

# CASE MARKING AND PREPOSITIONAL MARKING. SOME REMARKS CONCERNING *DE*-PHRASES IN ROMANIAN

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## 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):<sup>1</sup>

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (1) am dat (cărți) regel <b>ui</b> (Dative) | (2) cărțile regel <b>ui</b> (Genitive) |
| have-1 given (books) king-the-D             | books-the king-the-G                   |
| ‘I gave (books) to the king’                | ‘the books of the king’                |

The difference is visible when substituting by a possessive pronoun:

- |  |
|--|
| (3) i-am dat (cărți) <b>lui</b> / * <b>sale</b> (Dative) |
| him-CL-D have given (books) him-D / his-G                |
| ‘I gave (books) to him’                                  |
| (4) cărțile <b>lui</b> / <b>sale</b> (Genitive)          |
| books-the him-G / his-G                                  |
| ‘his books’  |

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<sup>1</sup> 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. Introduction

Romanian displays a remarkable alternation between DPs morphologically marked for Genitive case and PPs headed by the preposition *DE*;<sup>2</sup> this alternation appears with several types of nouns: relational nouns (5a), deverbal nouns (5b), picture nouns (5c), object-denoting nouns (5d):

- |        |                           |     |                        |
|--------|---------------------------|-----|------------------------|
| (5) a. | fiul regelui              | vs. | fiul de rege           |
|        | son-the king-the-G        |     | son-the DE king        |
| b.     | construirea caselor       | vs. | construirea de case    |
|        | building-the houses-the-G |     | building-the DE houses |
| c.     | fotografia grupului       | vs. | fotografia de grup     |
|        | picture-the group-the-G   |     | picture-the DE group   |
| d.     | ușa bisericii             | vs. | ușa de biserică        |
|        | door-the church-the-G     |     | door-the DE church     |

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

- |        |                                 |     |                       |           |
|--------|---------------------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----------|
| (6) a. | <i>the room of the men</i>      | vs. | <i>the men's room</i> | (English) |
| b.     | <i>le fils du (de + le) roi</i> | vs. | <i>le fils de roi</i> | (French)  |
|        | the son of the king             |     | the son DE king       |           |

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, *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:

- (i) The possibility to substitute the DPs marked with morphological case by *DE*-phrases in which *DE* would have take the functions of casual inflection (cf. *supra* (5) and *infra* (7));
- (ii) 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. :

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<sup>2</sup> There are other constructions with prepositions which can alternate with morphological Genitive constructions (e.g. *cartea copiilor* 'book-the children-the-G' vs. *cartea a trei copii* 'book-the A three children'). We will not discuss this type here.

- |        |                          |   |                           |
|--------|--------------------------|---|---------------------------|
| (7) a. | <i>curtea de împărat</i> | / | <i>curtea împăratului</i> |
|        | court-the DE emperor     |   | court-the emperor-the-G   |
| b.     | <i>gulerul de cămașă</i> | / | <i>gulerul cămășii</i>    |
|        | collar-the DE shirt      |   | collar-the shirt-the-G    |
| c.     | <i>nepotul de unchi</i>  | / | <i>nepotul unchiului</i>  |
|        | nephew-the DE uncle      |   | nephew-the uncle-the-G    |
| d.     | <i>camera de oaspeți</i> | / | <i>camera oaspeților</i>  |
|        | room-the DE guests       |   | room-the guests-the-G     |
| e.     | <i>ostrovul de flori</i> | / | <i>ostrovul florilor</i>  |
|        | isle-the DE flowers      |   | isle-the flowers-the-G    |
| f.     | <i>aerul de munte</i>    | / | <i>aerul muntelui</i>     |
|        | air-the DE mountain      |   | air-the mountain-the-G    |
| g.     | <i>căldura de vară</i>   | / | <i>căldura verii</i>      |
|        | heat-the DE summer       |   | heat-the summer-the-G     |
| h.     | <i>omul de datorie</i>   | / | <i>omul datoriei</i>      |
|        | 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. | <i>fiul regelui</i> | / | <i>fiul unui rege</i> |
|        | son-the king-the-G  |   | son-the a-G king      |
| b.     | <i>*fiul rege</i>   |   |                       |
|        | 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. | <i>*fiul de rege</i>        | / | <i>*fiul de un rege</i>             |
|        | son-the DE king-the         |   | son-the DE a king                   |
| b.     | <i>fiul de rege african</i> | / | <i>construirea de case din lemn</i> |
|        | son-the DE king African     |   | building-the DE houses of wood      |

#### 4.2. Distribution in predicate position<sup>3</sup>

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*<sup>4</sup> in front of the Genitive DP (10b):

- (10) a. \*fiul este regelui;                      \*ușa este bisericii  
           son-the is king-the-G;                door-the is church-the-G  
       b. fiul este al regelui;                ușa este a bisericii  
           son-the is A-the king-the-G;    door-the is A church-the-G

In contrast, prepositional constructions can appear after the copula (11):

- (11) a. fiul este de rege (nu de sclav)  
           son-the is DE king (not DE slave)  
       b. ușa este de biserică (nu de casă)  
           door-the is DE church (not DE house)

#### 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):

- (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’

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):

- (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’

#### 4.4. The *a avea* ‘to have’ paraphrase

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

- (14) *soția avocatului* →            *avocatul are soție*  
       wife-the lawyer-the-G    lawyer-the has wife

This is not the case for prepositional constructions (15):

- (15) *soția de avocat* → ???  
       wife-the DE lawyer

<sup>3</sup> By predicate position we understand post-copular position (cf. Milner 1982).

<sup>4</sup> 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 nopții* 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 colț* vs. \**floarea colțului*  
 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.*



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):

- (22) a. \**El este fiul de [rege]<sub>i</sub> pe care<sub>i</sub> tînăra speră să îl<sub>i</sub> întâlnească.*  
 he is son-the DE [king]<sub>i</sub> ACC-which<sub>i</sub> young-the hopes that him<sub>i</sub> meet  
 b. *El este [fiul de rege]<sub>i</sub> pe care<sub>i</sub> tînăra speră să îl<sub>i</sub> întâlnească.*  
 he is [son-the DE king]<sub>i</sub> ACC-which<sub>i</sub> young-the hopes that him<sub>i</sub> meet  
 'He is the king's son that the youngwoman hopes to meet'
- (23) a. *El este fiul regelui pe care tînăra 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]<sub>i</sub> pe care<sub>i</sub> tînăra speră să îl<sub>i</sub> întâlnească.*  
 he is son-the [king-the-G]<sub>i</sub> ACC-which<sub>i</sub> young-the hopes that him<sub>i</sub> meet  
 c. *El este [fiul regelui]<sub>j</sub> pe care<sub>i</sub> tînăra speră să îl<sub>j</sub> întâlnească.*  
 he is [son-the king-the-G]<sub>j</sub> ACC-which<sub>j</sub> young-the hopes that him<sub>j</sub> meet

More precisely, the noun *rege* 'king' in (22a) cannot serve as antecedent for the anaphorical pronoun *îl* 'him' because the former is non referential (i.e. it denotes a property). In contrast, the whole 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 *îl* '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 *îl* 'him' and (ii) the one in (23c) with *fiul* 'the son' being the antecedent of *îl* '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).

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