

# Left-right asymmetries in Romance possessive agreement

M. Rita Manzini

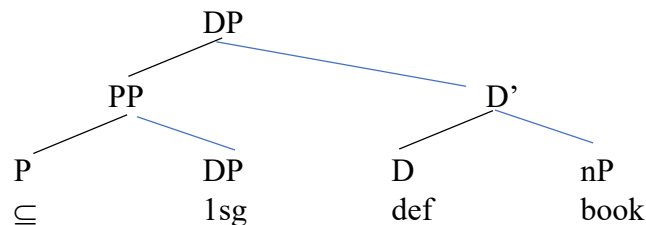
## I. POSSESSIVES

### 1. Structure

- Oblique cases, including genitives, can be construed as Ps (or K) heads carrying elementary relational content, such as part/whole. Manzini and Franco (2016) notate the latter  $\subseteq$  (cf. Manzini and Savoia 2018, Baldi & Savoia 2021); Adger (2013) notates the relevant category  $\bar{p}$ .

E.g. in ‘my book’ the elementary relator ( $\bar{p}$ ,  $\subseteq$  or other) establishes a possession (inclusion) relation between the speaker ‘I’ and ‘the book’

- (1) a. my book  
b.



### 2. Agreement with N

Possessive agreement is a residual form of a typological macrophenomenon (Plank 1995) for which I will use the cover term of Linker (Lkr) structures.

#### (2) Possessive pronoun agreement (German)

- a. sie gedachten uns-er  
they commemorated 1PL-GEN  
'They commemorated us'
- b. sie gedachten uns-er-es Sieg-es  
they commemorated our-GEN.MSG victory-GEN.MSG  
'They commemorated our victory'

#### (3) Genitive PP agreement (Punjabi)

- Mohan d-e ghor-e  
Mohan of-MPL.DCT horse-MPL.DCT  
'Mohan's horses'

#### (4) Linkers (Ancient Greek, Albanian)

- a. **hai** thugater-es **hai** ton polit-on  
the=daughter-NOM.FPL LKR.NOM.FPL the=citizen-GEN.MPL  
'the daughters of the citizens'
- b. libr-i i nxënës-it  
book-MSG.DEF.NOM LKR.MSG.DEF.NOM pupil-MSG.DEF.OBL  
'the book of the pupil'

*Albanian*

#### (4) Case stacking (Kalkatungu, Pama-Nyungam)

|                              |                       |                               |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| kalpin-kuwa- <b>thu</b>      | yaun-kuwa- <b>thu</b> | thuku- <b>yu</b> (ityayi-ngi) |
| man-Gen-Erg                  | big-Gen-Erg           | dog-Erg (bite-me)             |
| 'the big man's dog (bit me)' |                       |                               |

### 3. Lkr structures

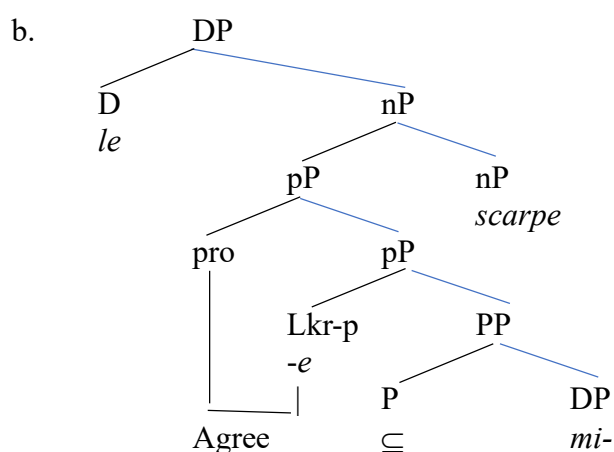
Analyses of Lkr structures include at least the following.

- (i) N-N sensitive analyses: identity avoidance (Persian, Ghomeshi 1997, Richards 2010); Case assigner (again Persian, Larson & Yamakido 2008, Larson & Samiian 2021);
- (ii) Predication analyses: copula (den Dikken and Singhapreecha 2004, den Dikken 2006; Balkan languages, Campos and Stavrou 2005, Campos 2009); subject of predication/ subject clitic (Balkan languages, Indo-Iranian languages Franco, Manzini & Savoia 2015, Manzini, Savoia and Franco 2015); reduced relative clause (RC) pronoun (Greek a.o., Alexiadou 2014)
- (iii) Agr analyses: Agree probes (Iranian, Toosarvandani and van Urk 2014); cartographic heads (Persian, Kahnemuyipour 2014ff.)

