Possessive Constructions in the Dialects of Asturian. A Micro-Parametric Approach[*]

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Abstract

In this paper I analyze the properties of two different kinds of possessive constructions in the dialects of Asturian. The first one has been called the «periphrastic (or analytic) possessive construction» and its surface appearance is «QP+*de*+Possessive Pronoun», as in *tres vaques de só* 'three cows of his'. This construction exists in Western and Central Asturian, but not in the Eastern dialect. The second one is the «ordinary (or non periphrastic) possessive construction», which shows in Asturian the surface order «Art+Possessive Pronoun+QP», as in *les mis tres vaques* 'my three cows'. When the possessive pronoun refers to a single possessor, the pronoun and the noun head agree in gender and number features in Western Asturian, but in the Central and Eastern dialects they only agree in number or do not agree at all. I try to derive all these divergences from minimal differences in the lexicons of the corresponding dialects.

Key words: Asturian Morphology and Syntax, Possessive Constructions, Lexical Parameters.

Resum. *Les construccions de possessiu en els dialectes de l'asturià. Una visió microparamètrica*

En aquest article analitzo les propietats de dues construccions de possessiu diferents en els dialectes de l'asturià. La primera és l'anomenada «construcció de possessiu perifràstica (o analítica)» amb l'ordre superficial «QP+*de*+Pronom Possessiu», com per exemple: *tres vaques de só* 'three cows of his'. Aquesta construcció és pròpia de l'asturià occidental i central però no de l'asturià oriental. La segona és la «construcció simple de possessiu (o no perifràstica)» que mostra l'ordre superficial «Art+Pronom Possessiu+QP», com a *les mis tres vaques* 'my three cows'. Quan el pronom possessiu fa referència a un únic posseïdor, el pronom i el nucli nominal concorden en gènere i en nombre en els dialectes de l'asturià occidental però no en els dialectes central i oriental, on només hi ha concordança en nombre o no hi ha concordança en absolut. En aquest article intento derivar totes aquestes divergències a partir de diferències mínimes en el lexicó dels dialectes de l'asturià.

Paraules clau: morfologia i sintaxi asturiana, construccions possessives, paràmetres lèxics.

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1. Introduction

The linguistic situation of Asturias is characterized nowadays by the coexistence of three different languages: Asturian, Galician and Spanish. Both Spanish (extended over the whole territory) and Galician (restricted to its westernmost area; see the map below) show in Asturias important dialectal peculiarities, worth a specific investigation. In this paper, however, I will limit my focus to the internal variation of Asturian, which lives together with Spanish from river Navia to the East in an unequal situation of official support.

Attending basically to phonetic and morphological criteria, it is a common place of Asturian dialectology to distinguish three different varieties, whose limits are established in the map appearing in the next page.

Going directly to the central topic of this paper, the morpho–syntax of nominal possessive constructions in Asturian, the main sources of differentiation between these dialects are the following:

1. Possessives pronouns which refer to a single possessor agree in gender and number with the noun head in Western Asturian. In Central and Eastern Asturian, however, the possessive pronoun is the same irrespectively of the gender of the noun head (see Neira 1976: 108–109). In this second area two subdialects are to be distinguished (with a non defined geographical distribution): in the first (to which we will refer as Variant A), the possessive pronoun and the noun head show number agreement; in the second (to which we will refer as Variant B), they show no agreement at all (see Zamora Vicente 1985: 175).[1]

The schema in (1) shows the complete paradigm of single possessor possessive pronouns in each of the Asturian dialects; some examples are given in (2) and (3):

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1.   Picallo (1991: 132–133) notes that a similar phenomenon is found in other Romances languages and dialects, such as Gironí (restricted to the nouns *mare* 'mother' and *casa* 'home'), Cors, Toscan and Rosellonés. Her examples are the following:

i.	la	seu	mare (Gironí)
	the–fem.sing	his–msc.sing	mother–fem.sing
ii.	e	miò	arrechie (Cors)
	the–fem.pl	my–masc.sing	earrings–fem.pl
iii.	i	tu	calzoni (Toscan)
	the–masc.pl	your–sing	pant–masc.pl
iv.	els	meu	mainatges (Rosellonés)
	the–masc.pl	my–sing	child–masc.pl

(Picallo 1991: ex. 52)

