ON THE HISTORY OF ROMANIAN GENITIVES: THE PRENOMINAL GENITIVE

Alexandra Cornilescu[*] and Alexandru Nicolae[**]

Abstract: In this paper[†] we focus on the behaviour of prenominal genitives in Old Romanian in contrast with Modern Romanian. In the old language, the prenominal genitive is more widely used and occurs in three distinct configurations: (i) it is a determiner genitive in DP-initial position and checks the definiteness feature of D in a local configuration, (ii) it is a lower determiner genitive which checks the definiteness feature of D across an intervening constituent, and (iii) it is an attributive/property genitive, similar to the attributive genitive of English and to the genitival adjectives of (certain) Slavic languages. Of these three distinct configurations, only the first one is still available in Modern Romanian. In trying to provide an explanation for the loss of some of the prenominal genitive patterns, we relate this phenomenon to changes in the syntax of the definite article.

Keywords: prenominal genitive, determiner genitive, property genitive, syntactic variation, syntactic change

1. Introduction

From a diachronic point of view, the Romanian genitive raises at least three problems:

(i) the rise of genitival morphology (a special point concerns the controversial origin and structure of the genitival article; see Găzdaru 1929, Densusianu 1961, Coteanu 1969, Ivănescu 1980, Rosetti 1926, 1986, Vasiliu and Ruxăndoiu 1986, Sala 2006, Giurgea forthcoming);

(ii) the specialization of the genitive into a referential anchoring genitive co-occurring with the definite article and a non-anchored non-referential (prepositional) genitive (see Pană Dindelegan 2008, Cornilescu and Nicolae 2009);

(iii) the evolution and interpretation of the prenominal genitive, which has not been discussed so far.

The third problem represents the focus of the present study. In Modern Romanian (ModR)[1], the prenominal genitive is a definite determiner, similar to the English Saxon genitive. However, in contrast to Modern Romanian, the prenominal genitive of Old Romanian (OldR) displayed a dual behaviour: it could be a *definite determiner*, as in ModR, or it could function *attributively*, similarly to the English attributive genitive or to

* University of Bucharest, Pitar Moş 7-13, alexandracornilescu@yahoo.com.
** "Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti" Institute of Linguistics, Romanian Academy, 13 Septembrie 13, Bucharest, nicolae_bibi@yahoo.com.
† This work was supported by CNCSIS, project PN II − IDEI 1979/2008 and by the European Social Fund, project POSDRU 107/1.5/S/80765, Human Resources Sectoral Operational Program 2007 − 2013, priority axis 1, major domain of intervention 1.5.
[1] We use the chronology proposed by Gheție (1975: 86-87): Old Romanian (OldR) 16th – 18th c; Modern Romanian (ModR) 19th – present day.

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

Slavic adjectival genitives. By investigating an extended OldR corpus, we show that the second (attributive) reading of the prenominal genitive was lost in the transition from OldR to ModR.

Prenominal genitives are attested as early as the first Romanian texts (the 16th c.) and continue to be available in ModR. In OldR, the prenominal genitive is much more frequent than in ModR. The difference in frequency and usage of this constituent in these two periods of Romanian is considerably more than a matter of style and register.

In order to understand the evolution of the prenominal genitive from OldR to ModR, it is incumbent on us to briefly review the behaviour of the prenominal genitive in ModR.

2. The prenominal genitive in Modern Romanian: a determiner genitive

In ModR the prenominal genitive has several characteristic obligatory properties. It is the initial constituent of the DP, as in (1), (3)−(5). The prenominal genitive is always headed by the genitival article AL. It is followed by adjectives, including quantifying adjectives, as in (3). The nominal head is determinerless, so that the genitive is the **only bearer of definiteness** in the whole DP. The prenominal genitive always confers a definite interpretation to the DP it is a member of, being a **determiner genitive** (Cornilescu 1995, *GBLR* 2010), very similar to the English Saxon genitive (2) (Lyons 1986). Finally, even if it presumably sits in [Spec, DP], an A'-position and an escape hatch in Romance languages, the Romanian prenominal genitive cannot be extracted, much like its English counterpart, again. These properties are illustrated by the examples below.

(1) a. **al țării** steag
AL country-DEF GEN flag
'the country's flag'

b. **al casei** prag
AL house-DEF GEN threshold
'the house's threshold'

(2) a. **the country's** flag

b. **the house's** threshold

(3) a. **ale turnurilor** negre umbre
AL towers-DEF GEN black shadows
'the towers' black shadows'

(4) a. **ai mei** doi fii
AL my two sons
'my two sons'

b. *doi **ai mei** fii
two AL my sons

(5) a. Pe **ale cui studente** le- ai văzut la concert?
PE AL whose students CL ACC 3SG FEM have seen at concert
'Whose students did you see at the concert?'

b. *Pe **ale cui** le- ai văzut la concert **studente**?
PE AL whose CL ACC 3SG FEM have seen at concert students

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

The prenominal genitive in (6a), (7a) can be preceded only by the definite quantifiers *toți* 'all' and *amândoi* 'both' which are prenominal constituents that obligatorily take a definite DP complement – see (6b) *vs.* (6c); (7b) *vs*. (7c). This may be taken as a hint that the prenominal genitive occupies the [Spec, DP] position, checking the [+def] feature of the DP.