I follow Franco et al. (2015):

- the Lkr is a subject clitic
- it merges with the  $\alpha$  phase head (Roberts 2010), hence with  $p$
- it licenses an empty category pro (Sportiche 1996, Angelopoulos and Sportiche 2022).
- pro is controlled (identified) by the superordinate D.

- (6) a. l-e mi-e scarp-e  
the-fpl my-fpl shoe-fpl  
'my shoes'



## II. LEFT-RIGHT ASYMMETRIES IN ROMANCE

### 4. Pre-N vs. post-N possessive agreement

- (i) Post-N possessives

- (7) Borbona (Latium): possessives do not agree with N

|      |         |                 |
|------|---------|-----------------|
| msg: | lu kane | <b>me/te/se</b> |
| fsg: | li kani | <b>me/te/se</b> |

mpl: la kamifa      **me/te/se**  
fpl: le kamife      **me/te/se**  
'my/your/his dog(s)/shirt(s)'

- (8) Giurdignano (Apulia):            possessives agree with N

|                               |          |                                          |
|-------------------------------|----------|------------------------------------------|
| msg:                          | u kane   | me- <b>u</b> /to- <b>u</b> /so- <b>u</b> |
| fsg:                          | i kani   | me- <b>i</b> /to- <b>i</b> /so- <b>i</b> |
| mpl:                          | a kamisa | mi- <b>a</b> /tu- <b>a</b> /su- <b>a</b> |
| fpl:                          | ε kamise | me- <b>i</b> /to- <b>i</b> /so- <b>i</b> |
| 'my/your/his dog(s)/shirt(s)' |          |                                          |

- (ii) pre-N and post-N/pronominal possessives, no agreement asymmetries

- (9) Italian: possessives agree with N

a. il su-**o** libro  
the.msg 1Gen-msg book.msg  
'his/her book'

b. (Non ho) nemmeno un libro su-0  
not I-have not-even one.msg book.msg 3Gen-msg  
'(I have) not even one book of his'

- (10) Alfonsine (Romagna):            possessives do not agree with N

a. msg: e                    **mi/tu/su** ga:t  
 fsg: la                    **mi/tu/su** skarænæ  
 mpl: i                    **mi/tu/su** ga:t  
 fpl: al                    **mi/tu/su** skaræ:n  
 ‘my/your/his cat(s)/chair(s)’

b. msg: l e                    e **mi/tu/su**  
 fsg: l e                    la **mi/tu/su**  
 mpl: i e                    i **mi/tu/su**  
 fpl: aɫ e                    al **mi/tu/su**  
 ‘it is mine/yours/his/hers/ours/theirs’

- (iii) Pre-N and post-N/pronominal possessives; agreement asymmetries.

- (11) Firenze: pre-N possessives do not agree with N  
 post-N/pronominal possessives agree with N  
 (also Spanish: *mi libro* vs. *el libro mio*)

a. msg: il            **mi/tu/su** tsio  
 fsg: la            **mi/tu/su** tsia  
 mpl: i            **mi/tu/su** tsi:  
 fpl: le            **mi/tu/su** tsie  
 ‘my/your/his uncle(s)/aunt(s)’

b. le            son **mi-e**  
 they are my-fpl  
 ‘They are mine/my ones’

- (12) Celle S. Vito (Franco-Provencal, Apulia): Different pre-N and post-N/pronominal forms; agree with N (Baldi & Savoia 2021)

(cf. French: *m-on chien* vs. *c'est le mi-en*)