Navia River

Galician

Western Asturian

Central Asturian
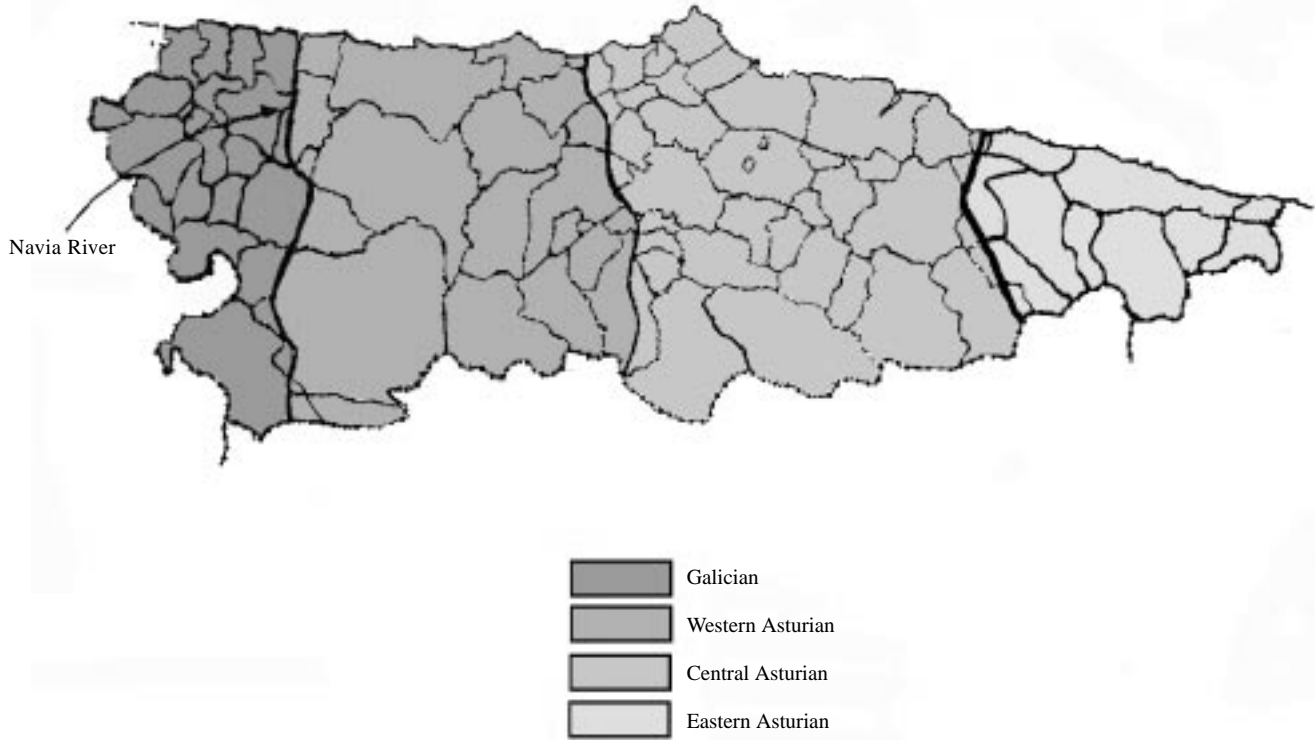
Eastern Asturian

(1)

	Western Asturian		Central and Eastern Asturian
	Masculine	**Femenine**	**Masc. and Fem.**
1st Person	mieu(s) ≈ miou(s)	mía(s) ≈ miá(s) ≈ miya(s)	mió(s)
2nd Person	tou(s)	túa(s) ≈ tuá(s) ≈ tuya(s)	tó(s)
3rd Person	sou(s)	súa(s) ≈ suá(s) ≈ suya(s)	só(s)

(2) *Western Asturian*

 a. El   mieu/tou/sou   xatu.
   the–masc.sing my/your/h(is/er)–masc.sing calf–masc.sing
   'My/your/h(is/er) calf.'

 b. La   mía/túa/súa   vaca.
   the–fem.sing   my/your/h(is/er)–fem.sing cow–fem.sing
   'My/your/h(is/er) cow.'

 c. Los   mieus/tous/sous   xatos.
   the–masc.pl   my/your/h(is/er)–masc.pl calf–masc.pl
   'My/your/h(is/er) calves.'

 d. Las   mías/túas/súas   vacas.
   the–fem.pl   my/your/h(is/er)–fem.pl cow–fem.pl
   'My/your/h(is/er) cows.'

