting as the head noun, in PPs without an overt noun, cf. (33).

- (33) frá öndverðu til ofanverðs
from former/lower.part.STR to latter/upper-part.STR
'from top to bottom' or 'from beginning to end'

In other words, the (singular) neuter forms have nominal uses, in addition to their more frequent ad-nominal use. However, this nominal use only appears to occur in the absence of a semantic head noun. Whenever there is a constituent denoting the source location, it is realized as the (semantic and) syntactic head noun, and the positional predicate agrees with that head noun in case, number and gender. In this respect, Old Icelandic behaves differently from the neuter forms of *meson* in Ancient Greek, cf. (27b), which may take the semantic head noun as a genitive complement. Judging from the examples examined here, Old Icelandic never takes genitival dependents.

4.2 Old English

In Old English, we find largely the same inventory of positional predicates as in (Old) Icelandic; some examples are given in (34).

- (34) a. on middre ðære sæ
in middle.STR DEM sea
'in the middle of the sea' (NPEGL, OEng.436.568)
- b. on middum ðinum temple (Lat. in medio templo tui)
in middle.STR your temple
'in the middle of your temple' (<https://bosworthtoller.com/22789>)
- c. þæt heafod foreweard
DEM head front.part.STR
'the front part of the head' (NPEGL, OEng.349.012)
- d. genim hamorwyrð & efenlastan nyðoweard
take wall.pellitory & herb.mercury nether.part.STR
'take the lower part of pellitory-of-the-wall and herb mercury
(= plant names)' (NPEGL, OEng.241.262)
- e. on þam lande norþweardum
on DEM land northern.part.STR
'in the northern part of the land' (NPEGL: OEng.097.051)

Besides the item "middle (part of)", we find a large class of complex items consisting of a locational component plus a morpheme *-weard-* (plus inflection)

like *norþ-weard-*, cf. Icelandic *norðan-verð-*. Previous research on the position of adjectives in Old English has noted that those items in *-weard-* have some “adverbial interpretation” and occur more frequently in postnominal position than regular adjectives (especially Fischer 2001; Grabski 2017, 2020). Thus even in Old English, which otherwise displays a relatively rigid modifier ordering in general (see Bech et al. 2024 [this volume]), positional predicates are much more versatile than regular adjectives. At the time of writing, 213 positional predicates have been identified in the NPEGL database (annotation still in progress). This is a comparatively large number, and therefore, it is noteworthy that, so far, no occurrences with pronouns have been identified.

Also notice (34b), taken from Bosworth Toller’s *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary online*, which in addition gives the Latin original that the Old English phrase is supposed to translate. The possessive occurs postnominally in the Latin, but prenominally in English; this is perhaps not very surprising given that possessives in Old English almost exclusively occur prenominally (see Bech et al. 2024 [this volume]). Yet it is noteworthy that, in accordance with our expectations, the adjective precedes that possessive.

Other deviations from Latin are even more revealing, for instance cases where the Latin text has a genitive dependent while the English translation uses an agreement construction. The examples in (35) (likewise taken from Bosworth-Toller’s dictionary entry: *midd*) illustrate some such mismatches between Old English and the Latin source (bracketing indicates agreement in case, number, gender).

- (35) a. *in middum wulfum*
 in [middle.STR wolf]-DAT.PL
 ‘amidst the wolves’
 Lat. *in medio luporum* (→ wolf.GEN.PL)
- b. *þurh midde ða ceastre*
 through [middle.STR DEM camp]-ACC.SG
 ‘through the middle of the camp’
 Lat. *per medium castrorum* (→ camp.GEN.PL)
- c. *On middum ðæm úrum wicum*
 in [middle.STR DEM our camp]-DAT.PL
 ‘in the middle of our camps’
 Lat. *in media castrorum* (→ camp.GEN.PL)

- d. On middan ða wic
in [middle.WK DEM camp]-ACC.SG
'in the middle of the camp'
Lat. in medio castrorum (→ camp.GEN.PL)

These apparently systematic deviations are an indication that the construction is precisely not a scholarly translation from Latin, but a native phenomenon. As already seen in the previous subsection on Old Icelandic, Old English seems to prefer the agreement construction. However, in contrast to Icelandic, we find a handful of examples instantiating the genitive construction, as in (36).