- |     |              |           |                |
|-----|--------------|-----------|----------------|
| a.  | l-u          | tʃinnə    | mi- <b>nnə</b> |
|     | the.msg      | dog       | my-msg         |
| b.  | l-ə          | tʃinnə    | mi- <b>nnə</b> |
|     | the.mpl      | dogs      | my-mpl         |
| c.  | l-a          | tʃəmmisa  | mi- <b>a</b>   |
|     | the.fsg      | shirt     | my-fsg         |
| d.  | l-ə          | tʃəmmisə  | mi- <b>jə</b>  |
|     | the.fpl      | shirts    | my-fpl         |
| a'. | m- <b>un</b> | frarə     |                |
|     | my-msg       | brother   |                |
| b'. | m- <b>ə</b>  | frarə     |                |
|     | my-mpl       | brothers  |                |
| c'. | m- <b>a</b>  | fɪʌʌə     |                |
|     | my-fsg       | daughter  |                |
| d'. | m- <b>ə</b>  | fɪʌʌə     |                |
|     | my-fpl       | daughters |                |

### Generalization

There are no Romance languages where pre-N possessives agree with the head N and post-N possessives do not.

(i.e. Pre-N possessives agree with the head N only if post-N possessives do.)

## 5. Pre-N vs. post-N adjective order in Italian

Only a subset of adjectives can be pre-N. Adjectives in the ANA configuration are furthermore ordered: there is a correspondence between the order of English adjectives from left to right and the left-of-N/right-of-N positioning of Italian adjectives (Cinque 1994ff., Scontras, Mazzaggio & Manzini 2026)

- (13) a. un grosso cane nero  
       a big dog black  
       b. \*un nero cane grosso  
       a black dog big
- (14) a. a big black dog  
       b. #a black big dog

All adjectives in Italian can be post-N. There are no significant order effects among post-N adjectives (Scontras, Mazzaggio & Manzini 2026, cf. Cinque 2010).

- (15) a. un cane nero grosso  
       a dog black big  
       b. un cane grosso nero  
       a dog big black

## 6. Pre-N vs. post-N adjective agreement

Some adjectives/quantifiers have different inflectional/agreement properties pre-N and post-N.

In Italian (also Spanish, Bonet et al. 2015), *grande* ‘big, great’ has an invariable form *gran* restricted to pre-N position, alternating with the regular declension.

- (16)
- |    |     |             |           |
|----|-----|-------------|-----------|
| a. | una | gran/grande | chiesa    |
|    | a   | big         | church    |
| b. | un  | gran/grande | portone   |
|    | a   | big         | doorway   |
| c. | due | gran/grandi | poltrone  |
|    | two | big         | armchairs |
| d. | due | gran/grandi | armadi    |
|    | two | big         | wardrobes |

The same is true in the masculine singular of *buon* ‘good’ (cf. *buono*) and of quantifiers that can appear pre-N or post-N, e.g. *alcun/alcuno* .

Vice versa, the Italian post-N adjective *bello* ‘good looking’ has a pre-N *be-* allomorph whose inflection includes definiteness features as well as phi-features (Cardinaletti and Giusti 2015, Giusti 2015: 202ff.),

- (17)
- |      |           |     |       |       |
|------|-----------|-----|-------|-------|
| msg: | be-l/-llo | cf. | il/lo | ‘the’ |
| fsg: | be-lla    |     | la    |       |
| mpl: | be-i/-gli |     | i/gli |       |
| fpl: | be-lle    |     | le    |       |

## 7. Pre-N vs. post-N plural morphology

Across Romance languages plural may be selectively externalized on pre-N elements to the exclusion of N and post-modifiers – or vice versa

- (18) Brazilian Portuguese (Costa and Figueiredo Silva 2002)

- a.
- |                       |        |               |
|-----------------------|--------|---------------|
| o-s                   | livr-o | muito bonit-o |
| M-PL                  | book-M | very nice-M   |
| ‘the very nice books’ |        |               |
- b.
- |            |         |        |
|------------|---------|--------|
| o-s        | me-u-s  | livr-o |
| M-PL       | my-M-PL | book-M |
| ‘my books’ |         |        |

- (19) Fassa (Ladin, Rasom 2008)

- a.
- |                              |          |           |           |
|------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| la                           | picola   | cèses     | de Fascia |
| the-f                        | little-f | house-fpl | of Fassa  |
| ‘the little houses of Fassa’ |          |           |           |
- b.
- |                              |           |            |           |
|------------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| la                           | cèses     | picoles    | de Fascia |
| the-f                        | house-fpl | little-fpl | of Fassa  |
| ‘the little houses of Fassa’ |           |            |           |

cf. Stark and Pomino (2009), Bonet et al. (2015), Bonet (2018), Cyrino and Espinal (2019), Savoia et al. (2018), Manzini et al. (2020, 2021) for differing views.