(3) *Central and Eastern Asturian*

 a. El   mió/tó/só   xatu.
   the–masc.sing   my/your/h(is/er) calf–masc.sing
   'My/your/h(is/er) calf.'

 b. La   mió/tó/só   vaca.
   the–fem.sing   my/your/h(is/er) cow–fem.sing
   'My/your/h(is/er) cow.'

 c. A. Los   miós/tós/sós   xatos.
   the–masc.pl   my/your/h(is/er)–pl calf–masc.pl
   'My/your/h(is/er) calves.'
   B. Los   mió/tó/só   xatos.
   the–masc.pl   my/your/h(is/er) calf–masc.pl
   'My/your/h(is/er) calves.'

 d. A. Les   miós/tós/sós   vaques.
   the–fem.pl   my/your/h(is/er)–pl cow–fem.pl
   'My/your/h(is/er) cows.'
   B. Les   mió/tó/só   vaques.
   the–fem.pl   my/your/h(is/er) cow–fem.pl
   'My/your/h(is/er) cows.'

  Possessive pronouns which refer to many possessors agree in gender and number in all the dialects. The corresponding paradigms and some examples are given below:

(4)

	Western Asturian		**Central and Eastern Asturian**	
	Masculine	Femenine	Masculine	Femenine
1st Person	nuesu (nuesos)	nuesa(s)	nuestru (nuestros)	nuestra (nuestres)
2nd Person	vuesu (vuesos)	vuesa(s)	vuestru (vuestros	vuestra (vuestres)
3rd Person	sou(s)	sua(s)	só(s)	só(s)

(5) *Western Asturian*

    a. El   nuesu/vuesu/sou   xatu.
        the–masc.sing   our/your/their–masc.sing   calf–masc.sig
        'Our/your/their calf.'

    b. La   nuesa/vuesa/sua   vaca.
        the–fem.sing   our/your/their–fem.sing   cow–fem.sing
        'Our/your/their cow.'

    c. Los   nuesos/vuesos/sous   xatos.
        the–masc.pl   our/your/their–masc.pl   calf–masc.pl
        'Our/your/their calves.'

    d. Las   nuesas/vuesas/suas   vacas.
        the–fem.pl   our/your/their–fem.pl   cow–fem.pl
        'Our/your/their cow.'

(6) *Central and Eastern Asturian*

    a. El   nuestru/vuestru/só   xatu.
        the–masc.sing   our/your/their–masc.sing   calf–masc.sig
        'Our/your/their calf.'

    b. La   nuestra/vuestra/só   vaca.
        the–fem.sing   our/your/their–fem.sing   cow–fem.sing
        'Our/your/their cow.'

    c. Los   nuestros/vuestros/sós   xatos.
        the–masc.pl   our/your/their–masc.pl   calf–masc.pl
        'Our/your/their calves.'

    d. Les   nuestres/vuestres/sós   vaques.
        the–fem.pl   our/your/their–fem.pl   cow–fem.pl
        'Our/your/their cow.'

All dialects have in common the tonicity of the pronouns and the necessity of an article heading the construction.[2]

2. Western and Central Asturian have a possessive construction (sometimes called «periphrastic», sometimes «analytic»), in which the possessive pronoun appears, invariable in gender and number, preceded by the preposition *de* «of».

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2.   On this construction see also Rodríguez Castellano (1957) and Cano et. al. (1976: 39–40).

This construction does not exist in Eastern Asturian (see Neira 1976: 109 and Zamora Vicente 1985: 174). Let's see some examples:

(7) *Western and Central Asturian*

   a. Un   carru   de   mieu/mió.
      a   cart   of   mine
      'A cart of mine.'

   b. Un   perru   de   tou/tó.
      a   dog   of   yours
      'A dog of yours.'

   c. Una   tierra   de   sou/só.
      a   land   of   h(is/ers)
      'A land of his/hers.'

It is worth noticing that the noun head must be preceded by indefinites within this construction. The examples in (7) thus alternate with those in (8), and not with those in (9):

(8) a. El   mieu/mió   carru.
        the   my   cart
        'My cart.'

      b. El   tou/tó   perru.
        the   your   dog
        'Your dog.'

      c. La   súa/só   tierra.
        the   h(is/er)   land
        'His/her land.'

(9) a. *El   carru   de   mieu/mió.
        the   cart   of   mine

      b. *El   perru   de   tou/tó.
        the   dog   of   yours

      c. *La   tierra   de   sou/só.
        the   land   of   h(is/ers)

It is also important to note that this constructions is only used to express ownership, and not the more general and contextually determined relation labeled as «R–Relation» by Higginbotham (1983). Standard θ–roles cannot be discharged on the possessive pronoun within this periphrastic construction either.

