

The syntax of Daco-Romance prenominal possessives: a minimalist account

Ștefania Costea
University of Cambridge

1. Framing the problem

Unlike in other Romance varieties, the prenominal position of possessives in Daco-Romance, a linear order originally preserved under Slavic contact, requires in all but Megleno-Romanian (1) a functional element *a(l)* (2-5), the origins of which remain controversial (cf. Rosetti 1986; Giurgea 2013).

- (1) *vostru* *fișor*
your.M.SG son
'your son' (Megleno-Romanian, Capidan 1925:152)
- (2) (*a*) *tel'i* *fil'*
A.INVAR your.M.PL son.PL
'your sons' (Istro-Romanian, Dragomirescu and Nicoale 2018:7)
- (3) *a* *meu* *băiat*
A.INVAR my.M.SG son
'my son' (Moldovan Daco-Romanian, Republic of Moldova, Sorocea)
- (4) *a* *meu* *fçor*
A.INVAR my.F.SG son
'my son' (Çipan Aromanian, Constanța, Romania)
- (5) *al* *meu* *copil*
AL.M.SG my.M.SG child
'my child' (rare/obsolete in southern Daco-Romanian, possible in old Daco-Romanian)

While in (old/standard) Daco-Romanian this functional element, presumably a reflex of Lat. AD 'to(wards)', shows inflexional agreement for number and gender through incorporation of the erstwhile suffixal definite article, namely *al* (MSG), *a* (FSG), *ai* (MPL), *-ale* (FPL) (< Lat. AD+ILLE / ILLA / ILLI / ILLAE), in the other Daco-Romance varieties it surfaces as the invariable *a* (cf. Kovačec 1984:568; Manzini and Savoia 2018:172). In this paper, I propose a formal account of this difference based on the idea that in Common Romanian possessives could function either as adjectives or determiners (cf. Lyons 1986).

2. From Latin to Common Romanian

Adams (2013:288) observes that in late Latin genitive/possession could be marked through the preposition A(D) 'to(wards)' (cf. 7).

- (7) *nam* *terra* [PP *ad* [DP *illo* [NP *homine*]]] *numquam* *fossadasset*
for land to that man never dug
'for he never dug the land [of that man]' (late Latin, *Form.Andec.*, Adams 2013:288)

Common Romanian, I argue, extended the use of the same preposition to prenominal possessives which in their adjectival function were preceded by reflexes of the article ILLE (cf. Densusianu 1906). The result was double marking of possession through a combination of the preposition *a* and the adjectival possessive (cf. double marking of genitive in Fr. *mon chien à moi* 'my dog to me'). However, this double marking semantically bleached through time when

the reflex of AD merged with the reflex of ILLE, yielding the functional element *al*. This is sketched in (8) where we witness a reanalysis of the original PP as a DP, in which the erstwhile genitive preposition undergoes a case of downward regrammaticalization (cf. Lohndal 2007) now merged as part of a complex D° functional head.

(8) [PP AD [DP [D ILLUM] [PossP MEUM [NP CABALLUM]]]] → [DP [D AL] [PossP MEU [NP CALU]]]
to that my horse AL.M.SG my.M.SG horse
‘my horse’ (*apud* Densusianu 1906)

3. Daco-Romance variation

I argue that the key difference between the varieties presented in (1)-(5) is that, while standard Daco-Romanian (spoken in Romania) continues a pattern whereby the possessive was adjectival in nature, hence preceded by the definite article (viz. AL < AD + ILLE) as in (8), other Daco-Romance varieties continue a pattern in which the possessive functioned as a determiner. Consequently, it was originally preceded, albeit not obligatorily, by the preposition (AD>) *a*, but not by the article since the D position was already lexicalized by the possessive. It therefore follows that when the possessive construction in these other Daco-Romance varieties was subsequently reanalysed along the lines of (8), the reflex of AD underwent downwards regrammaticalization to merge as a complex D-head with the possessive, as sketched in (9)..

(9) [PP AD [DP [D MEUM] [NP CABALLUM]]] → [DP [DA MEU] [NP CALU]]
to my horse A.INVAR my.M.SG horse
‘my horse’

In short, the aims of my paper are twofold: (i) to provide a descriptive account of the historical development pan-Daco-Romance pronominal possessive structures; and (ii) to offer a principled account of different formal developments across Daco-Romance in the syncretic marking of definiteness and genitive.

REFERENCES

- Adams, J.N. (2013). *Social Variation and the Latin Language*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Capidan, Th. (1925). *Meglenoromâni. Istoria și graiul lor (I)*. Bucharest: Cultura Națională.
- Densusianu, O. (1906). ‘Raport’. *Buletinul Societății Filologice* 2, 16.
- Dragomirescu, A. and Nicolae, A. (2018). ‘Exprimarea genitivului și a posesivului în istororomână’. In Pană Dindelegan, Zafiu, and Nedelcu (eds), *Studii lingvistice. Omagiu Valeriei Guțu Romalo*. Bucharest: Editura Universității din București.
- Giurgea, I. (2013). *Originea articolului posesiv-genitival al și evoluția sistemului demonstrativelor în română*. Bucharest: Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române.
- Kovaček, A. (1984). ‘Istororomâna’. In Rusu (ed.), *Tratat de dialectologie românească*. Craiova: Scrisul Românesc, 550–559.
- Lohndal, T. (2007). ‘On the structure and development of nominal phrases in Norwegian’. In Stark, Leiss, and Abraham (eds), *Nominal Determination: Typology, context constraints, and historical emergence*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 287–310.
- Lyons, C. (1986). ‘On the Origin of the Old French Strong-weak Possessive Distinction’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 84:1–41.
- Manzini, R. and Savoia, L. (2018). *The Morphosyntax of Albanian and Aromanian Varieties*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Rosetti, A. (1986). *Istoria limbii române. De la origini până în secolul al XVII-lea*. Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.