## 8. Pre-N vs. post-N (adjectival) Lkrs

(i) *Persian*: post-N modifiers are embedded under Lkrs (the so-called *ezafe*), but not pre-N material, including determiners and quantifiers, but also superlatives or adjectives in the literary style (Khanemuyipour 2014). The *ezafe*, though phonologically enclitic, forms a constituent with the modifier that follows it (Larson and Yamakido 2008:60, Philip 2012: 37-38).

- (20) a. *pre-N determiners vs. post-N modifiers* *Persian*  
in do ketaab-e qatur-e jaaleb  
this two book-LKR thick-LKR interesting  
‘these two interesting thick books’  
b. *pre-N superlatives vs. Post-N comparatives*  
bad-tarin ketaab a’. ketaab-e bad(-tar)  
bad-SUPER. book book-LKR bad-COMP.  
‘the worst book’ ‘bad/worse book’  
c. *pre-N adjectives (in literary style) vs. post-N adjectives*  
bichaare xalq b’. xalq-e bichaare  
poor/pitiable people people-LKR poor/pitiable  
‘poor people’

(ii) *Greek*: post-N adjectives must be embedded under a Lkr if the NP is definite. Alexiadou and Wilder (1998), Campos and Stavrou (2005) agree that no order effects are observed with post-N adjectives.

- (21) a. to vivlio to kokkino to megalo/to megalo to kokkino *Greek*  
the book LKR red LKR big/ LKR big LKR red  
b. ena vivlio kokkino megalo/megalo kokkino  
a book red big/ big red

Pre-N adjective can either be embedded under a Lkr or not. Order effects are observed with adjectives not embedded under Lkrs, but at least according to Campos and Stavrou (2005) not with those embedded under Lkrs.

- (22) a. to megalo to kokkino/ to kokkino to megalo to vivlio *Greek*  
LKR big LKR red/ LKR red LKR big the book  
b. ena megalo kokkino/ #kokkino megalo vivlio  
a big red/ red big book

(iii) *Albanian*: adjectives are typically post-N, but they may be preposed in some case (Campos 2009). The linker is obligatory both in post-N and in pre-N position – yet different allomorphs are involved.

- (23) a. vajz-at e mir-a  
girl-PL.DEF.NOM LKR.NOM good-PL  
‘the good girls’  
b. të mir-at vajz-a  
LKR good- PL.DEF.NOM girl-PL

In this sample of languages (Balkan and Iranian), both pre-N and post-N modifiers can present the Lkr (Albanian) or the post-N modifier can present it to the exclusion of the pre-N modifier (Persian, Greek) – but not the other way round.

## 9. The theoretical issue

Two major models of constituent order:

- (i) linear order is defined in syntax, presupposing a locally total order of constituents based on asymmetric c-command (Kayne 1994).

Consequences:

- the base order is invariable, hence superficial crosslinguistic variations are determined by movement operations applying in the syntax. This requires head movement, roll-up movement, remnant movement, etc.
- the structure must be fine-grained enough to provide in particular a locally total order of modifiers – in practice, a cartographic structure.

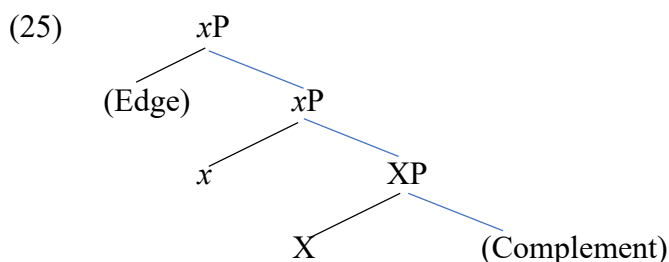
- (ii) linear order and the parameters concerning it are a matter not of core syntax but of Externalization (Chomsky 2004, 2005ff.).

Consequences:

- Locally total dominance/c-command order is not necessary, n-ary branching modification structures are possible (Neeleman et al. 2023, Chomsky 2024 FormSet). Phrase structure may be as simple as the minimal phase (plus adjuncts).

