

Irish genitive possessors- The ‘pseudo-construct state’

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Previous analyses of Irish noun phrases Irish have focused on genitive possessor phrases that typically consist of a head noun governing a genitive noun as in (1):

(1) Hata an fhir

hat the man-GEN

‘The man’s hat’

Crucially, the head noun cannot be introduced by the definite article (2), although Irish has obligatory definite determiners in canonical environments (3):

(2) *An hata an fhir

vs. (3) *(An) hata

the hat the man-GEN

the hat (is brown)

This phrase has attracted much attention in the literature because it shares some distributional properties with the Construct State Nominal (CSN) of Semitic, most notably the fact that the definite article is disallowed on the head in both Irish and Semitic. Typical analyses of Semitic CSNs have involved proposing N-to-D movement to account for head-possessor word order and the ban on the article (Ritter (1988); Mohammad (1988); Siloni (1996) and Borer (1988, 1999a) among others). A similar N-raising approach has been adopted to explain the Irish possessor in (1) by Guilfoyle (1988); Sproat and Shih (1991); and Duffield (1995). The aim of this paper is twofold: firstly we show that N-raising cannot be sustained for Irish, based on crucial differences between the Semitic CSN and the Irish equivalent, and by presenting novel data where D appears in Irish. We then propose a unified analysis for Irish that involves different flavours of relational phrase \bar{p} (following Adger 2012).

Beyond the head-possessor word order and the ban on the definite article, Semitic CSNs and Irish genitive phrases have fairly different properties, summarized in the table below:

CSN defining property	Semitic	Irish
Head first, NSO word order.	✓	✓
Head cannot be modified by a determiner	✓	✓
Head cannot be modified by an adjective	✓	✗
±DEF value of head spreads to non-head	✓	✗
APs appear on the right of the possessor	✓	✗
Multiple Ns can be nested	✓	✗
CSN strategy for compound formation	✓	✓/✗

Considering a more extended pool of data, even for the typical possessors as in (1), N cannot have moved to D. Consider (4) below where modifying adjectives appear adjacent to the head, in contrast with Semitic (5) where adjectives follow both the head and the possessor:

(4) **Teach aláinn** an mhúinteora

house beautiful the teacher-GEN

‘The teacher’s beautiful house’

- (5) **beyt** ha-mora **ha-yafe** (Hebrew)
house the teacher the beautiful
 ‘the teacher’s beautiful house’

Assuming that the adjective is generated with the noun inside NP, these examples cannot involve head movement of a bare N to D. A further argument involves demonstratives: the head can appear with DEM, which in Irish obligatorily co-occurs with the definite determiner:

- (6) **An** hata sin an fhir
the hat DEM the man
 ‘that hat (of the man)’

Obviously again, such examples cannot be analysed as instances of N-to-D. A last piece of data against a CSN analysis of Irish involves non-possessive genitives, i.e. genitives denoting action-agent, action-theme, and noun-attribute relationships. In particular, when the genitive non-head is attribute-denoting, the definite article freely appears with a definite head noun:

- (7) Leis an gcaptaen na loinge
with the captain the ship-GEN
 ‘With the captain of the ship’

Again, the appearance of the article in such constructions clearly suggests that N-to-D is not the correct analysis for the Irish paradigm. Instead, we propose that the components of a genitive phrase are generated within a relational phrase $\bar{\nu}$ (following Adger (2012)). The type of relation generated is mediated by a particular type of root ($\sqrt{\text{POSS}}$ for possessives):

- (8)
-
- $\bar{\nu}_{\text{poss}}$
 $\begin{array}{cc} \text{KP} & \bar{\nu}_{\text{poss}} \\ \triangle & \sqrt{\text{POSS}} \\ \text{POSSESSOR} & \end{array}$

This phrase $\bar{\nu}$ mediates the relation between the two components of a genitive phrase. Both the head and the non-head are generated inside $\bar{\nu}$. The variation in the appearance of the article in Irish is dependent on the type of relation generated within $\bar{\nu}$. When the relational phrase is possessive ($\bar{\nu}_{\text{poss}}$) the phrase containing the possessor moves to SpecDP and licenses D, resulting in definite interpretation and blocking the article, When the demonstrative follows N as in (6), the possessor phrase remains in-situ and the definite article merges in D. On the other hand, when the relational phrase is of type attributive ($\bar{\nu}_{\text{att}}$), both the non-head and the head are generated in $\bar{\nu}_{\text{att}}$ as before but the attributive phrase differs from the possessive and is never referential. This attributive phrase cannot raise and license D and therefore always remains in-situ. This allows for the definite article in D as seen in (7).

This paper provides a novel analysis for genitive phrases in Irish following the conclusion that N does not raise to D in Irish genitive phrases. We also contribute to understanding of how reference is established in the Irish DP as well as provide an explanation of the obligatory co-occurrence of the post-nominal demonstrative and the article in Irish.