Abstract

In this paper, we analyze two types of nominal constructions in Romanian: DPs morphologically marked for Genitive and complex DE-phrases. The two types of construction are alike insofar as they involve a relation (which may either pertain to the lexical meaning of the head N or else be contextually triggered by the presence of the second argument), but they differ regarding the nature of the second argument. A strong correlation can be shown to exist between syntactic categories (DPs vs. NPs), syntactic functions (arguments vs. modifiers), Case marking (synthetic vs. analytic) and semantic type (type <e> vs. type <e, t>).

0. A few remarks about case in Romanian

Romanian is a Romance language which partially inherits from Latin morphological case, namely the Dative case and the Genitive case which are homonymous. Dative is assigned in verbal constructions (1) while Genitive is assigned in nominal constructions (2):\footnote{Abbreviations used in glosses and diagrams: DE = Romanian Preposition de, G = (morphological) Genitive Case, D = (morphological) Dative Case, 1, 2, 3 = 1st, 2nd, 3rd person, CL = clitic, AUX = auxiliary, ACC = Accusative.}

(1) am dat (cărți) regelui (Dative) have-1 given (books) king-the-D 'I gave (books) to the king'
(2) cărțile regelui (Genitive) books-the king-the-G 'the books of the king'

The difference is visible when substituting by a possessive pronoun:

(3) i-am dat (cărți) lui / * sale (Dative) have-1 given (books) him-D / his-G 'I gave (books) to him'
(4) cărțile lui / sale (Genitive) books-the him-G / his-G 'his books'

\[ \text{[ASJU, XLII-2, 2007, 201-208]} \]
1. Introduction

Romanian displays a remarkable alternation between DPs morphologically marked for Genitive case and PPs headed by the preposition \textit{DE};\footnote{There are other constructions with prepositions which can alternate with morphological Genitive constructions (e.g. \textit{cartea copiilor} ‘book-the children-the-G’ vs. \textit{cartea a trei copii} ‘book-the A three children’). We will not discuss this type here.} this alternation appears with several types of nouns: relational nouns (5a), deverbal nouns (5b), picture nouns (5c), object-denoting nouns (5d):

\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textit{fiul regelui} \textit{vs.} \textit{fiul de regelui} \\
  \textit{son-the king-the-G} \textit{vs.} \textit{son-the DE king} \\
  \item \textit{construirea caselor} \textit{vs.} \textit{construirea de case} \\
  \textit{building-the houses-the-G} \textit{vs.} \textit{building-the DE houses} \\
  \item \textit{fotografia grupului} \textit{vs.} \textit{fotografia de grup} \\
  \textit{picture-the group-the-G} \textit{vs.} \textit{picture-the DE group} \\
  \item \textit{uşa bisericii} \textit{vs.} \textit{uşa de biserică} \\
  \textit{door-the church-the-G} \textit{vs.} \textit{door-the DE church}
\end{enumerate}

This phenomenon is not a characteristic of Romanian, but it appears in other languages too (see, \textit{inter alia}, Munn 1998, Corblin 2001 and Dobrovie-Sorin 2001a, for an analysis of English or French equivalents):

\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textit{the room of the men} \textit{vs.} \textit{the men’s room} (English) \\
  \item \textit{le fils du (de + le) roi} \textit{vs.} \textit{le fils de roi} (French) \\
  \textit{the son of the king} \textit{the son DE king}
\end{enumerate}

This paper is organized as follows: in sections 2 and 3 we present previous analyses and we give arguments against a unitary treatment of the two constructions; in section 4, we discuss the conditions under which the two types of constructions are used in Romanian; in section 5, we propose an analysis for each of these constructions.

2. Previous analyses

Traditional grammars (see, for example, \textit{GLR} 1966) as well as handbooks analyze these two types of constructions as respectively synthetic (i.e. morphological) vs. analytic Genitives. The arguments in favour of such an analysis are the following:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item The possibility to substitute the DPs marked with morphological case by \textit{DE}-phrases in which \textit{DE} would have take the functions of casual inflection (cf. \textit{supra} (5) and \textit{infra} (7));
  \item Both constructions express similar semantic values: alienable possession (7a), inalienable possession (7b), human relationship (7c), goal (7d), content (7e), location (7f), time (7g), quality (7h) etc.
\end{enumerate}
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(7) a. curtea de împărat / curtea împăratului
    court-the DE emperor court-the emperor-the-G
b. gulerul de cămaşă / gulerul cămăşii
    collar-the DE shirt collar-the shirt-the-G
c. nepotul de unchi / nepotul unchiului
    nephew-the DE uncle nephew-the uncle-the-G
d. camera de oaspeţi / camera oaspeţilor
    room-the DE guests room-the guests-the-G
e. ostrovul de flori / ostrovul florilor
    isle-the DE flowers isle-the flowers-the-G
f. aerul de munte / aerul muntelui
    air-the DE mountain air-the mountain-the-G
g. căldura de vară / căldura verii
    heat-the DE summer heat-the summer-the-G
h. omul de datorie / omul datoriei
    man-the DE honour man-the honour-the-G

3. Limitations of the classical analysis

On the one hand, formal alternation as well as similarity of semantic values do not necessarily imply identical structures.