- (24)  $\{_{xP} \text{ Edge}, \{x, \{_{XP} X, \text{Complement}\}\}\}$

- Linear order parameters are fixed at EXT – in particular the classical Head-Complement parameter (whether the head precedes or follows its complements). Edges are leftward (like movement, cf. Abels and Neeleman 2012)



A classical test case are left-right asymmetries in DPs (Cinque 2005, 2025)

- Can answers to the general issue provide insights into possessive structures? Can possessive agreement asymmetries provide insights into the general question?

## III. ITALIAN ADJECTIVES

### 10. Locally total syntactic order of adjectives?

For Cinque (1994, 2010, 2025)

- pre-N adjectives in English reflect the base-generated order
- ANA/NAA orders in Italian are derived via N or N-projection movement (remnant, roll-up, etc.)

Given hierarchies such as quality > size > age > shape > color > nationality/origin (Cinque 1994), and movement parameters, we expect there to be as many possible languages as are the obligatory height reached by movement

[<sub>AP</sub> A<sub>quality</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> A<sub>size</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> A<sub>age</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> A<sub>shape</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> A<sub>color</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> A<sub>nation</sub> NP ]]]]]]]

- Are the remaining languages attested? As far as I can tell, this claim has never been made for Romance or other languages. The problem of course multiplies for more complex hierarchies.

While color and size are clearly ordered as in *big black dog* vs. *#black big dog* above many other supposed adjective classes clearly commute in order (Svenonius 2008, Truswell 2009).

a. red wooden clogs/wooden red clogs  
b. big new cuts/new big cuts

## 11. Semantic correlates for pre-N and post-N positioning?

- all of the logically possible orders are acceptable post-N in Italian (Scontras et al. 2026).
- the undergeneration issue is avoided if post-N orders different from the predicted one, are the result of merging the rightmost adjective higher up as a reduced relative clause (RC).

Cinque (2010ff.) argues that interpretation distinguishes true APs ('direct modification' non-predicative: non-intersective, non-restrictive, individual level, etc.) from reduced RCs (predicative: intersective, restrictive, stage level, etc.). Since reduced RCs are only post-N, he excludes predicative interpretations pre-N. But this not so.

a. Ho visto uno stupendo ballerino, biondo, alto, muscoloso

- I.have seen a beautiful dancer: blond, tall, muscular
- b. Ho visto uno stupendo ballerino, tecnicamente perfetto  
I.have seen a beautiful dancer: technically perfect
- (29) *pre-N, stage level*
- a. la sorridente signora alla tua destra  
'the smiling woman on your right'
- b. lo smarrito testimone della difesa  
the confused witness of the defence
- (30) *pre-N, restrictive*
- a. Ho smarrito un piccolo/grande cane nero  
I-have lost a small/big dog black
- b. I grandi patrimoni vanno tassati, quelli piccoli no  
the big holdings must be taxed, those small not

Assuming Cinque's corroborating evidence to be correct, it will have to be imputed to further restrictions – more likely to contextual restrictions (including those introduced by the 'out-of-the-blue' context, which is anything but a neutral context). No matter how much corroborating evidence is presented, one bona fide set of counterexamples is sufficient to undermine the analysis.

## 12. The hierarchy: Gradable – Non-gradable

### *Theoretical issue:*

notional classes like 'color', 'shape', 'size, etc. are the wrong primitives to embed in syntax, where there is no independent motivation for them (no [color] Agree, or [color] EPP, or [color] Minimality etc.).

### *Alternative:*

Truswell (2009) and Svenonius (2008) suggest a basic [subjective [intersective NP]] hierarchy, or in fact [Sort [n NP]] for Svenonius. Again, from a purely theoretical point of view, subjective and intersective seem to be the wrong categories to invoke in syntax, since at least in the classical definition by Kamp and Partee (1995) these are inferential notions.

Empirically, the sequence intersective > subjective > N seems to be perfectly possible. Note that the latter is the order predicted by Cinque (2010), since reduced RCs are higher than direct modification APs.

- (31) It is not true that there are no beautiful good linguists

### *Proposal:*

I propose that a first bipartition of adjectives should be based on gradability (Manzini 2025a, 2025b). The Deg quantification is set at the *pos* Degree (Kennedy 1999) as the default.