- (36) a. on westewardum þisses middangeardes
in western.part.STR [DEM world]-GEN
'in the western part of this world' (NPEGL, OEng.078.130)
b. wið middan þæs suðwages
at middle.WK [DEM south.wall]-GEN
'at the middle of the south wall' (NPEGL, OEng.540.709)

Except for the examples in (36), all positional predicates annotated in NPEGL occur in an agreement construction, which indicates that, albeit attested, the genitive construction seems to be dispreferred.

There is a more noticeable feature of positional predicates in Old English concerning adjectival inflection. As illustrated by (35d) and (36b), we find weak inflection where we otherwise expect the strong inflection according to (13iii). Currently, we have 35 (out of 213) such weakly inflected positional predicates in the NPEGL database of Old English. This aspect has been noted before. Mitchell (1985: vol. I, 70) discusses exceptions regarding the distribution of adjectival inflection and the deviant behaviour of *midd* and elements ending in *-ward*. Of course, positional predicates are deviant only from the point of view of "regular" adjectives, generally speaking, but Mitchell points out certain cases that are unexpected also from the perspective of positional predicates. We can distinguish three constellations (37)–(39).

(I) Predicative position – weak inflection

- (37) a. on ufeward-an þam geate
on upper.part-WK DEM gate
'in the upper part of the gate' (NPEGL, OEng.010.465)

- b. betwux þam eorode midd-an
among DEM troop middle-WK
‘among the middle of the troop’ (NPEGL, OEng.340.258)

(II) Attributive position – strong inflection

- (38) a. þære midd-re nihte
DEM middle-STR night
‘the mid-night’ (NPEGL, OEng.429.571)
b. þone mid-ne sumor
DEM middle-STR summer
‘the mid-summer’ (NPEGL, OEng.175.907)

(III) Attributive position – weak inflection

- (39) þam midd-an wintra
DEM middle-WK winter
‘the mid-winter’ (NPEGL, OEng.697.340, OEng.685.076)

Constellations (I) and (II) are unexpected with respect to both regular adjectives and positional predicates; with a handful of relatively systematic exceptions, weak adjectives are usually restricted in their occurrence to (formally) definite contexts, which normally means when following a definite determiner.

Thus, while the elements in constellation (I) display the expected syntax (= the predicative position), the pre-determiner weak inflection is unexpected. Conversely, the post-determiner strong inflection is unaccounted for in constellation (II). Moreover, the attributive position is unexpected given that the elements in (38) still produce a partitive reading, not a restrictive one (see Section 3.1).

The latter issue can possibly be addressed by analyzing (II) as a mere surface phenomenon derived via determiner raising to a pre-adjectival position while the adjective itself occupies the predicative position all along (40).²⁰

- (40) [þære middre [_{DP} þære nihte]]

An analysis along those lines can thus account for the partitive reading with (II). However, constellation (III), which is what is expected for regular adjectives, poses a more serious problem – precisely because of the weak inflection, an analysis like (40) does not work here. All formal criteria indicate that *middan* in (39)

²⁰In other words, rather than the relative article position, here the strong inflection could be taken as a diagnostic for the predicative position of the respective modifier. Still, this raises the question what motivates the determiner movement.

genuinely occupies an attributive position. We should therefore expect a restrictive reading (~ ‘the middle one in a sequence of winters’), but we get a partitive reading (‘the middle part of the winter’).

Thus while Old English provides ample evidence for positional predicates, we also find “deviations” from the prototypical behaviour as characterized in (13), notably in terms of adjectival inflection. Obviously, more research is called for, but, in all likelihood, such deviations are part of (later) English-internal developments. For one thing, the inflectional system shows first signs of disintegration already towards the end of the Old English period.²¹ But also more broad syntactic changes in the transition to Middle English, e.g. the emergence of the determiner system and an increasingly fixed word order, had an impact on adjective syntax in general, cf. Fischer (2004, 2006), and presumably on the behaviour of positional predicates.