(6) a. toți **ai țării** ostaşi
all AL country-DEF GEN soldiers
'all the soldiers of the country'
b. toți ostaş**ii**
all soldiers-DEF
'all soldiers'
c. *toți ostaşi
all soldiers

(7) a. amândoi **ai țării** duşmani
both AL country-DEF GEN enemies
'both enemies of the country'
b. amândoi duşman**ii**
both enemies-DEF
'both enemies'
c. *amândoi duşmani
both enemies

From a Romance comparative perspective one may wonder why AL-genitives may occur prenominally, unlike their Romance counterparts. An obvious difference between Romanian and Romance is that Romanian AL-genitives are DPs, not PPs like their Romance counterparts. Romanian prenominal are thus similar to prenominal English Genitives which are DPs as well, and contrast with the postnominal prepositional ones. A second question is what allows these genitives to check definiteness, a question which is sharpened by the observation that definiteness is checked even if the complement of AL is indefinite:

(8) a. **a multor mândre fete** soartă
AL many-GEN beautiful-GEN girls-GEN fate
'the fate of many beautiful girls'
b. Nu ştiam nimic de **a niciunui prieten** soartă.
not knew nothing of AL no-GEN friend.GEN fate
'I didn't know anything about the fate of any friend.'
c. Nu ştiam nimic de **a vreunui prieten** soartă.
not know nothing of AL any-GEN friend.GEN fate
'I didn't know anything about the fate of any friend.'

Given such examples, the constituent that incorporates the [definite] feature is likely to be the adjectival article, which (historically and) morphologically includes the definite article (Densusianu 1961, Rosetti 1926, 1986, Vasiliu and Ruxăndoiu 1986, Sala

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

2006). While its semantic features are usually bleached, it is still able to incorporate the definiteness feature.

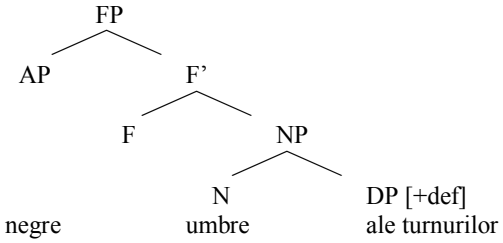
We conclude that the possibility of the AL-genitive to occur prenominally hinges on AL's ability to incorporate the feature [+definite], forcing movement of the AL-phrase to [Spec, DP].

Consider the derivation of an example like (5) below.

(9) **ale turnurilor** negre umbre
AL towers-DEF GEN black shadows
'the black shadows of the towers'

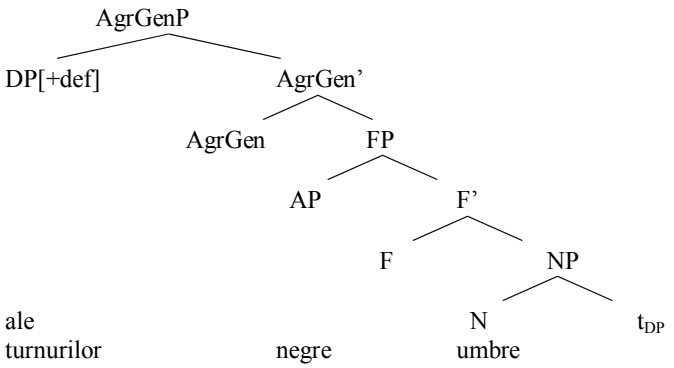
The genitive merges as complement to the indefinite N-head *umbre*, in a position where it is assigned its theta-role, while the AP *negre* merges as the specifier of a designated prenominal functional projection (= FP).

(10)



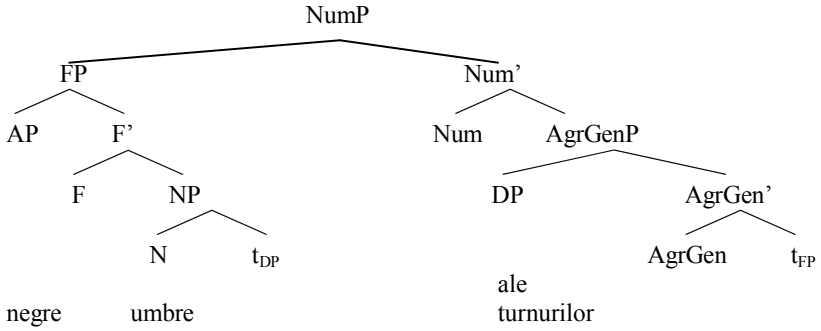
The genitive is assumed to be a structural case, checked in a designated functional projection, the lowest above the lexical domain. The genitive DP raises to the specifier of the AgrGenP (Cornilescu 2003) – see (11). We follow a majority of linguists (Cinque 2004 for Romance, Tănase-Dogaru 2009 for Romanian) in the assumption that Romanian NP raise at least as far as the number projection – see (12).

(11)



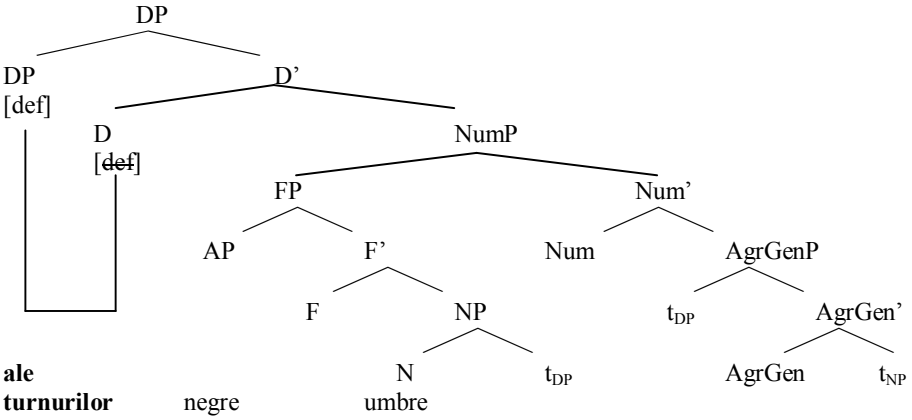
BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

(12)



What counts is that since the genitive is marked as definite it will be attracted to the specifier of the DP. The definiteness feature of D is valued by the definiteness feature of the AL-genitive.