- (32)
- 
- ```

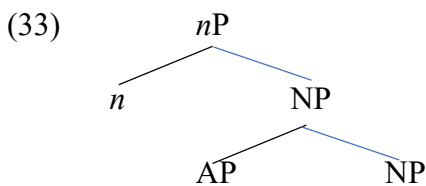
graph TD
    DegP --> Deg
    DegP --> AP
    Deg --- pos
  
```

From a theoretical point of view, there is no question that gradability is syntactically represented because of overt Degree modifiers, as well as comparative and superlative structures.

### 13. Mapping to phase structure (in English)

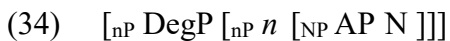
Non-gradable adjectives are adjoined to NP.

- Adjunction is an instance of Merge which does not define a theta- (i.e. argument-of/complement) configuration.
- labelling is defined at Transfer, and both projection and selection can in principle enter in the Labeling Algorithm: NP is labelled by the head N and the selecting head *n* restricts its complement to NP.
- adjunction of modifiers is interpreted as a conjunction of properties, e.g. NP & AP & AP etc. (cf. *dog & black & big (for a dog)*).



Phasal architecture can be used to accommodate the fact that gradable adjectives are higher than non-gradable ones (Manzini 2025a, 2025b).

- the default position of APs is the lower adjoined one.
- DegPs are positioned at the edge of nP, possibly because Deg is an edge feature.
- modifiers are linearized to the left (up to the Head Final Filter HFF of Williams 1982)

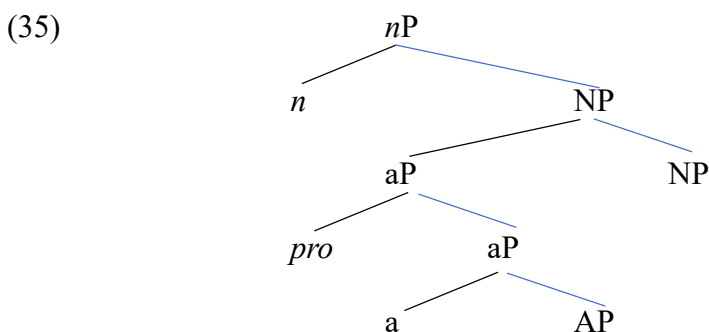


### 14. Predicative adjectives (in Italian)

Following the insight of Sproat and Shih (1991) in Chinese, cf. Cinque (2010) on Italian, free order of adjectives is the thumbprint of a more complex internal structure of the adjective.

The simplest way to enrich the structure of adjectival modifiers seems postulating an empty subject of predication:

- no extra functional structure that is never externalized (such as an empty sentential shell for reduced RC).
- as for Lkrs, we may build the subject of predication into an aP structure.
- The interpretation is that NP, AP etc. are saturated by the same referent, and again they are conjoined.



For gradable adjectives this has the important consequence that the DegP is embedded under the

predication structure. This means that gradable adjectives need not be at the edge of *n* and can freely reorder with non-gradable ones.

(36) ... [<sub>NP</sub> *n* [<sub>NP</sub> AP/aP    N]]]

As for linear order, Cinque (1994) proposes that N is externalized in a higher position in Italian wrt English (i.e. undergoes head movement to a higher position in his terms). The fact that gradable adjectives can appear in pre-N position clearly means that they can (though they need not) be at the edge of *n*.

(37) [<sub>NP</sub> DegP [<sub>NP</sub> N-*n*        [<sub>NP</sub> aP/AP        N]]]

## 15. n-ary branching (FormSet)

Multiple occurrences of both gradable and non-gradable adjectives are possible – in which case they appear to be unordered (and arbitrarily linearized at EXT. These multiple occurrences can be modelled by Chomsky's (2024) FormSet – or in any event correspond to n-ary branching (rather than binary branching) trees (Neeleman et al. 2023).

(38) [<sub>NP</sub> {DegP, ... } [<sub>NP</sub> *n* [<sub>NP</sub> {aP/AP, ...}        N ]]]

Linearization is predicted to reflect non-syntactic constraints: for instance prosodic preferences, frequency of use considerations, etc. (Dyer, Torres, Scontras & Futrell 2023).