4.3 Gothic

In Gothic, we find six relevant instances of the item *midjis* ‘middle’, all of which are given in (41) ((41d) represents two occurrences).

- (41) a. in midjaim laisarjam
 in middle.STR teachers
 ‘in the midst of the doctors’ (Wulfila, Luke 2:46)
- b. ana midjai dulp
 at middle.STR feast
 ‘about the midst of the feast’ (Wulfila, John 7:14)
- c. þairh midja Samarian jah Galeilaian
 through middle.STR Samaria and Galilee
 ‘through the midst of Samaria and Galilee’ (Wulfila, Luke 17:11)
- d. þairh midjans ins
 through middle.STR them
 ‘through the midst of them’ (Wulfila, Luke 4:30; John, 8:59)
- e. in midjaim im
 in middle.STR them
 ‘in the midst of them’; ‘amongst them’ (Wulfila, Mark 9:36)

²¹As a result, there is an increase of syncretism and a decrease in distinctions made between cases, but also between strong vs. weak inflection; thus it cannot always be unambiguously decided whether a given adjective is strongly or weakly inflected. Incidentally, this also applies to Old Saxon, see fn. 26. Thanks to George Walkden (p.c.) for pointing this out to me.

Even though none of these examples involves a determiner, they illustrate the characteristics of positional predicates in predicative position: the modifier is strongly inflected, it combines with proper names and pronouns and they fully agree in case, number (and gender), the noun denotes a temporal or spatial extension or plurality, and we get a partitive interpretation. Of course, based on only six “well-behaved” examples, not much can be said about variation and language-specific peculiarities, but it is worthwhile pointing out two observations of interest.

Firstly, out of three co-occurrences with a pronoun, the positional predicate precedes the pronoun three times, (41d) and (41e); that is 100%. Recall that, in Old Icelandic, positional predicates *never* occur pre-pronominally, and as will be seen in the following section(s), the same applies to Old High German and Old Saxon (with one counterexample). Thus if the post-pronominal position is otherwise the default across Germanic, even three instances might be sufficient to indicate that Gothic differs from the other Germanic languages, at least in that respect.

However, one permanent problem with Gothic is the question to what degree it reflects the Greek rather than the native syntax (see Ratkus 2011 for a thorough discussion); the pre-pronominal position could, in principle, be such a reflection. It is therefore revealing to take a look at the Greek source text; (42) illustrates the relevant passages underlying the Gothic translations in (41).²²

- (42) a. en mesō tōn didaskalōn
 in middle.N.DAT.SG [the teacher]-M.GEN.PL
- b. tēs heortēs mesousēs (F.GEN.SG)
 the feast in.middle.being
- c. dia meson samareīās
 through middle.N.ACC.SG Samaria.F.GEN.SG
- d. dia mesou autōn
 through middle.N.GEN.SG they.GEN.PL
- e. en mesō autōn
 in middle.N.DAT.SG they.GEN.PL

Strictly speaking, the Greek examples show a pre-pronominal position, cf. (42d) and (42e), but upon closer inspection, we discern a systematic mismatch between Greek and Gothic. Even though Classical Greek does have positional predicates occurring in an agreement construction/the predicative position as

²²The Greek text is from taken from *Project Wulfila* (<http://www.wulfila.be/gothic/>), which relies on the Streitberg edition of the Gothic/Greek New Testament.

was discussed in Section 3.1, cf. (21b) and (27a), Biblical Greek seems to prefer a genitive construction, as in (27b). With the exception of (42b),²³ the Greek examples in (42) involve a nominalized adjective (based on the neuter singular) that takes the noun/pronoun as a genitive dependent. In spite of this, the Gothic translations in (41) all use the agreement construction. This, in turn, is a strong indication that the partitive agreement construction found with positional predicates is a native phenomenon and a productive pattern of the Gothic syntax, and precisely not a borrowing from Greek – which would, in principle, be a plausible source.