(13)



In conclusion, the **definite interpretation** and the **initial position** of the Romanian prenominal genitive are the most important properties from the point of view of our analysis. We may now turn to the investigation of the prenominal genitive in OldR. It will be shown that, in contrast to ModR, in OldR there are two types of prenominal genitive: a determiner genitive and a property-denoting, attributive genitive.

3. The prenominal genitive in Old Romanian

In OldR, there are two types of prenominal genitive: a determiner genitive, similar to the one of ModR (14), and a property-denoting, attributive genitive, which co-occurs with other determiners (15):

(14) [$_{DP}$ **a păcatelor** cădeare] cinre o înțeleage? (PH: 101)
AL sins-DEF GEN falling who it understands
'who is able to understand the falling into sins'

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

(15) de [DP această mare **a marelor monarhii** adunare]
of this big AL big.DEF.GEN monarchies gathering
tuturor în ştire să dea (Cantemir I: 35)
everyone-DAT in news SĂ give
'to announce everyone about this big gathering of the great monarchies'

Thus, (15) contrasts with (14) in that the prenominal genitive occupies a low position and co-occurs with a demonstrative determiner. Both of the patterns in (14) and (15) co-existed throughout OldR. We will examine each pattern in turn.

3.1 The determiner genitive in Old Romanian

We start by illustrating the determiner genitive of OldR, with examples spanning from the oldest texts (16th c.) to the more recent ones (early 18th c.):

(16) a. şi [DP **a**[2] **toată lume** cap] să piară de o muiere (Alexandria: 197)
and AL all people head SĂ perish because a woman
'that everyone's head should perish because of a woman'

b. [DP **a păcatelor** cădeare] cinre o înţeleage? (PH: 101)
AL sins-DEF GEN falling who it understands
'who is able to understand the falling into sins'

c. [DP **a lor** rrost] grăia deşert (PH: 207)
AL their mouth spoke vain
'their mouth spoke in vain'

d. [DP **ale aceştii ţări** lucruri şi fapte] (IŢR: 219)
AL these.GEN country-GEN things and facts
'this country's things and facts'

e. [DP **ale domnului** umblete şi purtări] (RG: 117)
AL prince-DEF GEN escapades and demeanours
'the prince's escapades and demeanour'

f. după [DP **a ţării** poftă] (RG: 104)
after AL country-DEF GEN desire
'in compliance with the country's desire'

[2] Note that in OldR the ModR preposition *a* functions as an allomorph of the genitival article, incorporating the definiteness feature, even if it does not show the φ-features characteristic of *al*. This allomorph is already specialized for uninflected complements. In contrast, when the article shows φ-features, its complement is inflected for the genitive. It is precisely the fact that *a*-genitives occur prenominally as determiner genitives which forces us to analyze *a* as an allomorph of the genitival article *al*, rather than a preposition. In ModR, prepositional *a*-genitives occur only postnominally:

(i) a. mamă **a doi copii**
mother A two children
'a mother of two children'

b. ***a doi copii** mamă
A two children mother

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

g. văzându [$_{DP}$ **a nemților** biruință] şi [$_{DP}$ **a turcilor**
seeing AL Germans-DEF GEN victory and AL Turks-DEF GEN
înfrângere] (RG: 107)
defeat
'seeing the victory of the Germans and the defeat of the Turks'

h. [$_{DP}$ **ale altor domni** vieți şi istorii] (RG: 98)
AL other-GEN kings-GEN lives and histories
'the lives and histories of other kings'

i. [$_{DP}$ **a tuturor** nedejde] (Cantemir I: 44)
AL everyone-GEN hope
'everyone's hope'

j. fără [$_{DP}$ **a aierului** trebuință] (Cantemir I: 45)
without AL air-DEF GEN need
'without the need of air'

k. [$_{DP}$ toate **a munților** înalte vârfuri] (Cantemir I: 35)
all AL mountains-DEF GEN high peaks
'all the high peaks of the mountains'

A few comments are in order here. In all these examples, the noun (or any occurring prenominal adjective) is indefinite, so that the only definite constituent is the genitive DP. Further proof of definiteness is the fact that *toți* 'all', which selects only definite DPs in Romanian – see the discussion above in (6)-(7), may immediately precede the prenominal genitive, as in (16k). The prenominal genitive may be a lexical noun phrase, as in (16a), (16b), (16d), (16e), (16f), (16g), (16h), (16j), (16k), or a pronoun, in (16c), (16i). When they are present (16k), adjectives follow the prenominal genitive.

As announced, this is not the only use of the prenominal genitive in OldR. In the first place, there are instances where the genitive is the bearer of definiteness, but it is not the DP-initial constituent, so that definiteness is checked across another constituent.

(17) a. pre [$_{DP}$ mai mare **a vicleşugului** căptuşală]$_i$ o$_i$ făcea (Cantemir I, p. 307)
PE more big AL guile-DEF GEN hiding it made
'he resorted to a deeper hiding of his guile' (= 'he hid his guile deeper')

b. căptuşala mai mare **a vicleşugului** o făcea (ModR structure)
hiding-DEF more big AL guile-DEF GEN it made

Example (17a) shows the genitive phrase below an indefinite AP, *mai mare*. Definiteness is checked by the lower genitive, as shown by the (ModR) definite paraphrase in (17b). In these cases, the position of the genitive DP is different (lower), while its interpretation is the same (that of a definite determiner). We will get back to this situation in section **4.**

3.2 The property genitive in Old Romanian

There is a second class of cases, in sharper contrast to ModR, since in this category of examples the prenominal genitive functions like **a prenominal adjective**, not as a

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

determiner. We will refer to the genitive that co-occurs with determiners as the **property genitive**.