## 16. Predictions

(i) *relational adjectives, nationality, color, shape adjectives* → non-gradable, low post-N position

- (39) a.        \*una chimica/atomica reazione  
              a chemical/atomic reaction  
      b.        \*una reazione più/meno chimica/atomica di questa  
              a reaction more/less chemical/atomic than this one
- (40) a.        \*un quadrato/ottagonale tavolo  
              a square/octagonal table  
      b.        \*un tavolo più quadrato/ottagonale di quello  
              a table more square/octagonal than that one

However as pointed out by Svenonius (2008: 38) it is of course possible to say *a very French attitude*, where the nationality adjective means “(very) typical of France” rather than “(\*very) originating from France”. In essence it is coerced into a gradable meaning by the presence of a Deg modifier, cf. Italian.

- (41) a.        \*un italiano vizio  
              an Italian vice  
      b.        un italianissimo vizio  
              a very Italian vice

Similarly, it is possible for a color adjective to appear in prenominal position or with Deg modifiers. The ‘green hills’ are ‘verdant hills’ – which is of course not true of a ‘green coat.

- (42) a. Ho comprato un cappotto verde/\*un verde/??verdissimo cappotto  
I have bought a coat green/a green/very green coat  
b. Le verdi/verdissime colline della Toscana sono una perenne attrazione turistica  
The green/very green hills of Tuscany are a perennial tourist attraction

In general, there is a Deg syntax and a non-Deg syntax. Adjectives fall under one or the other by default, but may be coerced into the alternative syntax under appropriate circumstances. The same general situation is known in the mass-count domain.

(ii) ‘closed scale’ adjectives (Kennedy and McNally 2005), i.e. those describing properties that have a minimal and a maximal value (cf. *half closed/open* but not *\*half big/small*) → non-gradable, low post-N position

- (43) a. \*una chiusa/aperta porta/finestra  
a closed/open door/window  
b. \*una piena/vuota bottiglia/tazza  
a full/empty bottle/cup

As before, the same properties can be coerced into an ‘open scale’ reading (presumably a matter of removing ma and min value), in which case they can be prenominal.

- (44) a. una piena comprensione della materia  
a full understanding of the matter  
b. una chiusa mentalità provinciale  
a closed mentality provincial  
‘a provincial close-mindedness’

(iii) *participles* → non-gradable, low post-N position

- (45) a. un orologio smarrito/rubato  
a watch lost/stolen  
b. \*uno smarrito/rubato orologio  
a lost/stolen watch

If the telic component is removed (which is of course not always possible), then pre-N position and degree modification becomes possible.

- (46) lo smarrito testimone della difesa  
the lost/confused witness for the defence

#### IV. POSSESSIVE AGREEMENT

##### 17. Movement accounts of pre-N and post-N possessives

Pre-N and post-N possessives are widely analyzed in terms of movement –of the possessive or of an NP-projection.

*Possessive movement*

For Cardinaletti (1998: 67-69) the post-N possessive is in situ in a complement-like position and N raises around it. The pre-N possessive is a weak form (Cardinaletti and Starke 1999) which must move to an AgrS(NP) position for its deficient properties to be licenced. Left-right agreement asymmetries can be imputed to the strong vs. weak status of the possessive (cf. also Manzini 2014 for criticism of the weak/strong divide as applied to *loro* ‘their’)..

(47) Cardinaletti (1998)

- |    |        |               |                             |                 |       |
|----|--------|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------|-------|
| a. | [DP la | [YP casa      | [NP sua <del>e</del> asa]]] | post-N          |       |
| b. | [DP la | [AGRS(NP) sua | [YP casa                    | [NP sua easa]]] | pre-N |

*NP(-projection) movement:*

- Pre-N possessives are base generated in a subject-like position (Bernstein 2005: 66, cf. Cinque 1994). Post-N possessives are derived via movement of a projection of N to their left.
- successive-cyclic movement of NP(-projections) takes place to the Spec position of the modifiers of NP (i.e. of the Agr heads embedding each modifier) triggering obligatory agreement with them (Shlonsky 2004 on Semitic) – i.e. post-N modifiers agree in the syntax (Bonet, Lloret & Mascarò 2015)
- No head-Spec configuration holds with pre-N modifiers which can but need not agree. For Bonet et al. “prenominal agreement is established at PF and is controlled by constraint evaluation” (i.e. an OT interface).