Similarly to Old Icelandic, cf. (33), in Gothic, we find four cases without an overt noun where the modifier itself is used nominally (43).

(43) in **midjaim**

in middle.DAT.PL

‘in(to) the middle/midst’ (Wulfila, Luke 2:35, 5:9, 6:8; Mark 14:60)

There are no instances of the adjectival form taking a genitival dependent. However, differently from Old Icelandic, Gothic has a morphologically distinct (feminine) noun *miduma* that occurs six times, of which four times with a genitive dependent (44).

(44) in **midumai** wulfe

(en mesō

lukōn)

in middle wolf.GEN.PL

in middle.NEUT.DAT.SG wolf.GEN.PL

‘amidst wolves’ (Wulfila, Luke 10:3)

Setting aside nominal uses as in (43), the adjectival form *midjis* only occurs in agreement constructions, while the noun *miduma* can take the (semantic) head noun only as a genitival dependent. In Greek, on the other hand, the adjectival form occurs both in agreement constructions and with genitival dependents; notice that both *midjis* in (43) and *miduma* translate the neuter adjectival forms (*meson*) in the Greek text.

4.4 Old High German

A query in ANNIS yields 79 matches for the lemma *mitti* ‘middle’. In 49 cases, these can straightforwardly be diagnosed as positional predicates; some examples are given in (45).

²³Note that this example is different at any rate; it actually involves a participle form of a verb ‘be-in-the-middle’ and the whole phrase is a so-called *genitivus absolutus*, a small clause construction with an adverbial function.

- (45) a. in mittemo seuue
in middle.STR sea
'in the midst of the sea' (ReAT_Tat81)
- b. únder mîttēn díen planetis
under middle.STR DEM planets
'amidst the planets' (ReA, N_Mart_Cap.I.14-37)
- c. in mittan thén uueizi
in middle.STR DEM wheat
'amidst the wheat' (ReAT_Tat72)
- d. in mîttēmo iro ríngē
in middle.STR their circle
'in their midst' (ReAO_Otfr.Ev.4.19)
- e. duruh den Fredthantes uuingarton mittan
through DEM Fredant's vineyard middle.M.ACC.SG.STR
'(right) through the middle of Fredant's vineyard'
(ReA, WM2_Wuerzburger_Markbeschreibung_2)
- f. in mittan Moin
in middle.STR Main
'in the middle (part) of the (river) Main'
(ReA, WM2_Wuerzburger_Markbeschreibung_2)

In 36 of these cases, *mitti* occurs prenominally, and we find four postnominal occurrences, e.g. (45e). However, with nouns denoting (place) names, only prenominal occurrences are found, e.g. (45f). In addition, we find nine occurrences with pronouns, as in (46), one of which in pre-pronominal position, cf. (46c).

- (46) a. untar sie mitte
among them middle.M.ACC.PL.STR
'into/between their midst' (ReA, T_Tat120)
- b. in dhir mitteru
in you.SG middle.F.DAT.SG.STR
'right inside you' (ReA, I_DeFide_3)
- c. Untar mitten íu
among middle.DAT.PL.STR you.PL
'amongst you' (ReA, T_Tat13)

As was already shown for Old Icelandic and Gothic, we also find nominal uses of the item *mitti*, i.e. without a semantic head noun, in prepositional phrases (47).

- (47) arstant inti gistant in mitten
raise and stand in middle.STR
'raise and stand in the middle' (ReA, T_Tat69)

Moreover, however, we find examples where *mitti* occurs with a genitive dependent (48), and here we have to distinguish between two cases: in (48a) and (48b), *mitti* occurs with a strong adjectival ending, whereas in (48c), it occurs with a nominal ending; the latter has to be construed as an instance of a feminine (in-stem) noun *mitti*; the additional feminine article *die* is another indication of nounhood of *mitti* in this example (cf. Section 3.3). Here, the inflection definitively disambiguates and distinguishes the *nominal use* of an adjective from an actual *noun*, even though the two happen to have the same nominative singular form: *mitti*.