The property genitive has two very important features: the first is co-occurrence with other determiners (**3.2.1**) which check the (in)definiteness feature of D; secondly, it is freely-ordered with respect to other prenominal constituents (**3.2.2**).

3.2.1 The co-occurrence with determiners

The prenominal property genitive co-occurs with determiners, both definite and indefinite. In particular it co-occurs with the definite article. This shows that in such cases it does not function as a determiner and has nothing to do with definiteness checking.

Consider first examples (18a), (18b), headed by indefinite determiners. In these examples, the prenominal genitive is not the checker of definiteness; definiteness is checked by the indefinite determiners that head the DP, the cardinal numeral in (18a) and the indefinite determiner *alt* ('an/some other') in (18b):

(18) a. din [$_{DP}$ <u>șeapte</u> **ale lumii** minuni] unul ieste (Cantemir I: 28)
of seven AL world-DEF GEN wonders one is
'it is one of the seven wonders of the world'

b. acéle jigănii sta, carele sau în colți, sau în unghii, sau într-[$_{DP}$ <u>altă</u> **a** **trupului** parte] arme de moarte purtatoare poartă (Cantemir I: 30)
those beasts stayed, which either in teeth or in claws or in other AL body-DEF GEN part weapons of death bearing carry
'those beasts stayed there, who either in their teeth or in their claws, or in some other part of their body, carry deadly weapons'

Likewise, the prenominal property genitive occurs with the whole range of definite determiners. In (19a)-(19c), the prenominal genitive is followed by a lower definite article on the head noun. The genitive is not involved in definiteness checking irrespective of its initial position. This structure is impossible in ModR, where a definite noun is **always DP initial** (see more in section **4**).

(19) a. **a ceriului** împăratu<u>l</u> (PH: 143)
AL sky-DEF GEN emperor-DEF
'the emperor of the sky'

b. **a lor** feciorii (PH: 207)
AL their sons-DEF
'their sons'

c. să înece **a toate țările** anii trecuți (Ureche: 57)
SĂ drown A all countries-DEF years-DEF passed
'would drown the passed years of all the countries'

The property genitive also co-occurs with other definite determiners: demonstrative pronouns in (20) and a DP-initial definite adjective (21):

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

(20) a. de [$_{DP}$ această mare **a marelor monarhii** adunare] tuturor în
of this big AL big-DEF GEN monarchies gathering everyone-DAT in
ştire să dea (Cantemir I: 35)
news SĂ give
'to announce everyone about this big gathering of the great monarchies'

b. aceste **ale Ciacalului** [...] cuvinte (Cantemir I, p. 72)
these AL Jackal.DEF.GEN words
'these words of the Jackal'

c. pentru [$_{DP}$ acéste spurcate **ale lui** fapte] (Let. Can.: 41)
for these filthy AL his deeds
'for these filthy deeds of his'

d. şi toţi de [$_{DP}$ acestea **ale sale** bune fapte] încălziţi era (RG: 101)
and all by these AL his good deeds heated were
'and they were all enchanted by these good deeds of his'

(21) a. deci cu [$_{DP}$ reaua **a lui** slujbă] (Let. Can.: 40)
so with bad-DEF AL his service
'so with his bad service'

b. [adevărata **a pasirilor** hirişie] (Cantemir I: 69)
true-DEF AL birds-DEF GEN fame
'the true fame of birds'

Notice also the exceptional construction below (early 18th) where two genitives are prenominal (an utter impossibility in ModR), and definiteness is checked by the initial definite adjective:

(22) singura **a mea a trupului** slăbiciune Cantemir I: 83)
only-DEF AL my AL body-DEF GEN weakness
'my only bodily weakness'

Thus, the obligatory characteristic of the property genitive is co-occurrence with other determiners. The co-occurring (definite) determiner is the checker of the [±definite] feature of D.

3.2.2 Position within the DP

As already apparent in the examples above, a second characteristic of the Property Genitive is its position. It may be lower or higher than the determiner of the phrase: thus, it may be DP initial and higher than the definite noun (23a), but lower than definite adjectives (23b) or demonstratives (23c). Secondly, it may be lower than the pre-nominal adjectives (23c) or it may higher than prenominal adjectives (23d):

(23) a. **a lor** feciorii (PH: 207)
AL their sons-DEF
'their sons'

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

b. deci cu [$_{DP}$ reaua **a lui** slujbă] (Let. Can.: 40)
so with bad-DEF AL his service
'so with his bad service'

c. pentru [$_{DP}$ acéste spurcate **ale lui** fapte] (Let. Can.: 41)
for these filthy AL his deeds
'for these filthy deeds of his'

d. şi toţi de [$_{DP}$ acestea **ale sale** bune fapte] încălziţi era (RG: 101)
and all of these AL his good deeds heated were
'and they were all enchanted by these good deeds of his'

3.3 Summary

The distribution of the prenominal genitive reviewed above raises the following problems:

(i) Why does the genitive only sometimes function as a checker of definiteness, so that, when it does not, it may co-occur with definite and indefinite Ds?