Summing up, when we study the internal diversity of possessive constructions in Asturian we discover that, not surprisingly, the Western and Eastern dialects are the varieties with more diverging features: they differ both in the properties of the agreement between the possessive pronoun and the noun head in the non periphrastic construction, as well as in the existence of a periphrastic possessive construction. The Central dialect can be seen, from this perspective, as a transition between the two other dialects: it shares the periphrastic construction with Western Asturian, and the partial or null agreement between possessives and noun heads with Eastern Asturian.

This paper tries to explain the foundations of all this variation in terms of minimal differences in the morphological inventory of the dialects. It is organized as follows. In Section 2, I attribute a structure to the periphrastic possessive construction of Western and Central Asturian. I also try to derive the «definiteness effect» observed within this construction and to explain its non existence in Eastern Asturian. Section 3 is devoted to the different agreement patterns within the non periphrastic construction. The ultimate goal of this paper is to apply to the domain of dialectological research Chomsky's idea that «there is only one human language, apart from the lexicon, and language acquisition is in essence a matter of determining lexical idiosyncrasies» (Chomsky 1991: 419). Dialectal variation will be understood all along this paper as a matter of fixing lexical properties of a minimal sort.

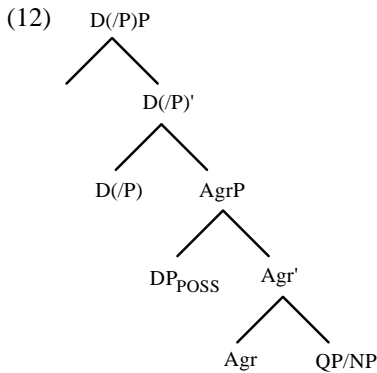## 2. The Periphrastic Construction

2.1. Analysis

There is an obvious connection between the periphrastic construction of Western and Central Asturian and an English possessive construction, repeatedly analyzed by Kayne (1993, 1994), which is exemplified in (10):

(10) A sister of John's/his.

First of all, the possessor, which can appear under the form of a possessive pronoun or as a genitive marked DP,[3] is preceded by preposition *of*. Furthermore, the construction is also subjected in English to a «definiteness effect» (henceforth, DE). Consequently, phrases as (11) are ruled out by the English grammar:

(11) *The sister of John's/his.

Based on Szabolcsi's (1981, 1983) hypothesis on the mechanism of Case assignment within possessive constructions in Hungarian, Kayne defends the following base structure for the English construction:

(12)

```
        D(/P)P
         /\
          D(/P)'
           /\
    D(/P)    AgrP
              /\
      DP_POSS   Agr'
                 /\
              Agr   QP/NP
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3. This second option is not possible in Asturian, which has no genitive mark in its morphological inventory.

According to Kayne, this structure serves to capture the complexities of the English construction in (10) supposing that the following derivation takes place on it:

i.   *A sister* is the QP which generates as the complement of the Agr head, which is occupied by the element *'s*, when a non pronominal DP is in [Spec, AgrP], or by a null element, when a pronoun is there.

ii. QP moves up to the highest Spec position of the structure, which is justified by Kayne as an aspect of the Case assignment strategy of the element in [Spec, AgrP]: *John* or *his* in (10). He thinks that neither *'s* nor its empty counterpart are Case licensers. As a consequence, the element in [Spec, AgrP] needs to be licensed by the next head in the structure.

iii. In phrases as (10), the movement of QP to the highest Spec allows the insertion of a preposition in the head position D^0/P^0. Kayne understands D^0/P^0 as a mixed category compatible with both determiners and prepositions. In (10) it is a preposition the element which is inserted in this head position, Case licensing the element in the lower Spec.

The result of all this set of operations is represented in (13):

(13)
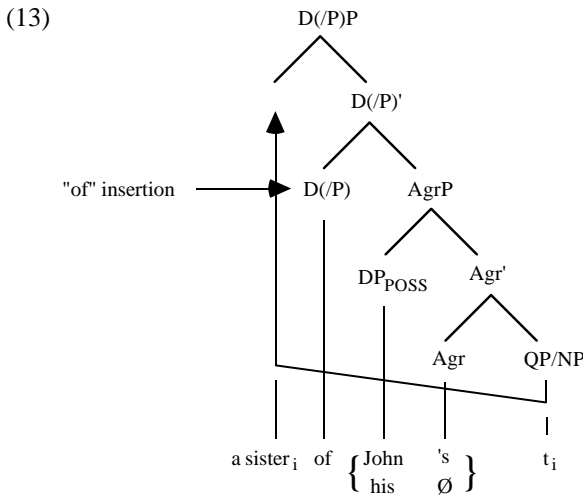
Kayne argues that every DP which stands for a possessor is subjected to this licensing condition through a higher head. In this sense, (13) does not constitute an exceptional situation. In ordinary (non periphrastic) possessive constructions, the possessor is also Case marked, according to Kayne, by an abstract D^0 head, as in (14). The definite character of this abstract element is what is responsible of its Case marking of the possessor, preventing the bunch of operations which ends up in a structure like (10) above:

(14) D^0 [$_{AgrP}$ John /his[$_{Agr'}$ [$_{Agr}$'s/Ø[$_{NP}$ sister]]]]

Case–marks
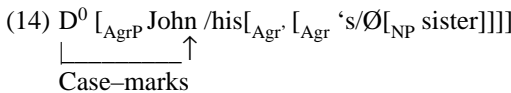
The overt counterpart of the abstract D^0 in (14) is arguably the article which precedes possessive pronouns in all the dialects of Asturian, as pointed out in Section 1 of this paper, as well as in other Romance languages such as Catalan, Galician or Italian. Let's remember some Asturian examples:

(15)   a.   El   mieu/mió   xatu.
            the   my   calf
            'My calf.'

       b.   La   mía/mió   vaca.
            the   my   cow
            'My cow.'

This sort of phrases drives us to the conclusion that possessive pronouns are to be Case marked by a $D^0(/P^0)$ element heading the constructions in which they appear. In non periphrastic possessive constructions, this element is overtly realized in languages like Asturian, Catalan, Galician or Italian, but it remains abstract in others like French or Spanish.[4]

Turning back to the periphrastic construction, Kayne notices the DE which affects it (see the contrast between (10) and (11)). In the terms of his analysis, this means that the complement position of Agr can only be occupied by indefinite phrases. Kayne suggests that this is due to a ban against DP recursion within this construction. However, this is only a descriptive statement which deserves a deeper explanation.

In this paper I will understand that the periphrastic construction of Western and Central Asturian shares the structure and the derivation with its English counterpart, with some minor differences. For instance, the possessive pronoun is invariable in gender and number in Asturian, contrary to English (*a cow of his/her/them*). Obviously, this property can not be noted in the Variant B of Central Asturian, where possessive pronouns are also invariable in gender and number in the non periphrastic construction, but it is very clear in Western Asturian, where the following phrases are ruled out:

(16)   *Una(s)   vaca(s)   de   sous/sua/suas.
        some   cow   of   them–masc/her/them–fem

In variant A of Central Asturian, in which possessive pronouns are variable in number, we can also detect this property, as can be seen in the following ungrammatical phrases:

(17)   *Una   vaca   de   sos.   / *Unes   vaques   de   sos.
         a   cow   of   them   some   cows   of   them

The possessive pronoun appears in the periphrastic construction under an invariable form which corresponds with that of the masculine singular of the

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4.   Therefore, phrases as the following ones are ungrammatical in Modern Spanish and French, respectively: Sp. * *El mi libro*; Fr. * *le mon libre*.

dialects which show gender and number variations.[5] For this reason I will understand that the complement of the D^0/P^0 element is not an AgrP in Asturian, but a functional projection which I will label as FP. Possessive pronouns are located in the Spec position of this projection. I will also assume that non pronominal DPs can not occupy the [Spec, FP] position as a condition imposed by F^0, which differs in this respect with the Agr^0 element of the English construction. The analysis that I finally propose to the Asturian periphrastic construction is represented in (18):[6]

(18) $[_{D/PP}$ una vaca$_i$ $[_{D/P'}$ $[_{D/P}$ de $[_{FP}$ mieu/mió $[_{F'}$ $[_F$ Ø $[_{QP}$ t$_i$$]]]]]]]$

2.2. Deriving the DE in the Periphrastic Construction

In order to explain the DE in the periphrastic possessive construction of Western and Central Asturian I will propose that Kayne's structure in (12) is still incomplete. In my opinion, Agr^0 in English and F^0 in Asturian does not directly take a QP as their complement, but the projection of an abstract preposition which expresses the relation between a possessor and a possessed thing. This idea can be traced back to Hale's (n.d.) analysis of possessive constructions, who suggests that such a preposition is overtly realized in several languages, as can be observed in the following examples from O'odham and Walpiri:

(19) *Walpiri*
     Warnapari   ngirnti–parnta.
     dingo   tail-with
     'The dingo has tail.' (lit. 'the dingo is with tail')
     (Hale n.d.: ex. 14c)

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5.   In Calabrese and Napolitan there exists a periphrastic possessive construction in which the possessive pronoun agrees with the noun head of the QP. The following examples are from Rohlfs (1949: 129):

     Calabrese
     i. n'amico   d'u   mío
         a–friend–masc   of–the   mine–masc
     ii. na   casa   d'e   sue
         a   house–fem   of–the   his/hers–fem

     Napolitan
     i. n'amich7   du   mij7
         a–friend–masc   of–the   mine–masc
     ii. na   canoscenza   da   mía