(48) [DP el [CP [AgrP amigo viejo] [IP suyo [AgrP ~~amigo~~ [FP ~~viejo~~ [NP ~~amigo~~]]]]]

## 18. Pre-N and post-N possessives in a phase-based environment

By analogy with adjectival modifiers

- Post-N possessives are in the complement of *n* (ordered to the right of *n*)
- Pre-N possessives are at the periphery of nP (ordered to the left of *n*)

(49) [ (Poss) [nP N-*n* [NP (Poss) ~~N~~ ]]]

Pre-N possessives in Italian can be higher than pre-N quantifiers and adjectives; but they can also intermix with them.

- (50) a. i suoi due bei articoli recenti  
the his/her two nice articles recent
- b. i due suoi bei articoli recenti  
the two his/her nice articles recent
- c. ?i due bei suoi articoli recenti  
the two nice his/her articles recent

For post-N possessives in Italo-Romance, Manzini and Savoia (2005, III: 744-745) have data suggesting that possessives and adjectives intermix.

- (51) a. a fìjja bbella tujə/ tujə bbellə (Garaguso, Lucania)  
the daughter nice your/your nice
- b. a suərə tojə ɣrannə (Terranova, Calabria)  
the sister your big (i.e. older)
- c. li fili mia randi (Copertino, Salento)  
the children my big

- d. fillu miu mannu (Settimo S. Pietro, Sardinia)  
child my big

Picallo and Rigau (1999: 994-995) provide similar evidence from Spanish.

- (52) a. los libros nuevos mios/ mios nuevos  
the books new my/ my new  
b. las palabras amables vuestras/ vuestras amables  
the words amiable your/ your amiable  
c. el coche rojo pequeno mio/ ??mio rojo pequeno  
the car red small my/ my red small

Two possessives can actually cooccur (Picallo and Rigau *ibid.* for Spanish)

- (53) a. L'unica mia foto sua (risale a 20 anni fa)  
the sole my photo his/her goes back to 20 years ago  
'My only picture of him/his only picture of me (is 20 years old)'  
b. I miei tre libri suoi (sono regali)  
the my three books his/her are gifts  
'His three books by me/my three books by him (are gifts)'
- (54) a. Todos tus manuscritos suyos .  
all your manuscripts his/her  
b. ??Su fotografia mia  
his/her photo my

## 19. Asymmetries in pre-N and post-N possessive agreement

How are left-right agreement asymmetries triggered?

*Complement of n.*

- In a phase-based theoretical environment, the basic form of agreement is at-distance Agree triggered by the FFs of a phase head (the probe) and targeting goals within its search space (as defined by c-command and the PIC). I propose avoiding the vexed question of downward vs. upward Agree by taking Agree to be a match/identity operation/relation.

*Periphery of n*

- Spec-head agreement reflects a different set of operations having to do with the satisfaction of edge conditions. These are subject to (externalization) parameters – capturing the Shlonsky/Bonet et al's insight in a different form. Taking the suggestion of Cinque, Bernstein and others, the *n* phase head may be associated with a 'subject EPP' feature, allowing (but not requiring) satisfaction by a possessive.

## V. IN CONCLUSION...

As for possessors,

- a genitive possessor is not as an argument of N, but a modifier, connected to N by its oblique Case, whose content is that of an elementary relator ( $\bar{p}, \subseteq$ ).
- agreement with the head N is a residual Lkr behavior. Lkrs are clitics licencing an empty

pronominal subject of predication.

As for agreement, the underlying question is whether left-right asymmetries in NPs generally are best accounted for:

- (i) by a syntactic account of linear order based on articulated functional structures, operated on by movement parameters.
- (ii) by a reduced functional structures (minimally a phase head) and a limited repertory of syntactic movement combined with linearization at EXT

The facts are that

- (i) in a highly articulated structure operated on by complex movement derivations one might expect complex variation arising wrt to the positioning of adjectives, or the distribution of plural -s or other differential agreement patterns (adjectives again, possessives)
- (ii) however, where non-homogenous behaviors of a given nominal category are observed (adjective placement, plural -s distribution, agreement of modifiers), they always split along the same fault-line – modelled here in terms of complement vs. head of phase

The evidence reviewed (albeit limited wrt to the range of languages and of phenomena considered) does not provide support for the more articulated structure. In fact, the simpler phase-based organization of constituent structure is superior to the extent that it cuts out all sorts of possibilities in principle open under the richer account.

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