ASPECTS OF THE POSSESIVE OBJECT IN SPOKEN ROMANIAN[1]

***Abstract**: The present paper aims to approach some particular aspects of this syntactic position, the possessive object, which are present in spoken Romanian structures and differ from the Standard Romanian structures.*

***Key words**: possession, verb group, noun group, spoken Romanian, syntactic superordinate.*

1. The syntactic position of possessive object, in its prototypical form, is "a component of the verbal group which occurs in a ternary structure and expresses the possessor by means of a short form of a reflexive pronoun or of a personal pronoun having the semantic feature [+Animate]; it establishes a semantic relation of possession (and other relations subsumed under possession: belonging, dependency etc.) with another *nomen* in that structure, which represents the possessed «object» (in broad terms)" (GALR, II, 2005: 441). This definition is the starting point for the present paper which aims to approach certain structures that occur in spoken Romanian and that could be considered exceptions or indefinite situations placed on the border between possessive object and other syntactic structures.

2. The solution of creating a new syntactic function for those short forms of the pronoun in the dative expressing possession is justified also by the fact that these pronominal forms have been considered to function both as a special type of indirect object and as a special type of pronominal attribute in traditional grammar studies (Rădulescu Sala, 2007: 191).

The syntactic position called possessive object is brought about by a transformation which involves a few stages and it is the final result of this series of transformed constructions. The starting level consists of a structure including a possessive adjective or a pronoun in the genitive which represents "the Possessor" and is subordinated to a *nomen* (*Copilul meu a adormit repede.*). The semantic equivalence of this possessive to a short form of a pronoun in the dative ("possessive dative") leads to a structure where the pronoun is no longer under the dominance of the noun, although it may preserve it as a phonetic prop.

"The short form of the pronoun functioning as a possessive object may sometimes use the noun with which it establishes the possession relation (*Pe umeri pletele-i curg râu./ Pe umeri pletele îi curg râu.*), or even an adjective subordinated to this noun (*Blondele-i plete flutură în vânt./ Blondele plete îi flutură în vânt.*) as a phonetic prop (but not as a single syntactic superordinator)" (GALR, II, 2005: 448).

The structure in this stage of the transformation (*Copilu-mi a adormit repede*) is similar to another structure (*Te urmează privirea-i rece*). However, there is a difference in analyzing these two structures; in the former sentence, the short form of the pronoun is a possessive object, in the latter sentence its syntactical function is an attribute.

"The attribute in the dative expressed by a short form of the pronoun («the *adnominal* dative») in sentences such as *Se gândeşte la frumuseţea-i trecută* or *Mă obsedează trista-i privire* is different from the possessive object because, in this

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situation, the short form of the pronoun can not be moved in the verbal group (it does not re-categorize the verb, so it can not be subordinated to the verb)" (GALR, II, 2005: 449).

Thus, even though the transformation stops at this level, in this stage where the short form of the pronoun occurs in the proximity of a noun or an adjective, this form of the pronoun is considered to have already become subordinated to the verb, so a possessive object, if the reorganization of the sentence may continue to the next level. If this is not possible, then it is considered to be still subordinated to the noun, functioning as an attribute.

At the next level of the transformation, the short form of the pronoun gets out of the noun group and occurs in the proximity of the verb (*Copilul mi-a adormit repede.*) which is said to be re-categorized by getting a valence of the dative that was absent in its argument structure.

This is the point where the transformation stops, it is complete and the possessive object gets to establish a relation of double subordination: a syntactical one to the verb, on the one hand, a semantic one to the co-occurring noun in the ternary structure it takes part in, on the other hand.

Firstly, the present paper aims to show that there are structures where the possessive object and the *nomen* involved in the relation of possession are not co-occurring; still, these sentences belong to spoken Romanian and can be considered to be exceptions from the rules asserted in the normative grammar. "The *nomen* with which the possessive object establishes the relation of possession has to be co-occurring; therefore it can not be deleted" (GALR, II, 2005: 441). The impossibility of deleting the *nomen* in the sentences which resulted after the syntactic reorganization can be proved by examples that lack grammaticality (**Ion îşi respectă., *Ţi-am auzit., *Cunosc un bătrân căruia nu i-a slăbit.*). Still, there are other sentences such as *Mi-a adormit repede.,Mi-a mâncat bine astăzi şi mi-a dormit mult* which can occur in spoken Romanian and the hearers can consider them to be "meaningful". These structures are at least acceptable (and accepted as such by the speakers), if not grammatically correct. Their occurrence in spoken language requires the look for some answers to the following questions: is the expressing of possessed "object" obligatory or not? May the series of transformations which led to the presence of the possessive object syntactical function continue by deleting the *nomen*?