         a   acquaintance of–the   mine–fem

     It is of special relevance in this construction that the preposition has incorporated a form of the article, which seems to strength Kayne's hypothesis on a D/P category. On this construction see Lorenzo (1997).
6.   I understand that a phrase like *una vaca de Xuan* (lit. a cow of John)*,* which is correct in all Asturian dialects, does not relate with the structure in (18), as revealed by the fact that it alternates with *la vaca de Xuan* (lit. the cow of John), which will be a violation of the DE, as well as the fact it shows up in the dialects where the periphrastic construction is absent with possessives.

(20) *O'odham*

Heg'o   (ge)   gogs–ga.
he   affix   dog-with
'He has a dog.' (lit. 'he is with a dog')
(Hale n.d.: ex. 20)

The P^0 element that I am suggesting is useful to explain the fact that this periphrastic construction can only express ownership relations (see Section 1 above). We can explain this by supposing that P, in spite of its abstract nature from the phonetic point of view, is a contentful element with an inherent semantic feature which can be expressed as «ownership». My proposal is thus that Kayne's original structure should be extended by means of a PP projection, whose complement is the base position of the QP. It is represented in (21):

(21)
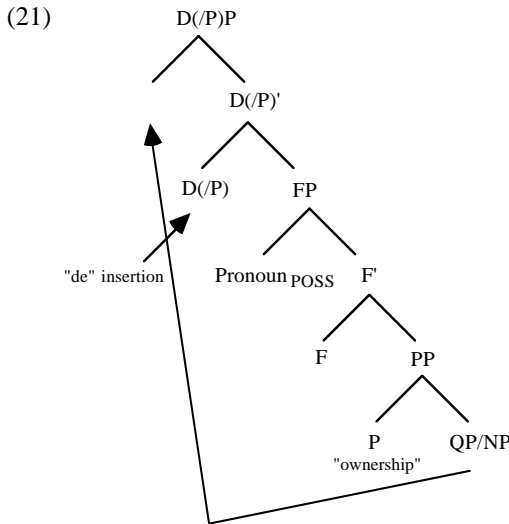
Let's remember that QP movement to [Spec, D/PP] serves to license the insertion of *de* in the head position of the projection, which in turn Case licenses the possessive pronoun in the low Spec. In the QP movement in (21) we thus find an instance of the «Enlightened Self–Interest» principle of Lasnik (1995). But it is also reasonable to suppose that the QP is also subjected to a Case condition. My idea in this respect is that the P^0 element of the structure is able to assign Case to its complement, and that the QP benefits from this prior to its movement. Let's now suppose that in Western and Central Asturian (as well as in English) P^0 only assigns Partitive Case and, following Belletti (1988), that this kind of Case is only compatible with indefinite nominals. If all this is correct, we are then deriving from Case Theory the non recursiviness of the category DP within this construction.[7]

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7. This idea is inspired in Rigau's (1997) analysis of existential constructions. As it is well–known, this construction is subjected to a DE in many languages, which is however absent in others like

2.3. Why Does Not Exist the Periphrastic Construction in Eastern Asturian?

Within the framework developed in the previous sections, the most natural explanation to the absence of the periphrastic construction in Eastern Asturian is to suppose the non existence of the abstract P^0 of «ownership» in the lexical inventory of this dialect. Without this ingredient, the structure can not be built up.

Moreover, my analysis is compatible with the existence of periphrastic possessive constructions with properties others that those of Western and Central Asturian. One can imagine, by instance, that the P^0 element shows different Case properties in other languages. Thus with an abstract P^0 capable of licensing Oblique Case, nothing would prevent DP recursion within the periphrastic construction. Remember that no semantic restriction is associated with this Case modality. This expectation is borne out without going out of Asturias. Actually, in the Galician dialect spoken in the westernmost area of Asturias (see the map in Section 1) there exists a periphrastic possessive construction compatible with both definite (22b) and indefinite nominals (22a). The following examples are taken from Fernández Braña et al. (1990: 38):[8]

(22) *Galician of Asturias*

    a. Temos   tres   prados   de   noso.
       have–we   three   lawns   of   ours
       'We have three lawns.'

    b. Os   nenos   de   voso.
       the–pl   children   of   yours–pl
       'Your children.'

It is of special interest here an observation made by Hale (n.d.), according to which the complement of the overt preposition within the possessive construction of certain languages is also subjected to the DE. It is the case of O'odham, as Hale notes, but not of Walpiri (see (19) and (20) above). Therefore, the characteristic that differentiates Western and Central Asturian, on the one hand, from Galician, on the other hand, in the periphrastic possessive construction is the same that dis-

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Catalan. Rigau derives this difference from the case properties of an abstract preposition in the lexical structure of the construction. On the other hand, the relations between existential and possessive construction, frequently understood as an instance of a locative relation, has been well established in the literature See, by instance, Benveniste (1966), Lyons (1967), Huang (1987) and Longa, Lorenzo & Rigau (1998).

As noted by the anonymous CatWPL reviewer, structure (21) deserves some further clarifications. I will assume that the PP at the bottom of the tree is defective, in that it does not project a Spec position. This is a necessary assumption in order to legitimate the movement of QP/NP up to [Spec, D(/P)P], which in any other case will not be the closest Spec position available. A P^0 movement operation up to F^0 is also to be postulated in order to establish the predicative relation which Kayne (1994) supposes between the possessive pronoun and the QP/NP.
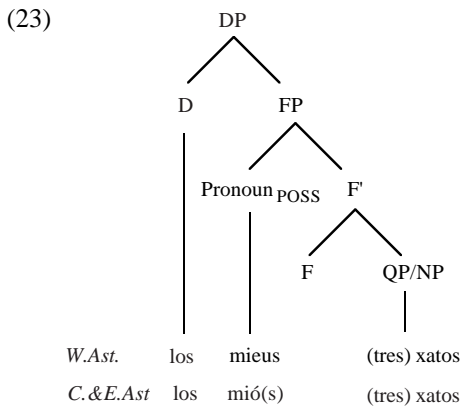
8. Víctor Longa (p.c.) pointed out to me that the periphrastic construction is not subject to the DE in other variants of Galician either. See Álvarez et Al. (1986) y RAG & ILGA (1982), where, however, all illustrations employ indefinite phrases.

tinguishes the languages studied by Hale in their respective possessive construc-
tions.[9]

3. Properties of Agreement in the Non Periphrastic Construction

3.1. Analysis of the Construction

The base structure that I suggest for the non periphrastic possessive construc-
tion is not so different from that of its periphrastic counterpart (see (21)). The main
difference to be noted is the absence of the abstract preposition, which is coherent
with the fact that this construction is not limited to the expression of «ownership»
relations. As a consequence, the QP/NP element directly complements F^0. On the
other hand, the highest head of the structure is a D^0 element which Case marks
the possessive pronoun in [Spec, FP] (as already noted in Section 2.1). This D^0
element does not tolerate the presence of a QP in its Spec, contrary to the D^0/P^0
head of the periphrastic construction, as a consequence of its definite character.
The resulting structure of the non periphrastic construction is the following one:

(23)