(ii) How is it possible for the OldR prenominal genitive to check definiteness even when its position is not DP-initial (i.e. [Spec, DP]), against the facts of ModR? Let us refer to this situation as the **lower determiner genitive**.

In the next section, answers are proposed to these questions.

4. Patterns of definite checking

The lower determiner genitive is part of a more general property of the OldR DP, i.e., the possibility to check definiteness by Long Distance Agree, one of its most striking properties in this period. This phenomenon is discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Cornilescu and Nicolae 2011).

4.1 Definiteness checking in Modern Romanian

As is well-known, in Romanian definite DPs, either the noun or the adjective may be suffixed by the definite article, and the article always occurs on the *first* noun or adjective in the group. Characteristic examples are the ones below:

(24) a. fat**a** frumoasă
girl-DEF beautiful

b. frumoas**a** fată
beautiful-DEF girl

c. *fată frumoas**a**
girl beautiful-DEF

d. *frumoasă fat**a**
beautiful girl-DEF

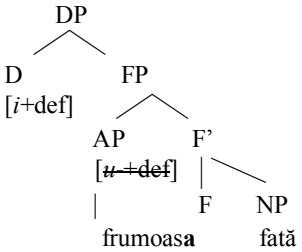
BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

Assuming that in definite phrases, there is always an interpretable but unvalued definite feature in D, the paradigm in (24) proves that the checking of definiteness observes strong locality conditions. Examples (24a) and (24b) represent two different syntactic configurations, each of them observing the same generalization:

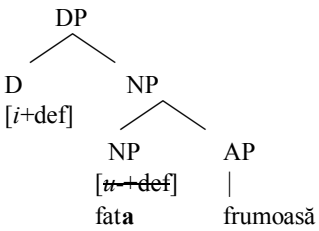
(25) **Definiteness checking in Modern Romanian (Local Agree)**: The [+def] feature is realized on the first [+N] constituent of the nominal phrase.

It is invariably the first [+N] (noun or adjective) constituent of the DP which values the feature in D, by Local Agree.

(26) a. frumoasa fată
beautiful-DEF girl



b. fata frumoasă
girl-DEF beautiful



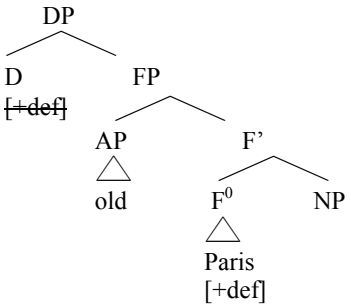
The locality of Agree in Romanian or in languages like French is more evident in contrast with English in the following modifier + proper name structure (recall that proper names are inherently definite, see Longobardi 1994):

(27) a. **le** vieux Paris (French)
the old Paris
b. vechi**ul** Paris (Romanian)
old.DEF Paris
c. old Paris (English)

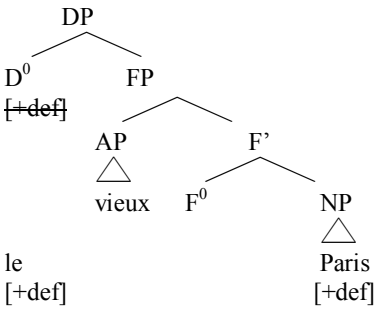
BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

English allows Long Distance Agree, verifying definiteness across the adjective (28a). French and Romanian disallow this, but use alternative strategies to express definiteness: a free standing, expletive (Leu 2008) definite article (French) (28b) or a definite article suffixed on a nominal constituent immediately below D (Romanian) (26).

(28) a. old Paris



b. **le** vieux Paris



Since Agree is local, only one phrase, the one on the edge of the constituent immediately below D or in D/[Spec, DP], may check the [+def] feature in D. In Romanian, the article is part of the NP/AP, being suffixed on the N/A head.

In conclusion, the Modern Romanian DP shows *local* constraints on the operation of definiteness checking by Agree.

4.2 Definiteness checking in Old Romanian

In Old Romanian, contrary to Modern Romanian, the definite article variably occurs **either on the first or on a lower constituent**, allowing another nominal constituent, for instance, an (indefinite) adjective in (29a)–(29e), to precede the definite nouns, as illustrated below:

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

(29) a. cu <u>cinstită</u> carte**a** mării tale (DÎR: 198)
with honoured letter-DEF highness-DEF GEN your
'with your highness' honoured letter'

b. în <u>vicleană</u> făgăduinț**a** lui (Costin: 67)
in deceitful promise-DEF his.GEN
'in his deceitful promise'

c. făcută de <u>cinstiți</u> părinț**ii** ei (Let. Can.: 63)
made by honest parents-DEF her.GEN
'made by her honest parents'

d. den <u>rea</u> chiverniseal**a** domnilor (RP: 65)
because bad administration-DEF kings-DEF GEN
'because of the kings' bad adminstration'

e. numai cu <u>rea</u> minte**a** lui le făcea (RG: 116)
only with mean mind-DEF his.GEN CL.ACC 3PL made
'he made these only with his mean mind'

Examples of this type show that in the older language **locality conditions are not so strict**, so that a different pattern of definiteness checking holds:

(30) **Definiteness checking in Old Romanian (Long Distance Agree)**: The [+def] feature is realized either on the first or on a lower [+N] constituent of the nominal phrase.

This **lower definite article** is present from the oldest Romanian texts of the 16th c. up until the first half of the 18th c. This phenomenon thus belongs to OldR, as opposed to ModR, assumed to start at the end of the 16th century. Thus, in all the examples above an indefinite adjective is higher than the definite noun, against the facts of Modern Romanian. The definite article checks definiteness from a lower position.