- (48) a. untar mǫtten thes sēlben dages
under middle.STR [DEM same day]-GEN
'during the same day' (ReA, O_Otfr.Ev.5.11)
b. thar bin ih in mǫtten iro
there am I in middle.STR they.GEN
'there I am in their midst' (ReA, T_Tat98)
c. die mǫtti-nā der-o bóum-o
DEM middle-F.NOM.PL [DEM tree]-M.GEN.PL
'the middle part(s) of the trees' (ReA, N_Mart_Cap.I.14-37)

In Gothic, the two can be distinguished more easily: *midjis* vs. *miduma*. Differently from Gothic, however, where only the latter takes a genitive dependent, in Old High German, also the adjectival forms *can* take a genitive dependent, cf. (48a) and (48b), besides occurring in the agreement construction as in (45) and (46).

4.5 Old Saxon

In Old Saxon, we find the examples presented in (49).

- (49) a. an middian dag
on middle.STR day
'in the middle of the day' (NPEGL, OSax.444.216, OSax.075.303)

- b. middi dag
middle.STR day
'(the) middle of the day'; 'mid-day' (NPEGL, OSax.869.882)
- c. under iu middeon (DAT.PL)
among you middle.STR
'amongst you' (NPEGL, OSax.367.476)
- d. an herdan sten ovanwardan
on hard.STR stone upper.part.STR
'on the upper part of the hard stone' (NPEGL, OSax.914.974)

These few examples do not convey much that has not already been addressed. Note that we only have agreement constructions, no genitival dependents. It is, however, worthwhile dwelling for a moment on the item *ovan-verd* in (49d).

4.6 The component *-*werþ*-

We have already seen several cognates of the type LOCATION + *-*werþ*- + STR, cf. Old Norse *ofan-verð-an* and Old English *ufe-weard-an*. In Old High German, we also find etymologically corresponding forms/items comprising the component *-vert-*, cf. (50), but it is not clear that they are relevant in the present discussion.²⁴

- (50) a. inuúertes sint sie ráze uúolua
inwardly are they furious wolves
'inwardly, they are furious wolves' (ReA, T_Tat41)
- b. ci thesemo antuuerden libe
to DEM present.WK life
'to this present life' (ReA, WK_Weissenburger_Katechismus)

Example (50a) involves a fossilized genitive *-es* and is used adverbially (cf. modern German items in *-wärt-s*). The item *antwort* in (50b),²⁵ meaning 'current, present', is weakly inflected and occurs in the attributive position. In all likelihood, it has to be construed as a "regular" (non-subjective) adjective, rather than a positional predicate. Thus it is not a counterexample or problematic case in the same way as constellation (III) is for the examples discussed for Old English, cf. (39). At the same time, it does not support anything. More generally, we do not seem to have positive evidence that items in *-vert-* were used as positional predicates in Old High German.

²⁴Notice that [v] is often spelled <uu> in Old High German manuscripts, cf. (50).

²⁵Etymologically, it corresponds to Icelandic *önd-verður* 'former/front-part', 'beginning'.

Therefore, *ovan-verd-an* in (49d) is a valuable hint that positional predicates of this type also existed in continental West Germanic, even though attestations are much scarcer than in Old Norse and Old English. ANNIS annotates Old Saxon *ovanverd-an* as adverb; when viewed as an isolated case, this decision may be justified, but when viewed in the context of comparable examples from Old Norse and Old English discussed in previous subsections, even this single example can be seen as part of a larger pattern, complying with the syntax of positional predicates as characterized here.²⁶

