

Some left/right asymmetries in the northern Italo-Romance noun phrase

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Italo-Romance possessives occur either before or after the noun. In most northern dialects, prenominal possessives do not agree in gender and number with the noun head, see (1a-b), whereas postnominal possessives show adjective-like agreement, see (1a'-b'). For the sake of consistency, all the following examples are from the dialect of Verona (Veneto region), but—to the best of my knowledge—same or similar phenomena are attested throughout the northern area, including Florence.

- (1) a. el **me/to/so** libro. a' el libro mio/tuo/suo
 the.MSG 1SG/2SG/3.POSS book.(M)SG the.MSG book.(M)SG 1SG/2SG/3.POSS.MSG
 b. la **me/to/so** carèga b' la carèga mia/tua/sua
 the.FSG 1SG/2SG/3.POSS chair.(F)SG the.FSG chair.(F)SG 1SG/2SG/3.POSS.FSG

Further syntactic properties distinguish pre- from post-nominal possessives (Cardinaletti 1998): the former cannot be coordinated, modified, and cannot occur in fragments, see (2). Prenominal possessives can marginally be focalized, see (2b). In this respect, northern dialects exhibit the same restrictions as standard Italian in (3), where prenominal possessives can be neither coordinated nor modified (however, see Manzini 2014 for counterexamples). Hence, the comparison between (2) and (3) suggests that prenominal possessives in (2) and (3) have the same syntactic distribution (or fall into the same class, in Cardinaletti's 1998 terms), although they differ morphologically as the forms in (2) do not agree with the noun head.

- (2) a. *i so e me libri
 the 3.POSS and 1SG.POSS books 'his and my books'
 b. ?el SO libro, no 'l tuo
 the 3.POSS book not the 2SG.POSS 'HIS book, not yours'
 c. De ci è-lo sto libro? *so/suo
 Of whom is=it this book 3.POSS 'Whose book is that? His'
 (3) a. i suoi e miei libri (Italian)
 the 3.POSS and 1SG.POSS books 'his and my books'
 b. ?il SUO libro, non il tuo
 the 3.POSS book not the 2SG.POSS 'HIS book, not yours'

In this talk, I show that the lack of agreement in (2) reflects a poorly understood syntactic asymmetry between Italian and northern dialects. I will focus on so-called possessive pronouns, which will be analyzed as instances of nominal ellipsis. As shown in (4), prenominal non-agreeing possessives in northern dialects cannot occur in contexts of ellipsis, i.e. in nominal phrases where the nominal head is missing, cf. (4a-b) vs (4a'-b').

- (4) a. *i **me** a'. i **mii**
 the.MPL 1SG.POSS the.MPL 1SG.POSS.MPL 'mine' (lit. 'the my')
 b. *le **to** b'.le **tue**
 the.FPL 2SG.POSS the.FPL 2SG.POSS.FPL 'yours' (lit. 'the your')

In fact, possessives always follow numerals in contexts of nominal ellipsis, as shown in (4a') and (4b'). This confirms that prenominal/nonagreeing possessives of northern dialects are barred when the nominal head is missing.

- (5) a. *i **mii** do ~~libri~~ a'. i do ~~libri~~ **mii**
 'my two (books).'
 b. *le **tue** sinque ~~carèghe~~ b'.le sinque ~~carèghe~~ **tue**
 'your five (chairs).'

Italian, on the contrary, allows both pre and post-nominal possessives to occur in contexts of nominal ellipsis, see (6). Possessives therefore end up occurring before or after numerals:

- (6) a. i miei due ~~libri~~ a'. i due ~~libri~~ miei (Italian)
 'my two (books).'
- b. le tue cinque ~~sedie~~ b'. le cinque ~~sedie~~ tue
 'your five (chairs).'

A comparable restriction on pronominal modifiers is found with demonstratives. Demonstratives in (7) may co-occur with deictic particles (e.g. *qua* 'here', *lì* 'there') that follow the nominal head. In other northern dialects, "all deictic force has been transferred to the adverb, reducing the demonstrative to a mere marker of definiteness" (Ledgeway 2020: 456 and references therein). In the languages of the latter type (which are not exemplified here), demonstratives have a single syncretic form, while deixis is lexicalized by the deictic particle, which is mandatory.

- (7) a. tol sto libro (qua)
 'Take this book (here).'
- b. tol chel libro (lì)
 'Take that book (there).'

When demonstratives are used pronominally as in (8) (in our analysis, when the noun head is deleted), the locative particle becomes mandatory in all northern dialects, including those in which the particle is otherwise optional, cf. (7) vs (8).

- (8) a. tol sto *(qua)
 'Take this.'
- b. tol chel *(lì)
 'Take that.'

The comparison between northern Italo-Romance and Italian with respect to demonstratives and possessives is schematized in (9) and (10), respectively. In a nutshell, pronominal modifiers such as possessives and demonstratives can license nominal ellipsis in Italian, but not in northern dialects. In northern dialects, a postnominal modifier, either a locative particle in (9) or an agreeing possessive in (10), is required.

- (9) a. [DP chel N *(lì)] northern dialects (demonstratives)
 b. [DP quello N] Italian
- (10) a. [DP el N *(mio)] northern dialects (possessives)
 b. [DP il mio N] Italian

Two accounts of (9) and (10) will be assessed. One suggesting that pronominal modifiers in northern dialects are deficient elements, either morphologically or prosodically (see Cardinaletti 1998: 102). The other elaborating on a structural asymmetry between the edge and the complement of the noun phrase (Manzini & Savoia 2019), which may in turn correlate with independently established evidence of a right/left asymmetry in nominal agreement/concord (so-called *lazy agreement*).

References

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