

The emergence of iterable prepositional genitives in Greek and its diachronic implications

In a number of Greek dialects, prepositional phrases headed by *apo* ‘from’ are used as genitive substitutes, with their distribution usually being morphologically conditioned: inflectional genitives and PP genitives are in complementary distribution, with the latter serving as suppletive forms filling paradigmatic gaps, e.g. plural genitives (Kavakli/Eastern Rumelia and most Northern Greek varieties) or genitives of non-bisyllabic nouns (Roumoukliotika/Imathia) and of unassimilated loan-words (Italiot/Calabria Greek, Katsoyannou 1996). This paper investigates genitives in the varieties of Grevena and Kozani, in which the prepositional realisation has been extended well beyond cases of suppletion and has become possible for all NPs (with the possible exception of proper names and personal pronouns), in all contexts where an inflectional genitive is allowed. While *apo*-PPs are favoured in most Greek varieties as genitive substitutes when the context is compatible with a source or partitive interpretation of the adnominal argument, in the varieties in question *apo*-PPs can support the full range of relations typically expressed through inflectional genitives:

- (1) *tu vivliu ap tun dhimarxu* (Grevena Greek)
the book APO the mayor
‘the book brought/owned/written/assigned by the mayor’
- (2) *Fotografies ap ts pethamen’ ts dimarxei*
pictures APO the dead the mayors
‘pictures of (=depicting) the dead mayors’

In (1), the *apo*-PP can express a source meaning or any of the following meanings typically associated with the genitive: “possession-control” (in the sense of Barker 2008), “author”, or any pragmatically recoverable relation between the mayor and the book (e.g. it could be the book the mayor talked about, the book related to his term as a mayor etc.). In picture nominals like (2), the *apo*-PP can be the theme argument, i.e. the individual depicted in the picture, in addition to ‘author’ or ‘possessor’ readings.

Crucially, one property that sets them apart from typical genitives in Greek is that *apo*-genitives are iterable and, when iterated, ambiguous with respect to theta-assignment, as opposed to inflectional genitives, which cannot be iterated in similar event nominalisations.

- (3) *I perigrafi ap tun dhimarxu ap ta pidhja*
the description APO the mayor APO the children
‘the mayor’s description of the children/(?)the children’s description of the mayor’
- (4) **I perigrafi tu Jani tu atiximatos* (Standard Greek)
The description the.GEN John.GEN the.GEN accident.GEN
‘John’s description of the accident’

At the same time, when co-occurring with another genitive argument realised by a different, structurally higher, form, e.g. a possessive pronoun, a strict thematic hierarchy (of the form ‘Possessor>Agent>Theme’, cf. Cinque’s (1980) generalisation) seems to be respected: a structurally lower genitive argument cannot take up a theta-role which is higher in the hierarchy than the role of the higher argument:

- (5) *i dhiki m fotografia ap tun dhimarxu*
the own my.clitic picture APO the mayor

In (5), the possible and impossible readings are as follows: (a) I=possessor, mayor=author, (b) I=possessor, mayor=theme, (c) I=author, mayor=theme, (d) *I=author, mayor=possessor, (e) *I=theme, mayor=possessor. The ‘source’ interpretation for the apo-PP is also independently available.

We argue that the difference between Standard Greek and the Northern Greek varieties under investigation is not just morphological, but actually syntactic. The varieties in question have fully developed a prepositional genitive system, alongside inflectional genitives, possessive pronouns etc., akin to prepositional genitives familiar from languages such as Romance/Bulgarian. Such genitives correspond to what Longobardi & Silvestri (2013) call ‘free genitives’ and have the distribution of all other types of oblique/prepositional modifiers, i.e. the distribution of (iterable) reduced relatives. As such they cannot undergo DP-internal emphatic/contrastive fronting, unlike inflectional genitives in Standard Greek.

- (6) Tu maghazi ap tun KSADHERFO M / *ap tun KSADERFO M tu maghazi
 The store APO the cousin my APO the cousin my the store
 ‘My COUSIN’s store’ (Grevena Greek)
- (7) TU KSADHERFU MU to magazi
 the.gen cousin my the store
 ‘My COUSIN’s store’ (Standard Greek)

This type of genitive contrasts with non-iterable genitives, which can be shown to occupy a unique, functional position immediately below all direct modification APs and (in Greek) the noun (Longobardi & Silvestri’s (2013) ‘GenO’), and before all sorts of obliques/reduced relatives. Standard Greek features inflectional genitive DPs occupying GenO and a higher position (arguably only crossed by the highest adjective present in the nominal), which is only occupied by genitive clitics and not genitive DPs (see also Alexiadou 2005). Greek dialects with PP realisations as a means of suppletion employ the same syntax, i.e. apparent PPs occupy GenO. Grevena and Kozani Greek instead have real prepositional (‘free’) genitives, alongside a high position for genitive clitics (attraction to which still obeys Superiority), and only a residual GenO position for proper names, as the PP realization seems to resist proper names and other higher expressions in Silverstein’s (1976) hierarchy.

Analysing more closely the landscape of variation, considering grammars with different degrees of Standard Modern Greek interference, as well as older written data documenting the variety of Kozani (Christodoulou 2015) we argue for a possible diachronic path which, if uninterrupted/unaffected by SMG, would have given (or might indeed give, in the future) rise to the prevalence of the prepositional realisation, with GenO being only residual, in a way reminiscent of the history of Romance genitives and of the synchronic situation in certain S.Italian dialects (cf. Silvestri 2013). The diachronic scenario advanced has two significant implications: (i) the loss of inflectional/DP genitives with a dedicated position is always preceded by the full development of prepositional genitives as a new full-fledged syntactic construction, akin to reduced relatives; for the complete loss of the inflectional genitive, the mere replacement of inflectional genitives by prepositional variants in the same position does not suffice; (ii) the initial rise of prepositional variants may correlate with the limited use of the inflectional genitive due to paradigmatic gaps or due to the absence of clausal argumental uses (all the varieties in question underwent a dative-accusative rather than a dative-genitive syncretism), but the emergence of prepositional genitives as a whole new syntactic construction arises seems to require further syncretisms in case morphology, cf. the extensive use of plural forms indistinguishable from the nominative as complements of P (ex. 2 above), which parallels the correlation between the complete loss of DP genitives and the merger of *cas sujet* and *cas régime* in the history of French.