```
                        DP
                       /  \
                      D    FP
                      |   /  \
                      | Pronoun_POSS  F'
                      |      |      /  \
                      |      |     F   QP/NP
                      |      |     |     |
W.Ast.      los    mieus         (tres) xatos
C.&E.Ast    los    mió(s)        (tres) xatos
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3.2. Deriving Differences in the Agreement Systems

As already pointed out in Section 1, in Western Asturian the possessive pronoun
and the noun head agree in gender and number within the non periphrastic cons-
truction. In Central and Eastern Asturian, when the possessive pronoun refers to a
single possessor, two different patterns of agreement can be observed:

1. In the fist one we find partial agreement, namely in number, between the two
    elements. We call Variant A the subdialect with this pattern.

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9.   In the case of Calabrese and Napolitian (see fn. 5), we should attribute to the abstract P^0 agree-
     ment features. This may be an inherent property of the preposition in these dialects. It may also
     be that the P^0 takes an AgrP as its complement, whose features raise to the preposition. See, on
     this idea, Sánchez (1995), as well as Section 3.2. in this paper.

2. In the second one we find a complete absence of agreement between the possessive an the noun. We call Variant B the subdialect with this pattern.

Let's remember some examples:

(24) a. Las   mías   vacas.   *Western Asturian*
         the–fem.pl   my–fem.pl   cow–fem.pl
         'My cows.'

   b. Les   miós   vaques.   *Central and Eastern Asturian*
                                                (Variant A)
         the–fem.pl   my–pl   cow–fem.pl
         'My cows.'

   c. Les   mió   vaques.   *Central and Eastern Asturian*
                                                (Variant B)
         the–fem.pl   my   cow–fem–pl
         'My cows.'