On the other hand, classical analysis ignores the categorial status of the adnominal constituent: DP with Genitive case vs. DE-NP. Both are treated the same way with respect to the distinction between DP and NP.

4. Conditions of use

As we will see in the next subsections, there are several diagnostic tests which help in distinguishing between the two types of constructions.

4.1. Formal constraints

The constructions with morphological case are necessarily nominal phrases governed by a determiner, either definite or indefinite (8):

(8) a. fiul regelui / fiul unui rege
    son-the king-the-G son-the a-G king
b. *fiul rege
    son-the king

In contrast, the complement of DE cannot be headed by a determiner, regardless of its nature 9a, but can have (adjectival or prepositional) modifiers 9b:

(9) a. *fiul de regele / *fiul de un rege
    son-the DE king-the son-the DE a king
b. fiul de rege african / construirea de case din lemn
    son-the DE king African building-the DE houses of wood
4.2. Distribution in predicate position

DPs marked with morphological case cannot appear after the copula (10a); in order for them to appear after the copula, we need to insert the so-called genitive article *al, a, ai, ale* in front of the Genitive DP (10b):

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(10) a. *fiul este regelui;    *uşa este bisericii
    son-the is king-the-G;    door-the is church-the-G
b.  fiul este al regelui;    uşa este a bisericii
    son-the is A-the king-the-G;  door-the is A church-the-G
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In contrast, prepositional constructions can appear after the copula (11):

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(11) a.  fiul este de rege (nu de sclav)
    son-the is DE king (not DE slave)
b.  uşa este de biserică (nu de casă)
    door-the is DE church (not DE house)
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4.3. Distribution in preverbal subject position

DPs marked with morphological case are frequent in preverbal subject position whether or not they are anaphorically related to another DP (12):

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(12) Fiul regelui nu a venit la întrunirea Curții.
    son-the king-the-G not has-AUX come at meeting-the Court-the-G
    ‘The son of the king has not come at the Court’s meeting’
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The so-called analytic Genitive (i.e. *DE*-phrases) are less natural in these position especially when the head noun takes the definite determiner and the construction is not anaphorically related to another DP (13):

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(13) ?Fiul de rege nu a venit la întrunirea Curții.
    son-the DE king not has-AUX come at meeting-the Court-the-G
    ‘The king’s son has not come at the Court’s meeting’
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4.4. The *a avea ‘to have’* paraphrase

DPs marked with morphological case, except the ones in which the head is a deverbal noun (see 5b above), can be paraphrased by *a avea ‘to have’* (14):

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(14) soţia avocatului → avocatul are soţie
    wife-the lawyer-the-G lawyer-the has wife
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This is not the case for prepositional constructions (15):

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(15) soţia de avocat → ???
    wife-the DE lawyer
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3 By predicate position we understand post-copular position (cf. Milner 1982).
4 This article is made up of the preposition *a* followed by the definite article.
4.5. Special cases

There are exceptions to the free substitution between the constructions with morphological Genitive and the constructions with the preposition *DE*, namely compounds. On the one hand, there are constructions taking only the synthetic form:

(16) a. floarea soarelui vs. *floarea de soare
   flower-the sun-the-G flower-the DE sun
   ‘sunflower’
   b. regina noptii vs. *regina de noapte
   queen-the night-the-G queen-the DE night
   ‘night flower’
   c. iarba dracului vs. *iarba de drac
   grass-the devil-the-G grass-the DE devil
   ‘weeds’

On the other hand, there are constructions taking only the analytic form:

(17) a. floarea de colţ vs. *floarea colţului
   flower-the DE corner flower-the corner-the-G
   ‘edelweiss’
   b. laptele de pasăre vs. *laptele păsării
   milk-the DE bird milk-the bird-the-G
   ‘dessert’
   c. dintele de lapte vs. *dintele laptelui
   tooth-the DE milk tooth-the milk-the-G
   ‘milk tooth’

4.6. Interim conclusion

Once again, free substitution as well as similarity of semantic values of the two constructions are not reason enough for them to be analysed the same way. As a consequence, the Genitive analysis is not appropriate for both nominal types presented above.