Expectedly, Long Distance Agree is open to other definite determiners as well; for instance, lower demonstrative values the definite feature in D across a topicalized adjective (31a):

(31) a. <u>cumplite</u> **acestea** vreami de acmu (Costin: 42)
terrible these times of now

b. <u>aceste</u> cumplite vremi de acum (ModR)
these terrible times of now
'these terrible times of now'

Since the determiner genitive is a definite determiner, it too may check definiteness from a lower position. This accounts for the following examples:

(32) a. [$_{DP}$ <u>frumos mirositoare</u> **a dragostei** flori] *a răsări* (Cantemir II: 4)
sweetly smelling AL love-DEF GEN flower FUT spring
'the sweet-smelling flower of love will spring'

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

b. pre [$_{DP}$ mai mare **a vicleşugului** căptuşală]$_i$ o$_i$ făcea (Cantemir I: 307)
PE more big AL guile-DEF GEN hiding it made
'he resorted to a deeper hiding of his guile' (= 'he hid his guile deeper')

In conclusion, cases where the genitive is lower and is understood as the checker of definiteness represent examples of long distance checking of the definiteness feature in D.

As amply shown above (section **3.2**), the low definite article may also be preceded by a Genitive. Definiteness is checked across the genitive, by the lower article:

(33) a. umblăm după a lumii înşelătoare faţa (Costin: 320)
Go-PRES.2PL after AL world.DEF.GEN deceitful face-the
'We are after the world's deceitful face'
b. a lor feciori**i** (PH: 207)
AL their sons-DEF
'their sons'
c. să înece a toate ţări**le** anii trecuţi (Ureche: 57)
SUBJ drown A all countries.DEF years.DEF passed
'(...) would drown the passed years of all the countries'

In terms of the dichotomy proposed above, this is a property genitive.

5. Back to the property genitive

The duality of a determiner and a property/attributive with the same form is known to other languages, the English *'s* genitive being a case in point. The examples below are thus ambiguous between a determiner genitive reading and an attributive/property reading:

(34) a. a girl's hat
'the hat of a girl/ a hat for girls'
b. a gentleman's behaviour
'the behaviour of a gentleman/ behaviour typical of gentleman'

In other instances, the attributive reading is the only possible one:

(35) a. two bachelor's degrees
b. a women's college
c. a two weeks' holiday

It has been proposed (see Lindauer 1998) that the attributive genitive has an internal structure different from that of the determiner genitive, since attributive genitives are not anchoring (cf. Kolliakou 1999, Koptjevskaja Tamm 2002, 2005) and thus lack the D-layer. Assuming the widely accepted order of functional projections (put forth by Borer

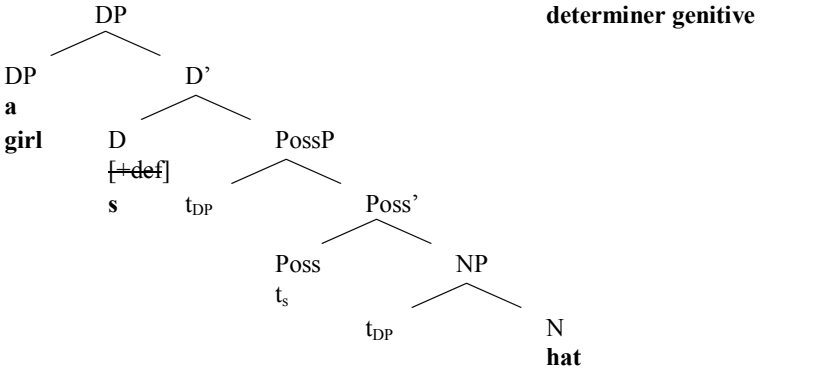
BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

2005), attributive genitives do not project the D-layer, but they are mere PossP (see, for a similar proposal, Holmberg 1993).

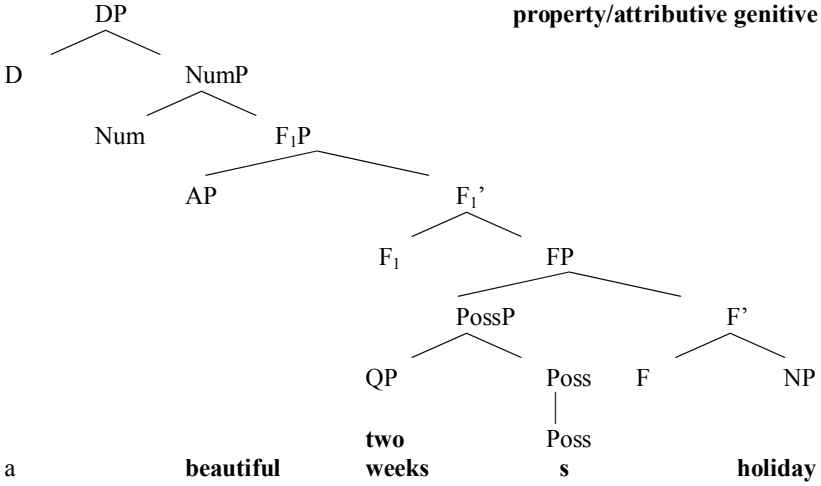
(36) DP > PossP > QP> NumP > NP

The ambiguity in (34) is structurally represented below; the representation in (37a) corresponds to the determiner reading of the prenominal genitive in (34a), while the one in (37b) corresponds to the exclusively attributive reading of the examples in (35c).

(37) a. **determiner genitive**



b. **property/attributive genitive**



Only in the first case does the Poss phrasal morpheme's also value the definite feature under the main D.