My suggestion in order to derive these contrasts runs as follows. I understand that in Western Asturian F^0 has as its complement not the QP projection directly, but the projection of a head which contains gender and number features. I also understand that these features move and incorporate to F^0 (see Chomsky 1995), which determines the full agreement between the noun head of the structure and the possessive pronoun. Structure (23) is thus to be modified as in (25) when we refer to Western Asturian:

(25)

In Variant B of Central and Eastern Asturian, on the other hand, the structure of the non periphrastic possessive construction is exactly (23), which lacks any Agr head. Therefore, the possessive pronoun is invariable in this variant, and shows a default form with an external appearance identical with that of the pronouns which appear in the periphrastic construction. Finally, Variant A of Central and Eastern Asturian also has an Agr head in the non periphrastic construction. However, this head differs from that of the Western dialect in that it only contains number

features. This is reflected in the partial agreement between the possessive and the noun head in this dialect.

However, in the three variants the possessive pronoun and the noun head fully agree when the former refers to many possessors, as also noted in Section 1. This seems to indicate that the difference between the dialects is more properly characterized by saying that the Central and Eastern varieties have a defective agreement paradigm, in that they lack an Agr head which jointly exhibits the feature complex [«1 possessor»; «x gender»; «x number»]. Variant A has an Agr head which combines the feature «1 possessor» with a number feature; in Variant B, on the other hand, the feature «1 possessor» enters in no combination with any j–feature. The following schema summarizes all these aspects of the respective lexicons:

(26)

Central and Eastern Asturian		Western Asturian
Variant A	**Variant B**	
Agr [«1 poss»; «x number»]	———	Agr [«1 poss»; «x gender»; «x number»]
Agr [«many poss»; «x gender»; «x number»]	Agr [«many poss»; «x gender»; «x number»]	Agr [«many poss»; «x gender»; «x number»]

3.3. Why Does the Article Agree?

A potential problem of the analysis developed so far is the following one. I have derived the existence of agreement between the possessive pronoun and the noun head by positing an Agr head at the bottom of the structure, whose features move to the head of the projection in which the possessive is located. In a complementary way, the non existence of agreement between these elements is to be explained by the absence of such a head in the corresponding structure. Now, how can it be explained that the fact that the article and the noun head *do* fully agree in Variant B of Central and Eastern Asturian, as can be noted in (24c) above? Similarly, how is to be explained that in Variant A of the same dialects we find full and not partial agreement between the possessive and the noun head, as shown in (24b) above?

I suggest that the agreement relation between the article and the noun head in all Asturian dialects is of a different nature from that maintained between the later element and possessive pronouns, in that its origins are not to be found in the Agr head introduced in the previous section. My guess is that it has to do with the expletive nature of the article in possessive constructions. Notice that articles are used in these constructions as Case licensers for possessive pronouns (see Section 2.1); i.e., as a pure grammatical device without referential properties. In this later respect the definite character of possessive pronouns is enough to fix the referential type of the whole phrase. Having so characterized the article, it makes sense to suppose that it is subjected to an «Expletive Replacement» operation at LF (henceforth, ER), which deletes an element completely irrelevant to the interpretive interface. The operation is thus driven by the principle of «Full Interpretation» (see Chomsky

1991). The associate element of the expletive is the noun head, which is actually its nearest contentful item.

Supposing that the ER operation is subjected in Asturian to a matching condition in φ–features, we can conclude that those of the article do not come from another category by «Move–f», contrary to those of the F^0 head which determines the agreement properties of the possessive. Instead, they are directly associated with the article in the «Numeration» process (in the sense of Chomsky 1995). Notice that if they come from an Agr head, we can not ensure a perfect matching between the features of the expletive and the features of the associate in Central and Eastern Asturian.

4. Conclusions

In this paper I have derived the existence of a periphrastic possessive construction in some Asturian dialects from the existence of an abstract P^0 associated with the idea of «ownership» in these dialects. The DE observed in this construction has been related with the Case properties of such a head, which only assigns partitive in Asturian. In other languages, like Galician, the counterpart of this head assigns Oblique Case and no DE is observed. I have also defended that the differences in agreement between the possessive pronoun and the noun head in the non periphrastic construction are to be derived from differences in the feature specification of an Agr head which is ordinarily (but not always) present in the structure of this construction. Summing up, prominent differences in the nominal systems of the Asturian dialects have been derived from parochial divergences in their respective lexicons.

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