5. An alternative analysis

The differences observed in 4. can be accounted for by a different analysis:

5.1. Morphosyntax

Generalizations

In Romanian, Genitive case can only be marked on the determiner (only the determiner can carry case markings) => *The constructions with morphological case are projections of D(eterminer) (i.e. DPs) taking argument positions.*

Those projections of N that do not have a determiner (i.e. NPs) cannot mark the case morphologically, hence the insertion of the preposition *DE* => *The constructions with DE are NPs taking modifier positions.*
5.2. Semantics

While in the constructions with morphological case (e.g. 19) the head N denotes a relation between two individuals (the one denoted by DP₁ and the one denoted by DP₂) (see Beyssade & Dobrovie-Sorin 2005), in the prepositional constructions (e.g. 18), the head N denotes a relation between an individual (denoted by DP₁) and a property (denoted by NP₂) (see Kolliakou 1999).

This explains several phenomena. First, why certain prepositional constructions may alternate with an AP (20):

(20) a. fiul de rege \text{→} fiul regal
    son-the DE king \text{→} son-the royal

b. ușa de biserică \text{→} ușa bisericăscă
    door-the DE church \text{→} door-the church-ADJ

Second, this explains why DPs marked with Genitive case may alternate with personal pronouns (also marked with Genitive case) (21):

(21) a. fiul regelui \text{→} fiul lui
    son-the king-the-G \text{→} son-the him-G

b. ușa bisericii \text{→} ușa ei
    door-the church-the-G \text{→} door-the her-G

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5 The structure proposed in (18) may be conceived of differently with respect to the nature of DE (see Mardale 2005), i.e. the last is not a preposition, but the spell-out of the functional category Mod(ifier) (see Rubin 2002). The arguments in favour of this analysis are the following: (a) DE can not alternate with another preposition (cf. i); (b) DE is excluded when it combines with an argumental PP (cf. ii); (c) DE is obligatory when it combines with an adjoined PP (cf. iii):

(i) aerul de munte \text{vs.} *aerul la munte
    air-the DE mountain \text{at mountain}
    ‘the mountain’s air’

(ii) *Ion a mers de la munte.
    John has-AUX walked DE at mountain

(iii) Ion a respirat aerul de la munte.
    John has-AUX breath air-the DE at mountain
    ‘John breathed the mountain’s air’
Third, this explains why the complement of DE cannot serve as anaphoric antecedents for another DP (22a), while the adnominal constituent marked with morphological case may do so (23):

   he is son-the DE [king], ACC-which, young-the hopes that him, meet
   'He is the king’s son that the youngwoman hopes to meet'

b.  El este [fiul de rege] pe care, tinăra speră să îl, întâlnească.
   he is [son-the DE king], ACC-which, young-the hopes that him, meet
   'He is the king’s son that the youngwoman hopes to meet'

(23) a. El este fiul regelui pe care tinăra speră să îl întâlnească. (ambiguous)
   he is son-the king-the ACC-which young-the hopes that him meet
   'He is the son of the king that the youngwoman hopes to meet'

b.  El este fiul [regelui], pe care, tinăra speră să îl, întâlnească.
   he is son-the [king-the-G], ACC-which, young-the hopes that him, meet

c.  El este [fiul regelui], pe care, tinăra speră să îl, întâlnească.
   he is [son-the king-the-G], ACC-which, young-the hopes that him, meet

More precisely, the noun rege ‘king’ in (22a) cannot serve as antecedent for the anaphorical pronoun il ‘him’ because the former is non referential (i.e. it denotes a property). In contrast, the hole DP fiul de rege ‘the king’s son’ in (22b) can be the antecedent of the pronoun, because the head fiul ‘the son’ is referential (i.e. it denotes an individual which has a certain property). As for the example in (23a), it is ambiguous. The nouns fiul ‘the son’ and regelui ‘the king-G’ can serve as antecedent for the anaphoric il ‘him’ because they are both referential (i.e. they denote individuals). As a result, we can obtain two types of readings: (i) the one in (23b) with regelui ‘king-the-G’ being the antecedent of il ‘him’ and (ii) the one in (23c) with fiul ‘the son’ being the antecedent of il ‘him’.

5.3. What about special cases?

Compounds which only allow the synthetic form denote unique entities (such as the sun, the night, the devil etc.), i.e. individuals, hence the Genitive construction (see 16 above).

Others refer to non unique entities (such as corners / mountains, birds, milk etc.), hence the prepositional construction (see 17 above).

6. Conclusion

The two constructions analyzed here are alike insofar as they involve a relation (which may either pertain to the lexical meaning of the head N or else be contextually triggered by the presence of the second argument), but they differ regarding the nature of the second argument: a strong correlation can be shown to exist between syntactic categories (DPs vs. NPs), Case marking (morphological vs. prepositional) and semantic type (type <e> vs. type <e, t>) (see also Dobrovie-Sorin 2001a).
7. References