Secondly, in English too, while the determiner genitive is DP-initial, the attributive genitive may be lower in the structure, lower than adjectives, in (38a)–(38b), sometimes co-occurring with the determiner genitive, as in (38c):

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

(38) a. a very abstract mathematician's proof
b. these very expensive ladies' gloves,
c. **father's** all girls' school

We retain from this sketchy analysis of English that the attributive genitive may (have to) be structurally different from the determiner genitive, despite their superficial similarity. Thus the crucial difference between the determiner genitive and the attributive genitive is the absence of the D-projection of the latter.

Other languages, like Bulgarian (Dimitrova-Vulchanova and Giusti 1998; Vulchanova 1998), Czech and Sorbian (Corbett 1987), or older varieties of Russian (Rappaport 2000) have genitive adjectives, which clearly have property (<e, t>) denotations. For instance, in the same vein with the English attributive genitive, the genitive adjectives of Bulgarian are prenominal and are lower than descriptive adjectives, though higher than relative adjectives, observing the hierarchy **descriptive AP > genitival AP > relative AP > N** (see Dimitrova-Vulchanova 1998):

(39) a. Ivanova-ta kniga
Ivan.ADJ=DEF carte
'Ivan's book'
b. nova-ta Ivanova kniga
new=DEF Ivan.ADJ carte
'Ivan's new book'
c. *Ivanova-ta nova kniga
Ivan.ADJ=DEF new book

In conclusion, English attributive genitives, just as Bulgarian genitive adjectives occupy positions within adjectival domains, a line of reasoning that we adopt for the OldR prenominal property genitives.

Thus, in OldR, the property genitive occurs below qualifying AP, as already noticed in the examples above. Similarly to an adjective, the prenominal property genitive does not occupy a unique position in the DP hierarchy in OldR:

(40) a. **a lor** feciorii (PH: 207)
AL their sons-DEF
'their sons'
b. deci cu [$_{DP}$ reaua **a lui** slujbă] (Let. Can.: 40)
so with bad-DEF AL his service
'so with his bad service'
c. aceste **ale Ciacalului** [...] cuvinte (Cantemir I: 72)
these AL Jackal-DEF GEN words
'these words of the Jackal'
d. de [$_{DP}$ această mare **a marelor monarhii**
of this big AL big-DEF GEN monarchies
adunare] tuturor în ştire să dea (Cantemir I: 35)
gathering everyone-DAT in news SĂ give
'to announce everyone about this big gathering of the great monarchies'

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

e. şi toţi de [$_{DP}$ acestea **ale sale** bune fapte] încălziţi era (RG: 101)
and all of these AL his good deeds heated were
'and they were all enchanted by these good deeds of his'

The prenominal property genitive of Old Romanian is no longer available in Modern Romanian. The question is that of why this pattern has been lost. The characteristic structural property of the property genitive is that it was not necessarily definite even though it was prenominal (see the examples above).

We claim that the loss of the property genitive is a consequence of *the loss of the lower definite article*. In other words, in Modern Romanian, Long Distance Agree (30) is replaced by Local Agree (25). According to Local Agree, in ModR the definiteness feature should be realized on the first [+N] constituent of the DP. At this point, we should recall that the genitival article AL is a φ-complete, case inflected element, including the definite article in its structure. Consequently, if the genitive DP is prenominal, it is a [+N] element and it automatically qualifies as the bearer of definiteness. Therefore the genitive DP should be the specifier of the projection immediately below D, ultimately moving to [Spec, DP].

6. Conclusions

The examination of a representative corpus has brought to light the existence in Old Romanian of two types of genitive phrases: determiner genitives and property/attributive genitives.

The determiner genitive of Old Romanian behaved like the other definite determiners: on the one hand, it could occupy the DP-initial position and value the definiteness feature of D in a local configuration, similarly to its Modern Romanian counterpart; on the other hand, Old Romanian also possesses a lower determiner genitive, which values the definiteness feature of D across an intervener, similarly to the lower definite article of Old Romanian, by long distance Agree. Both structures involving long distance Agree (the lower determiner genitive and the lower definite article) disappeared at the end of the 18th c.

The disappearance of the attributive genitive is the effect of the strengthening of the locality conditions on definiteness valuation in Modern Romanian.

Corpus

Alexandria − *Alexandria*, introductiom, edition and glossary by F. Zgraon. Bucharest: Fundaţia Naţională pentru Ştiinţă şi Artă, 2006.

Cantemir – Dimitrie Cantemir, *Istoria ieroglifică*, second edition, notes and glossary by I. Verdeş and P. P. Panaitescu; preface and chronological table by A. Duţu. Bucharest: Minerva, 1983 [The 2003 printing. Bucharest – Chişinău: Litera International].

Costin − Miron Costin, *Opere alese*, edited by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1958.

DÎR − *Documente şi însemnări româneşti din secolul al XVI-lea*, text established and index by G. Chivu, M. Georgescu, M. Ioniţă, A. Mareş and A. Roman-Moraru, introduction by A. Mareş. Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 1979.

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

IŢR − Stolnicul Constantin Cantacuzino, *Istoria Ţării Rumâneşti*. In *Cronicarii Munteni*, edited by A. Piru, Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1964.
Let. Can. − *Letopiseţul Cantacuzinesc* [*Istoria Ţării Rumâneşti de când au descălecat pravoslanicii creştini*]. In *Cronicarii Munteni*, edited by A. Piru, Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1964.
PH – *Psaltirea Hurmuzaki (sec. al XVI-lea),* edited by I. Gheţie and M. Teodorescu. Bucharest: Editura Academiei, 2005.
RG − R. Greceanu, *Cronica*. In *Cronicarii Munteni*, edited by A. Piru, Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1964.
RP − R. Popescu, *Letopiseţul Bălenilor*. In *Cronicarii Munteni*, edited by A. Piru, Bucharest: Editura Tineretului, 1964.
Ureche − Grigore Ureche, *Letopiseţul Ţărâi Moldovei*, edited by P. P. Panaitescu, Bucharest, ESPLA, 1955.