4.7 Beyond partitivity: *self*

The discussion so far has shown that all the early Germanic languages provide evidence for the existence of positional predicates as described in Section 2.1 to varying degrees. More precisely, we have looked at cognates of “middle” and compound adjectives in **-verb-*. Of course, the mere attestation of these items is not decisive; what matters most is that they manifest the (“deviant”) syntactic properties (13i–v), notably, occurrence in the predicative position and partitive interpretation. The partitive interpretation had been independently argued for by Romero (1996) concerning Latin and Classical Greek. Still, we might ask the question whether the partitive reading is the primary or canonical interpretation of the predicative position, or just one special case. For one thing, positional predicates in Old English can be viewed as a subclass of a large group of adjectives with an “adverbial reading,”²⁷ cf. Fischer (2001), Grabski (2017, 2020). In the same vein, the (Old) Icelandic items *pver* ‘across’ and *endilangur* ‘along’; ‘from part to the other’, cf. (3), do not immediately strike one as partitive elements even though, morphosyntactically, they pattern like all the other positional predicates. In either case, this could be part of a language-specific development, e.g. as an instance of broadening or narrowing the range of interpretations; evidence from the other early Germanic languages is too scarce to be helpful in that matter.

Apart from that, however, there is another observation of interest, which should be mentioned since I have made reference to evidence from Greek. Practically every textbook or grammar on Ancient Greek uses the example in (51) when illustrating the two positions of adjectives.

²⁶In this vein, the ending *-an* can be analyzed as strong, masculine, accusative singular (compare the prenominal adjective *herd-an*). However, it should also be mentioned that certain inflectional endings – especially *-an* – are ambiguous/syncretic. It is not even always clear whether *-an* stands for strong or weak inflection, or whether it is rather some sort of general-purpose or default inflection. Thanks to George Walkden (p.c.) for pointing this out to me; see fn. 21.

²⁷I thank Olga Fischer (p.c.) for pointing this out to me.

- | | |
|---|--|
| (51) a. Attributive position
ho autos basileus
the SELF king
‘the same king’ | b. Predicative position
autos ho basileus
SELF the king
‘the king himself / in person’, ‘even the king’ |
|---|--|

When occurring in the attributive position, the item *autos*, here simply glossed as SELF, expresses an identity/sameness relation corresponding to English (*the*) *same* (= ‘same’-reading). However, when occurring in the predicative position, it rather acts as a focus modifier emphasizing the referent in some sense and largely overlaps in usage with English *him-/herself* (= ‘self’-reading). When viewed in isolation, this ambiguity could be seen as a quirk of (Ancient) Greek. However, when we take into account the bigger cross-Germanic picture, we find the same distinction involving the same item *self* (52).

- | | |
|---|---|
| (52) a. Attributive position
(German)
der selb-e König
the SELF-WK king
‘the same king’ | b. Predicative position
(Icelandic)
sjálf-ur konungur-inn
SELF-STR king-DEF
‘the king himself’, ‘even the king’ |
|---|---|

In modern German, we visibly only find the ‘same’-reading of SELF (weakly inflected), while in Old Norse and modern Icelandic, only the ‘self’-reading is found (strongly inflected).²⁸ However, we do find subtle remnants of the same systematic alternation, also within one and the same language, at least in early West Germanic; compare the a- vs. b-examples in (53)–(55).

- (53) Old High German
- | | |
|---|--|
| a. demu selb-in tage
DEM SELF-WK day
‘the same day’ (ReA, B_14) | b. selb-emu dhemu gotes sune
SELF-STR DEM God’s son
‘the son of God himself’ (ReA, I_DeFide_4) |
|---|--|
- (attributive: ‘the same’)
- (predicative: ‘himself’)

²⁸The ‘self’-reading of *self* as such is found in modern German, in which case, however, the item *selbst/selber* is not inflected. In North Germanic, the lexical item *sam-* = ‘same’ has been in use since early on, and replaced the use of *self* in the ‘same’-reading.

