

FOR A DIACHRONIC THEORY OF GENITIVE ASSIGNMENT IN ROMANCE

Denis Delfitto - Università di Verona

Paola Paradisi - Universiteit Leiden

Although prepositionless adnominal genitives are completely excluded in present day standard Italian (apart from the construct-state configurations investigated by Longobardi), there is a variety of alleged nominal compounds (N+N compounds) which exhibits peculiar properties and that might turn out to be relevant for a global theory of genitive assignment in Romance. This category of compounds is exemplified in (1):

- (1) a. centrotavola, fondovalle, girocollo, montepremi
- b. taglio spese sociali, smaltimento rifiuti solidi, area parcheggio TIR, causa interruzione linea, ufficio riscossione tributi

We claim that these compounds can be partitioned into two distinct classes, one of a more lexical nature (1a), characterized by opacity to syntactic operations, more idiosyncratic meaning (*exocentricity*), and strict word-like status on phonological grounds (only one primary stress, generally falling on the complement), and one of a more syntactic nature (1b), characterized by compositional meaning, unconstrained recursion and phonologically independent word components. This splitting is highly reminiscent of an analogous phenomenon described for modern Hebrew in Borer 1988, featuring an opposition between lexical compounds and construct-state compounds. For instance, the compounds in (1b) tend to allow pronominal resumption of the head noun, exactly paralleling the transparency to syntactic operations manifested by construct-state compounds in modern Hebrew. This contrast is exemplified in (2):

- (2) a. A causa dei tagli della legge finanziaria, si sono dovuti eliminare due uffici personale e uno __ riscossione tributi
- b. *Ho già preso le misure di due girovita e di un(o) __ collo

In this presentation, we will argue for a different thesis than post-syntactic application of morphological rules (parallel morphology): the alleged forms of composition instantiated in (1b) are better analysed as the development of a form of genitive assignment which was fully productive in early stages of Romance. Crucial evidence in favor of a purely syntactic status of the constructions in (1b) is constituted by the observation that this type of alleged N+N compounds is systematically ruled out in Italian when the head noun is an agentive nominal (generally taking the derivational suffix *-tore*). Notice that these cases of composition are perfectly acceptable in Germanic languages such as English and Dutch, as shown in (3):

- (3) werkgever (employer) vs. datore di lavoro (cf. *datore lavoro)
- projectontwerper (project designer) vs. ideatore di progetti (cf. *ideatore progetti)

We propose that this phenomenon reproduces within the nominal domain the empirical effects of the so-called *Burzio's generalization*, which prevents verbs that do not assign an external thematic role (like passives and unaccusatives) from assigning accusative case to the object. The analogy is given by the fact that derived nominals in *-tore* are inherently agentive (thus, they do not assign an external theta-role): arguably, this is the reason why they are incapable of assigning (structural) genitive to their complement.

If this analysis is essentially correct, the obvious question that arises concerns the origin of this peculiar form of genitive assignment in Italian (as well as in other Romance varieties), especially in view of the observation that the adnominal genitives featured by this construction-type are apparently not licensed by the syntax of construct-state (the selecting head noun is not determinerless, the adnominal genitive cannot be a proper name, etc.).

Now, prepositionless realization of genitive Case in Old French is a well-known phenomenon, usually linked to the realization of the so-called *cas-régime absolu* and arguably corresponding to one of the three modes of genitive realization in a long phase of transition from spoken Latin to modern Romance varieties. We will produce a new set of data showing that this modality of genitive assignment (crucially involving definite genitive complements,

contrary to the type exemplified in (1b)) is also instantiated in Old Italian and still survives in some Italian dialects. From a theoretical perspective, what this suggests is that the Latin type of genitive assignment involving morphological genitives is simply continued in early Romance varieties corresponding to the relevant phases of Old French and Old Italian, in the form of a syntactic configuration that involves a CASE/AGR head selecting the adnominal genitive. We adopt the model of feature checking/valuation developed in Pesetsky & Torrego 2004, and propose that the CASE/AGR head contains a valued genitive feature that Agrees with the unvalued genitive feature realized on the genitive nominal, yielding its valuation. There is also evidence that the shift from the Latin-type to the Old French-type involves shift from an uninterpretable to an interpretable genitive feature on the genitive noun: this directly accounts for the rather robust generalization that adnominal genitives in Old French/Italian are constrained to a possessor interpretation, and cannot express subject or object interpretations. Notice now that for the acquiring child, the evidence for a valued genitive feature in CASE/AGR becomes extremely shaky with the loss of Latin overt genitive morphology and of the last residual overt case distinctions in French. The natural hypothesis is that the CASE/AGR head gets progressively redefined as a prepositional head, where a valued genitive feature is realized, Agreeing with an unvalued and (by now) uninterpretable genitive feature on the noun.

It is our crucial contention that another case-configuration also evolved, featuring the realization of a valued genitive feature in the D-position of the adnominal genitive complement, giving rise to the kind of structures documented in (1b). This valued genitive feature enters a feature-chain with the unvalued genitive features realized on both the selecting and the selected noun, yielding N-to-D raising of the selected noun. This nicely accounts for the observation that the genitive complements in (1b) are severely constrained to a kind-level interpretation of the genitive complement, arguably a consequence of N-to-D raising (cf. Longobardi 1996)). Moreover, we may propose that the genitive feature in D is in complementary distribution with the morphological feature responsible for the fact that proper names obligatorily raise to D in Romance: this nicely accounts for the fact that the construction-type in (1b) cannot feature proper names as genitives complements, at least in the core case. The reason why this form of genitive assignment could maintain itself (say, disguised under some alleged form of morphological composition) besides prepositional genitives is arguably not so difficult to detect: for the acquiring child, genitive assignment is at least strictly associated with bare noun complements, an acquisition cue that was not available in the phase attested by Old French and Old Italian.

Finally, this diachronic reconstruction has in our view an important advantage: the construct-state configurations detected by Longobardi in Romance, characterized by an extremely limited lexical paradigm, essentially involving the common noun *casa* across Romania, is no longer an isolated manifestation of a case-assignment pattern which is fully productive in Semitic, but rather corresponds to a case pattern akin to that proper to (1b): realization of a valued genitive feature in an empty determiner position, giving rise to a feature-chain with the genitive features realized on the selecting and the selected noun. Given the link between (1b) and construct-state, the intriguing issue arises of determining the exact relation between the two configuration-types, both synchronically and diachronically.

References

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