

# Possessors, foci and topics in the Greek DP

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## 1 Introduction

The position(s) and the status of the DP initial possessive genitive in Greek have been extensively discussed in the literature since the mid/late eighties. Although not the principal focus of investigation in Horrocks & Stavrou's work (1987), the nature of possessive genitive constituted their main argument for the existence of a functional category above NP, namely DP, in Greek.

In this squib, dedicated with love and respect to Liliane and her extensive work on possessors in West Flemish (and cross-linguistically), we return to the issue of the position and function of the possessive genitive and look with more detail at the preposed genitive and its possible interpretations.

The squib is structured as follows. First, we briefly summarize the basic facts and argumentation of Horrocks & Stavrou (1987). The main points of this outline concern the parallelisms between D and I/C in the sentential domain and the focus interpretation that both possessors and interrogative words get when moved to the specifier position of their respective functional categories. We also relate the focus interpretation with the (im)possibility of the genitive being doubled by a pronominal clitic inside the DP. Building on an idea first encountered in Giusti & Stavrou (2008), we show that the pronominal (or preposed) possessor in Greek can only be stressed as focus and cases of apparent violation of that generalization which have been brought up over the years (see Giusti & Stavrou 2008) are instances of either topicalization or of dislocation (as Hanging Topic) of the whole DP that contains the possessor. Closing our squib, we summarize the functions and interpretations of the preposed genitive in Greek.

## 2 Horrocks and Stavrou (1987)

The point of departure of Horrocks & Stavrou were nominal phrases where the possessor, in the form of a full DP whose lexical head (as well as other possible material) bears morphological genitive case, is found in a position preceding the article:

- (1) a. tu fititi to vivlio  
the.GEN.SG student.GEN SG the book  
'the student's book'  
b. ton pedjion to domatio  
the.GEN. PL kids.GEN. PL the room  
'the kids' room'

The position of the genitive in (1) is marked, since the intonation and interpretation it gets is that of a (contrastive) focus, in contrast to the neutral interpretation it gets in its 'base' position, following the noun. The focus function of the preposed genitive automatically means that the possessor cannot be doubled by a clitic:<sup>1</sup>

- (2) a. \*Tu fititi to vivlio tu katastrafike.  
the.GEN.SG student.GEN.SG the book CL.3SG.GEN was destroyed  
'The student's book was destroyed.'  
b. \*ton pedjion to domatio tus  
the.GEN.PL kids.GEN.PL the room CL.3PL.GEN

Horrocks & Stavrou (1987) put special emphasis on the fact that the same distributional pattern as in (1) is observed in interrogative DPs, in which the interrogative genitive also precedes the (definite) article (for more data and detailed discussion see Horrocks & Stavrou 1987):

- (3) tinos to aftokinito?  
whose the car (from: *to aftokinito tinos?* 'the car whose')  
'Whose car?'

There is a further eloquent parallelism between interrogative clauses and inter-

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<sup>1</sup> It must be noted that clitic doubling (of the possessor) is not attested inside the DP irrespectively of the position of the possessive genitive (Alexiadou & Stavrou 2000, Giusti & Stavrou 2008). The fact that it is predictably disallowed with focused genitives is independent and explained on the basis of the focus character of the genitive.

rogative DPs:

- (4) Ti ekane?  
what did.3SG  
'What did he do?'

(4) is exactly parallel to (3), the former showing fronting of the interrogative pronoun in the sentence, the second in the nominal expression. This parallelism led Horrocks & Stavrou to assume that within the nominal phrase there must be a grammatical position for the interrogative possessive pronoun to land to (internal *wh*-movement) parallel to CP in clauses, where *wh*-constituents move to. Such a position, a specifier position by analogy to Spec,CP, must be in front of the article, given the word order in (3). In that case, the article is the head of the projection at the specifier of which constituents from a position lower in the nominal phrase move to. Horrocks & Stavrou (1987) named that projection Art(icle)P. It was the same projection that was labelled DP in Abney (1987). The crucial fact underlined by Horrocks & Stavrou was that the pre-article position is an A'-position, similar to the Spec, CP. Thus, in Greek, in contrast to English, the same relationship holds between DP and NP as between CP and VP. In both cases, the specifier position of the functional layer is an A'-position and may host constituents moved from within the lexical category they dominate (operator movement); in English, DP is parallel to IP. The status of Spec,DP as an A'-position is used in Alexiadou (2016) to explain the unavailability of possessor doubling with full DPs in Greek. Giusti & Stavrou (2008) note that in certain cases involving pronominal possessors, the possessor can be clitic-doubled (see (5)). This is impossible when the possessor is a full DP (6):

- (5) To vivlio mu emena den pulithike katholu.  
the book CL.1SG me.GEN.STR not sold at all  
'My book was not sold at all.'

- (6) Petaxa to vivlio-(\*tu) tu fititi.  
threw.1SG the book-(\*his) the student.GEN  
'I threw away the student's book.'

German and other Germanic languages have possessor doubling with full DPs, as shown in (7):

- (7) dem Vater seine Katz  
the father.DAT his cat

According to Alexiadou (2016), Greek differs from German(ic), which has possessor doubling (7), in that in Greek, the pre-determiner possessor occupies an A'-position, as argued by Horrocks & Stavrou (1987). By contrast, in German(ic), the prenominal possessor can be argued to occupy an argument position, as it receives no particular focal or contrastive stress, see Corver (1990), Haegeman (2004), and Georgi & Salzmann (2011) among others. The latter type of possessor can be doubled by a clitic, which Alexiadou assumes, following Corver, that occupies D°. This is not possible in Greek. In Greek, the possessive clitic is enclitic to the head noun and never realizes D°. Evidence for this comes from the observation that in German(ic) possessor doubling constructions, the pronoun inflects like a determiner and not like an adjective, the possessive pronoun determines the inflection of a following adjective, and the possessive pronoun is in complementary distribution with other determiners.