References

Borer, H. 2005. *Structuring Sense I. In Name Only*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Cinque, G. 2004. A phrasal movement analysis of the Romanian DP. In A. Minut, E. Munteanu (eds.), *Studia linguistica et philologica in honorem D. Irimia*, 129-142. Iaşi: Editura Universităţii "A. I. Cuza".
Corbett, G. G. 1987. The morphology/syntax interface: Evidence from possessive adjectives in Slavonic. *Language* 63 (2): 299-345.
Cornilescu, A. 1995. Romanian genitive constructions. In G. Cinque, G. Giusti (eds.), *Advances in Romanian Linguistics*, 1-52. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Cornilescu, A. 2003. Romanian genitives revisited. *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics* IV (1): 45-70.
Cornilescu, A. and Nicolae, A. 2009. Evoluţia articolului hotărât şi genitivul în româna veche. In R. Zafiu, G. Stoica and M. N. Constantinescu (eds.), *Limba română: teme actuale*, 647-669. Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.
Cornilescu, A. and Nicolae, A. 2011. On the syntax of Romanian definite phrases: Changes in the patterns of definiteness checking. In P. Sleeman and H. Perridon (eds.), *The Noun Phrase in Romance and Germanic*, 193-222. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Coteanu, I. 1969. *Morfologia numelui în protoromână (româna comună)*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei R.S.R.
Densusianu, O. 1961. *Istoria limbii române*, edited by J. Byck. Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică.
Dimitrova-Vulchanova. M. 1998. Possessors in the Bulgarian DP. In M. Dimitrova-Vulchanova and L. Hellan (eds.), *Topics in South Slavic Formal Grammar*, 161-190. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
Dimitrova-Vulchanova, M. and Giusti, G. 1998. Fragments of Balkan nominal structure. *University of Venice Working Papers in Linguistics* 8 (1): 141-172.
Găzdaru, D. 1929. *Descendenţii demonstrativului ille în limba română*. Iaşi: Viaţa Românească.
GBLR 2010 = A. Dragomirescu, I. Nedelcu, A. Nicolae, G. Pană Dindelegan (coordinator), M. Rădulescu-Sala, R. Zafiu. *Gramatica de bază a limbii române*. Bucharest: Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold.
Gheţie, I. 1975. *Baza dialectală a românei literare*. Bucharest: Editura Academiei.
Giurgea, I. forthcoming. The origin of the Romanian 'possessive-genitival article' *al* and the development of the demonstrative system. *Revue roumaine de linguistique*.
Holmberg, A. 1993. On the structure of the predicate NP. *Studia Linguistica* 47 (2): 126-138.
Ivănescu, G. 1980. *Istoria limbii române*. Iaşi: Junimea.
Kolliakou, D. 1999. DE-phrase extractability and individual/property denotation. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 17 (4): 713-781.
Koptjevskaja Tamm, M. 2002. Adnominal possession in the European languages: Form and function. *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* 55: 141-172.
Koptjevskaja Tamm, M. 2005. *Maria's ring of gold:* Adnominal possession and non-anchoring relations in European languages. In K. Ji-Young, Y. A. Lander, B. H. Partee (eds), *Possessives and Beyond: Semantics and Syntax*, 155-181. Amherst, MA: GLSA Publications.
Leu, T. 2008. The Internal Syntax of Determiners. PhD dissertation, New York University.
Lindauer, T. 1998. Attributive genitive constructions in German. In A. Alexiadou and C. Wilder (eds.), *Possessors, Predicates and Movement in the Determiner Phrase*, 109-141. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

Longobardi, G. 1994. Reference and proper names: A theory of N-movement in syntax and Logical Form. *Linguistic Inquiry* 25 (4): 609-665.
Lyons, C. 1986. The syntax of English genitive constructions. *Journal of Linguistics* 22 (1): 123-143.
Pană Dindelegan, G. 2008. Tipuri de gramaticalizare. Pe marginea utilizărilor gramaticalizate ale prepoziţiilor **de** şi **la**. In G. Pană Dindelegan (ed.), *Limba română. Dinamica limbii, dinamica interpretării*, 227-239. Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.
Rappaport, G. 2000. The Slavic noun phrase in comparative perspective. In G. Fowler (ed.), *The Comparative Slavic Morphosyntax*. Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers.
Rosetti, Al. 1926. "Introduction" to *Lettres roumaines de la fin du XVI*[e] *et du début du XVII*[e] *siècle tirées des archives de Bistritza (Transylvanie)*. Bucharest: Arhivele Grafice Socec.
Rosetti, Al. 1986. *Istoria limbii române*. Bucharest: Editura Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică.
Sala, M. 2006. *De la latină la română*. Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic.
Tănase-Dogaru, M. 2009. *The Category of Number. Its Relevance for the Syntax and the Semantic Typology of the Nominal Phrase*. Bucharest: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.
Vasiliu, E. and Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, L. 1986. *Limba română în secolele al XII-lea – al XV-lea. Fonetică. Fonologie. Gramatică*. Bucharest: Tipografia Universităţii din Bucureşti.

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din Bucureşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)

BDD-A9864 © 2011 Universitatea din București
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.19 (2026-09-15 01:09:00 UTC)