Agreeing and Non-agreeing Genitives in Old Romanian and the History of Romanian Genitive Constructions

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This article investigates the genitival system of Old Romanian from a double perspective: historical and synchronic. A difficult problem in the diachrony of Romanian genitives is the emergence of the genitival agreement marker *al* from a definite article. Based on Old Romanian data, supported by Latin and comparative Romance evidence, I propose a reconstruction of this process, which explains the situations in which *al* was not generalized (after the suffixal article and inside non-argumental bare NPs). I also address the problems raised by the genitival system of Modern and Old Romanian for the general theories of Case and agreement, arguing that the existence of agreeing Genitives and the alternation between agreeing and prepositional Genitives support upward probing and the view of structural Case as an uninterpretable counterpart of the categorial feature of the Case licensor.

1 Introduction: Genitive Constructions in Romanian and their History

Although in Romanian the Genitive can be marked by endings, there are no Case inflections restricted to the Genitive. Therefore, the notion of *genitive* is not purely morphological (hence, no capital letter, which would signal morphological Case); we call *genitive* the default (or prototypical) realization of adnominal DPs/NPs (which include complements of event nouns, complements of relational nouns, possessors). There are several morphological types which fall under this definition of genitives:¹ (a) DPs marked with “oblique” Case endings—i.e., Case endings used for both Genitive and Dative;² (b) DPs

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¹ See Cornilescu (1994, 2003), who uses complements of event nominalizations as a test.
² I include here DPs in which the oblique marking appears in the form of the preposed marker *lui*—historically, a form of the definite article; for modern Romanian, as this form has no
marked with oblique Case endings and introduced by the genitival “article” 
al, a particle that agrees with the “possessee” (the head N of the matrix DP); 
(c) DPs/NPs introduced by the preposition a; (d) DPs/NPs introduced by 
the preposition de; (e) agreeing possessors (traditionally called “possessive 
adjectives”);³ (f) agreeing possessors introduced by al.⁴ In modern Romanian, 
the choice between these types is determined by formal properties: (a) and (e) 
are variants of (b) and (f) used in linear adjacency with the definite article of 
the matrix DP, see (1a vs. b); (c) is used with DPs introduced by determiners or 
other functional items with no case inflection, see (1c); (d) is used with bare 
nouns, see (1d).

(1) a. alegerea {acelui candidat / election(F).DEF that.OBL candidate} 
     al + Oblique/ Possessive your(SG).FSG

     b. prima alegere a {acelui candidat /ta} 
     first.DEF election(F) al.F.SG that.OBL candidate your(SG).F.SG

     c. alegerea a trei membri 
     election.DEF a three members

     d. alegerea de membri 
     election.DEF of members

³ It has been shown that these items behave both syntactically (distributionally) and semanti-
ically as DPs (Vasilescu 2005, Dobrovie-Sorin and Giurgea 2011, Giurgea and Dobrovie-Sorin 
2013). The only adjectival property is agreement, which can be seen as a way of marking the 
adnominal dependency relation. See section 4 for an analysis.

⁴ Besides, de can precede al as an anti-uniqueness marker similar to English of...’s (see Barker 
I will not discuss here de-al genitives, since their history is quite clear—they do not appear 
in the oldest texts and evolve gradually, from a partitive construction, during the 17th and the 
18th centuries (see Frâncu 1983; Giurgea 2013: 99–103).