- (54) Old Saxon
- a. thia selv-un tid
DEM SELF-WK time (attributive: ‘the same’)
‘the same time’ (NPEGL, OSax.522.758)
 - b. thie heland self
DEM saviour SELF.STR (predicative: ‘himself’)
‘the saviour himself’ (NPEGL, OSax.048.265)
- (55) Old English
- a. þæt sylf-e land
DEM SELF-WK land (attributive: ‘the same’)
‘the same land’ (NPEGL, OEng.614.076)
 - b. þone hælend silf-ne
DEM saviour SELF-STR (predicative ‘himself’)
‘the saviour himself’ (NPEGL, OEng.527.762)

At any rate, on the ‘self’-reading, the item *self* behaves like a positional predicate with respect to points (ii)–(v) above (i.e. modulo partitive interpretation) in several early Germanic languages: it occurs in the predicative position (DP-externally), and is strongly inflected.²⁹

In other words, in spite of being a relatively small class compared to regular adjectives, positional predicates may still be part of a larger phenomenon involving other modifiers in non-standard positions with a nonstandard interpretation. The non-standard position in all cases is the predicative position, but the non-standard interpretation is not always partitive. The commonality observable is thus primarily a syntactic property. Even though attestations are scarce in several cases, the big picture that emerges from the discussion in this section is that this syntactic property is likely to have been a feature of early Germanic.

5 Summary and outlook

The discussion has shown that positional predicates are a class of modifiers with a number of peculiar properties that set them apart from “regular” adjectives. One goal has been to establish this class, i.e. to show that they constitute a worthwhile object of investigation in their own right, and that the phenomenon is relevant to early Germanic syntax. We have established the following prototypical properties:

²⁹Gothic is an exception insofar as all occurrences of the item *self*, regardless of use or meaning, appear to be weakly inflected.

- (i) Positional predicates express a temporal/spatial part-whole relation, and they typically combine with nouns denoting temporal/spatial extensions or pluralities.
- (ii) They agree with their head noun/the rest of the noun phrase in case, number, and gender.
- (iii) Especially relevant for Germanic: they display the strong adjectival inflection, even though they occur in contexts where, at least at a surface glance, the strong inflection is unexpected.
- (iv) They occur in definite noun phrases, and combine with pronouns and proper names; even when not overtly marked as definite, there is an underlying definite interpretation.
- (v) They precede determiners (when present), such as demonstratives, articles, and possessives.

Point (v) is indicative of the “predicative position” in Ancient Greek, where the same phenomenon (modulo adjectival inflection) is found. The construction is also found in Latin even though it is not equally visible due to the lack of an article. We have seen for Greek, Latin and some Germanic languages that, occasionally, a genitive construction is used. However, we have likewise observed instances where a (Gothic, Old English) translation uses the agreement construction instead of a genitive construction used in the (Greek, Latin) original. This is a subtle, but important hint that the agreement construction/positional predicate in the predicative position is part of the native Germanic syntax, and not imported via scholarly translations. By extension, we may infer that the syntax of positional predicates is older than the extant texts.

Besides all the commonalities among the early Germanic languages, we have also observed some variation and deviation from the expected behaviour, presumably as a result of language-specific developments. There is for instance some variation in relative positions and co-occurrences; positional predicates occur pre-pronominally in Gothic, but post-pronominally in virtually all other attested cases, while they do not appear to co-occur with pronouns in Old English at all. We have also seen various degrees to which a genitive construction is used as an alternative to the agreement construction.

In all likelihood, there are more details and questions that remain to be addressed, and, at a more general level, we can add the following questions:

- (i) On the assumption that the syntactic peculiarities pertaining to positional predicates/the predicative are native to Germanic, Greek and Latin, is this a syntactic property inherited from a common source (PIE), or did it develop independently?
- (ii) How widespread is this phenomenon outside Germanic, Greek and Latin – or, for that matter, outside Indo-European?

I leave these issues to further investigation.

Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	N	neuter
ART	freestanding article	NOM	nominative
CMPR	comparative	PIE	Proto-Indo-European
DAT	dative	PL	plural
DEF	suffixed definite article	PRN	pronoun
F	feminine	SG	singular
GEN	genitive	STR	strong inflection
Lat.	Latin	SUPL	superlative
M	masculine	WK	weak inflection

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