### 3 Possessors, foci, topics and the DP

However, Giusti & Stavrou (2008) make the following observation, which appears to weaken the generalization that the preposed possessor in Greek is always (contrastively) focused. There are instances of DP initial genitives that are not focalized but look like (contrastive) topics (although such instances are much rarer than the cases where the preposed genitive is focused):

- (8) Tis Marias o petheros epathe egefaliko.  
 the.GEN.SG Maria.GEN.SG the father-in-law underwent stroke  
 'Mary's father-in-law underwent a stroke.'

In (8) the preposed genitive is not focalized and does not get emphatic/contrastive stress. The reading of (8) is something like 'talking of Mary/As for Mary her...'. Let us further consider the following context.

Context: Several of my former classmates face with health and other problems in their families; in particular:

- (8) Tis Marias o petheros...
- (9) Tis Elenis o jos epathe atihima sti thalassa.  
 the.GEN.SG Helen.GEN.SG the son had accident in the sea  
 'Helen's son had an accident in the sea.'

- (10) Tu Kosta o aderfos horise prin dio mines.  
 the.GEN.SG Kosta.GEN.SG the brother divorced before two months  
 'Kosta's brother got divorced two months ago.'

In these cases, the preposed possessor is not the focus but has rather the flavor of a topic, probably a contrastive topic. Nonetheless, the clitic is not allowed in such cases either:

- (11) \*Tis Elenis o jos tis epathe atihima sti  
 the.GEN.SG Helen.GEN.SG the son CL.GEN.SG had accident in the  
 thalassa.  
 sea

Giusti & Stavrou (2008) hypothesize that rather than saying that the genitive stands for a topic inside the DP, it is the entire DP that has this function, not just the possessor. The topic character of the whole DP in cases such as (8)–(10) is supported by the fact that it can be clitic doubled just like any other topicalized object in Greek:

- (12) Tis Marias ton pethero ton skotosan i  
 the.GEN.SG Maria.GEN.SG the father-in-law CL.ACC.SG killed the  
 jermani ston polemo.  
 Germans in the war  
 'Maria's father-in-law was killed by the Germans during the war.'

In isolation, the possessor may only be focused – the across-the-board case as said above. If this line of thought is along the right track, it means that the preposed genitive in (8) was originally focused within the DP, but when the DP moved to a topic position in the clause, the focus status of *tis Marias* was cancelled or overridden by the topic status of the whole DP. Full assessment of non-focused (preposed) genitives as in (8)–(10) requires a detailed examination of the interaction of foci and topics in the clause and in the DP.

Let us next consider cases similar to those in (8)–(10) but with a clear pause after the preposed genitive:

- (13) Tis Marias, i aderfi \*(tis) exi megalo provlima  
 the.GEN.SG Maria.GEN.SG the sister CL.GEN.SG has big problem  
 me ton antra tis.  
 with the husband hers

'Mary's sister has a big problem with her husband.' (Lit. 'Let's talk of Mary – she has...').'

In (13) the clitic inside the clause is required, in contrast with the previous case. Giusti & Stavrou assume that the possessor occupies a topic position in the sentence, not within the DP. If we take into consideration Anagnostopoulou's (1997) distinction between Clitic Left Dislocation and Hanging Topic, the question is whether in (13) the extraposed genitive DP is an instance of a hanging topic or (left) dislocation. As commented by Giusti & Stavrou (2008), both dislocation and HT represent exclusively oral (and often casual) speech, hence it is difficult to obtain clear judgments from the speakers. Nonetheless, here we follow Giusti & Stavrou (2008: 419–421) and assume that (13) instantiates a case of dislocation. There are two reasons for this: first, the preposed genitive may not carry default nominative, something that is usual with nominal hanging topics; second, the genitive may not be co-indexed with an epithet or a demonstrative lower in the clause, something, again, typical of hanging topics. In (13) the genitive is adjoined (to the left, but it can also be adjoined to the right) to the IP (or CP) and from there it forms a chain with the clitic – an operator – that appears within the clause. The two share the same phi-features and (genitive) case.

In the light of the above discussion, we conclude that the possessive DP that is found before the definite article in the Greek DP is a focused constituent which has moved to Spec, DP attracted by the [+foc] feature on D. This movement parallels the movement of *wh*-constituents in the clause. Apparent violations of this generalization are instances of either topicalization of the whole DP that contains the preposed possessor to a sentential topic position, or of dislocation of the possessor as Hanging Topic (along the lines of Anagnostopoulou 1997) to IP or CP.

## 4 Conclusions

In Greek, Spec, DP is A'-position. It can host both foci, but not topics, coming from a lower position in the DP. In that case it bears a [+foc] feature. In the absence of such a feature, the possessor stays in its original merge position. When the preposed genitive DP is not focused, then two things can happen: either it is the entire DP that has moved to a sentential topic position, most likely as a contrastive topic, (if it is an object of a verb it can be clitic doubled) after the possessor was moved to the spec, DP inside the DP. Alternatively, the possessor is

dislocated and adjoined to the IP (or the CP) with a clear pause separating it from the rest of the clause (doubling is then mandatory).

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