If the *nomen* involved in the relation of possession functions as a subject, it may not be expressed. Its absence in the surface structure correlates with the possibility of its semantic decoding in the context (*-Ce-ţi face copilul?-Mi-a adormit repede, e bine.*). As long as the *nomen* can be semantically grasped from the context by the speakers, its role of "superordinator" of the possessive object is accomplished because the subordination relation of the possessive object to the *nomen* is purely semantic.

If the sentences where the subject is missing at the surface structure are quite frequent and the semantic decoding is not complicated, in the structure *Mi-am scris pentru astăzi (tema)* the deletion of the direct object can be noticed, which is possible only if the context offer the speaker the opportunity to grasp the meaning of this *nomen*. In students' language, for example, *Ţi-ai învăţat?* represents a sentence which may be assigned a meaning (it has an associated reading), because the direct object valence of the verb is accomplished by the noun *lecţie* that is inferred by means of the context. This noun had been deleted from the basic structure *Ţi-ai învăţat lecţia?*

As these types of structures occur in spoken Romanian, the emotional component may be involved, which would create the possibility of interpreting some of

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them as being structures with *ethic dative*. Still, because the series of transformations can be reconstructed up to a basic construction where a possessive occurs, the short form of the personal or reflexive pronoun can be considered to function as a possessive object, without excluding the emotional involvement of the speaker.

It is obvious that these sentences where a noun group has been deleted in the surface structure are the result of the characteristics of spoken language. The possibility of inferring certain components of the sentence is given by the dialogue, as "the speaker does not repeat those terms already expressed by his interlocutor or by himself in a previous verbal intervention. The phenomenon occurs especially in those complex sentences by which the speaker answers to partial interrogative sentences."(Irimia, 1999: 110).

3. Recent normative grammars assert that "in larger constructions (complex sentences), the *nomen* involved in the relation of possession may be realized by means of an anaphoric pronoun in the clause where the possessive object occurs" (GALR, II, 2005: 445). However, this is not the only type of constructions where the anaphor may occur. In a dialogue, therefore in spoken Romanian, a similar situation may be noticed: - *Ți-ai găsit cartea? – Mi-am găsit-o!*

Besides, in spoken Romanian this pronoun may have also a deictic value, for ex. *Na-ți-l!, Iată-ți-o!*. These situations do not necessarily require the previous expressing of a noun and the utterance may be accompanied by an extra-linguistic way of indicating the element in the context which is referred to (a gesture, a look). Depending on the circumstances of the context, the ostensive deictic pronoun (*-l, -o*) may be decoded without using any extra-verbal indication.

4. Therefore, the indispensible element in realizing the syntactic position of possessive object is not the co-occurrence of the *nomen*, but its semantic inference.

Although in the normative grammar the position of possessive object is defined by the double subordination, in spoken language there are structures which seem to contradict this definition, because the *nomen* is not present, it is not co-ocurrent. This noun may be semantically retrieved from the linguistic context or the situation of communication.

The questions that have been asked above may be answered to, taking into account the analyzed structures. The expressing of the possessed "object" is not necessary, but the inference of its meaning is obligatory and if there is a possibility to decode it using the context, this noun may be deleted. This possible deletion of the *nomen* shows that the short form of the pronoun in the dative is unbound to the noun group with respect to its syntax, but it is still involved in this group with respect to its meaning.

The occurrence of this type of structures in spoken Romanian may represent another argument for consolidating the syntactic position of possessive object.

The fact that the number of these structures in spoken Romanian is small allows us to consider them to be exceptions to the rule that states the necessity of expressing the possessed "object". However, their existence can not be ignored and it may be taken as another argument for considering the short forms of the personal and reflexive pronouns in the dative functioning in the syntactic position of possessive object, as a part of the verbal group.

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