

Possessives are inherently Case-marked pronouns

Proposal. In this paper, I explore the variation in the expression of pronominal possession attested by Romance languages and propose that possessives are personal pronouns marked with an inherent Case. Concretely, building on Řezáč (2008), I maintain that possessive forms should be construed as [PP P [DP personal pronoun]]: this reduces the attested variation to variation at Spell-Out and is compatible with some additional (and seemingly unrelated) facts.

Possessives: variation. The expression of pronominal possessors across Romance languages shows a remarkable amount of variation. Here I focus on constructions that encode dependent pronominal possessors (I leave differences between weak and strong forms, (in)alienability-related issues, and general distributional restrictions for further research): although adjectival possessive forms (1–A) are most typically employed to express pronominal possessors, PPs (P+pronoun, (1–B)) and bare, unmarked or dependent pronouns (1–C) are also found:

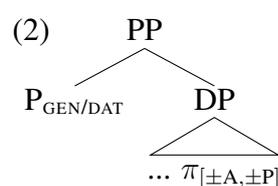
(1) *Possessive paradigms: three strategies*

	POSS.1SG	POSS.2SG	POSS.3SG	POSS.1PL	POSS.2PL	POSS.3PL
A Italian ¹	mio	tuo	suo	nostro	vostro	loro
B Spoken Braz.Pg. ²	de mim	de (vo)cê	dele	da gente	de (vo)cês	deles
C Haitian Creole ³	mwen	ou	li	nou	nou	yo

Notes. ¹SG.M inflection; ²Optional; Jungbluth & Vallentin 2015: 321; ³Optional; Fattier 2013: §5.

Different strategies may express dependent pronominal possessors in one and the same language (possibly with some semantic differences, left aside here): this is the case for instance for spoken (informal) Brazilian Portuguese, where Strategy A and B, as in (1–A/B) may be both used. Likewise, the Portuguese-based creole of Brava (Baptista 2013) attests, within its paradigm of adnominal possessives, at least one form for each strategy (*nha_A*, *bu_C*, *di nhol/-a_B*, *se_A*; *nos_(C)*, *nhos_C*, *ses_A*). For economy and uniformity reasons, it is desirable to reduce these different expressions for dependent pronominal possessors to one underlying structure and to account for the attested variation at Spell-Out. In what follows, I propose such a reduction by analysing adjectival possessives (Strategy A) as inherently Case-marked personal pronouns.

Possessives = [PP P [DP personal pronoun]]. The expression of pronominal possessors minimally consists of an indexical base which indexes the possessor: e.g. Italian *mi-*, Br.Pg. *mim*, Hait.Cr. *mwen*. (Strategy A possessives also show DP-internal agreement morphology, with inflectional endings covarying with the possessum: this is left out here.) I analyse the indexical base as a personal pronoun that is assigned a theta-related (inherent) Case by the possessed NP. The exact definition of the inherent Case is left open: I assume that either genitive or dative is assigned to the personal pronoun (beside being widely syncretic, GEN and DAT express possession and the elementary part-whole relation, see e.g. Manzini & Franco 2016). Further, following Řezáč (2008), I take inherent Case to be underlyingly construed as a PP: thus, the indexical base of possessive forms is a personal pronoun embedded under a preposition. Finally, I take person categories to be derived by two binary person features, [\pm A(uthor)] and [\pm P(articipant)], hosted on a π (person) head (following Harbour’s (2016) account for person systems). Therefore, but simplifying here, I derive the indexical part of possessive as in (2).



The hypothesis that possessives start out as pronouns is supported cross-linguistically by the parallel structures of pronominal and possessive paradigms, which display the same person, number, and gender categories (barring syncretisms). This is expected if possessives are inherently Case-marked pronouns (and is otherwise to be explained).

Variation: Spell-Out. Granting this analysis, the different strategies employed to express (de-

pendent) pronominal possessors shown in (1) naturally follow as variation at Spell-Out:

Strategy A	Strategy B	Strategy C
<p>The P + pronoun complex may be spelled out synthetically, i.e. the pronoun is overtly case marked (complementarity of prepositions and case suffixes), e.g. Italian (<i>mio</i> ‘my’):</p>	<p>The P + personal pronoun complex may be spelled out as such in PP (analytic) constructions, e.g. informal/spoken Brazilian Portuguese (<i>de mim</i> ‘my’):</p>	<p>The P + pronoun complex can be headed by a null P, deriving the syncretism between possessive forms and unmarked (or dependent) pronouns, e.g. Haitian Cr. (<i>mwen</i> ‘I, my’):</p>
$[\text{PP } P_{\text{GEN/DAT}} [\text{DP } \dots [\pi_{+A}, +P]]]$ <p><i>mio</i></p>	$[\text{PP } P_{\text{GEN/DAT}} [\text{DP } \dots [\pi_{+A}, +P]]]$ <p><i>de</i> <i>mim</i></p>	$[\text{PP } P_{\text{GEN/DAT}} [\text{DP } \dots [\pi_{+A}, +P]]]$ <p>\emptyset <i>mwen</i></p>

The extra functional material associated to the theta-related Case allows for Spell-Out variation when it comes to the expression of pronominal possessors, both across languages and within the possessive paradigm of one and the same language. Thus, the approach proposed here derives the attested variation without extra structures or assumptions.

Further observations. The derivation of possessive forms from personal pronouns is compatible with some additional facts, which I discuss in turn.

① Non-nominal uses of possessives (Ibero-Romance). In some Ibero-Romance varieties, possessive forms may be used as the argument of prepositions (3a) or verbs (3b) (for a recent overview and references, see Bouzouita & Marttinen Larsson 2020: §1.2, henceforth ‘B-ML’):

- (3) a. detrás meu [Galician; B-ML:20] b. paso túa [Galician; B-ML:23]
 behind POSS.1SG ‘Behind *mine* (>me)’ ignore.1SG POSS.2SG ‘I ignore *your* (>you)’

These uses of possessive forms can be accounted for by appealing to variation at Spell-Out, too: the underlying PPs (*detrás [de mi]*; *paso [de ti]*) are spelled out synthetically (Strategy A) rather than analytically (Strategy B). How to further formalise idiosyncrasies of and constraints on these constructions exceeds the scope of this paper.

② Agreement. Person and number features control verbal agreement when encoded in personal pronouns (4a), but do not do so when encoded in the indexical base of possessives (4b):

- (4) a. vous_[2PL] mangez_[2PL] b. votre_[2PL] chien_[3SG] mange_[3SG]/*mangez_[2PL] [French]
 2PL eatPRS.2PL POSS.2PL dog eat.PRS.3SG/*eat.PRS.2PL

The same is true for DP-internal agreement. If, *prima facie*, these agreement facts seem to contradict an analysis whereby possessives are inherently Case-marked personal pronouns, the analysis proposed here in fact warrants the inaccessibility of person and number features for agreement whenever they are encoded in the indexical base of possessives. This naturally follows if the P head that embeds the personal pronoun is taken to be a phase head, which makes its c-command domain opaque. Thus, the ϕ features encoded in the indexical base of possessives are invisible to DP-internal and (in turn) DP-external agreement.

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