

# Genitival Phrases in Albanian and Romanian A Comparative Approach

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**Abstract** Albanian and Romanian display a specific Genitival Phrase structure which is unique among Balkan's languages. It is characterized by the presence of a genitive marker, traditionally called 'genitival article', that follows the head noun. The goal of the present paper is twofold: on the one hand, it focuses on the origin and the syntactic role the genitival article has within GenP. On the other hand, this paper compares the Genitival Phrase of Albanian to that of Romanian in order to show similarities and differences in both their morphological and syntactic structure.

**Keywords** Albanian. Romanian. Genitival Phrase. Genitival marker.

**Summary** Introduction. – 2. On the 'genitival article' in Albanian and Romanian GenP. – 3. The syntactic role of the genitive marker. – 4. The structure of the Genitival Phrase in Albanian and Romanian. – Conclusions.



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## 1 Introduction

The Genitival Phrase of Albanian and Romanian has been a main issue in Balkan Linguistics for many years. Many scholars have studied its syntactic structure, which is very different from the other Balkan languages since it displays a genitival marker, which is traditionally called ‘genitival article’.

The studies on the Genitival Phrase have been focused on two basic structures: the Saxon genitive phrase like *John’s book* and the prepositional one *the book of John* (Hofherr, Dobrovie-Sorin 2005, 225). Unlike the English genitival phrases illustrated above, Albanian and Romanian display a structure containing a genitival marker (ART) which is followed by a noun marked for genitive Case. It has the following configuration:

(1) ART + NP.GEN

In both languages, the genitival marker agrees with the head noun. In Romanian, it agrees only for gender and number (*Gramatica de bază a limbii române* 2016, 63):

- (2) a. **Elev** **al profesorului**  
 student.<sub>MASC.SING.ART</sub> professor.<sub>GEN.SING</sub>  
 ‘Professor’s student’  
 b. **Acestei** **studente** **ale facultății**  
 these.<sub>FEM.PL</sub> students.<sub>FEM.PL ART.FEM.PL</sub> faculty  
 ‘These students of the faculty’

In Albanian, the genitival article agrees in gender, number and Case:

- (3) a. **Libri** **i** **nxënësit**  
 book.<sub>MASC.SING.NOM</sub> ART.MASC.SING student.<sub>MASC.SING.GEN</sub>  
 ‘The student’s book’  
 b. **Fletorja** **e** **nxënësit/nxënëses**  
 notebook.<sub>FEM.SING.NOM</sub> ART.FEM.SING student.<sub>MASC/FEM.SING.GEN</sub>  
 ‘The student’s notebook’  
 c. **Librave** **të** **nxënësvë**  
 books.<sub>PL.DAT ART.PL.DAT</sub> students.<sub>PL.GEN</sub>  
 ‘To the students books’

A main difference between Romanian and Albanian is that the Romanian Genitive Phrase may be realized both by the syntactic marker *al* (2a) or by the proclitic *lui* which precedes proper nouns:

- (4) **Lui Ion**  
 ‘Ion’s’

Albanian, instead, has only one structure to express the Genitival Phrase: the one represented in (1).

It is very important to highlight the role of the head noun, i.e. the noun which precedes GenP: it realizes the possessive relation between the possessum and the possessor. This is shown in (5) for Albanian and in (6) for Romanian:

- (5) **Libri**                      **i**                      **studentit**  
book<sub>MASC.SING.NOM</sub> ART.MASC.SING.GEN student<sub>MASC.SING.GEN</sub>  
'The student's book'

- (6) **O carte**              **al elevului**  
a book<sub>ART</sub> student<sub>GEN</sub>  
'A student's book'

Genitival Phrases of Albanian and Romanian represent a unique structure among other Balkan languages.

## 2              **On the 'genitival article' in Albanian and Romanian GenP**

In the Albanian Grammar, the so-called 'genitival article' is historically related to other prepositional articles like:

- the adjectival article *i mirë, i bukur* ('nice', 'beautiful')
- possessive article *i ati, e ëma* ('his father', 'his/her mother'), etc.
- pronominal article *i tij, i saj, i tillë* ('his', 'her', 'such'), etc.
- the article preceding week's days *e hënë, e martë, e mërkurë* ('Monday', 'Tuesday', 'Wednesday'), etc.
- the article preceding adjectival quantifiers *i parë, i dytë, të dy, të tre, të gjithë* ('first', 'second', 'both', 'the three of them', 'all'), etc.
- the article preceding deverbal neuter nouns *të folurit, të qeshurit* ('speaking', 'laughing'), etc.

The most similar article to the 'genitival article' is the adjectival article for they display the same function and morphological form. Both these articles agree in gender, number and case with the preceding noun: *drejtori i shkollës / drejtori i ri* ('the school director' / 'the new director'); *drejtoresha e shkollës / drejtoresha e re* ('the school director' / 'the new director', feminine) (*Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe* 2002, 106).

In Romanian, on the other side, except the genitival phrase, the genitival article may appear in two other structures: adjectival possessives (7a) and ordinals (7b):

- (7) a. **Al nostru**  
      ‘Ours’  
      b. **Al doilea**  
          ‘Second’

The Albanian genitival article originated from a demonstrative pronoun which has been used before a noun in genitive Case in order to express the meaning of the possessiveness, the relevant value of the genitive Case. This demonstrative was the only element which contributed to marking the distinction between genitive and dative Case in the Albanian language (Likaj 2003, 54).

The term ‘article’, when referred to the Genitival Phrase, has not the meaning of ‘definite article’, nor the same function, both in Romanian and Albanian. The Romanian genitival article *al* has been labelled as ‘syntactic genitive marker’ in *Gramatica de Bază a Limbi Române* (2016, 61) or ‘genitive marker’ in Giurgea (2014, 71). The elliptic use of *al* in the following example makes *al* to look like a semi-dependent pronoun:

- (8) **Al mei au plecat la mare**  
      ART mine they leave the sea  
      ‘Mine are gone to the sea’

Nevertheless, it is not considered an article yet, as it replaces the noun. Also, in the examples where *al* is used in combination with quantifiers as in *al doilea* (‘second’), it is considered a lexical affix which is not related to definiteness, the main function of the articles (*Gramatica de Bază a Limbi Romane* 2016, 87). Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the word ‘marker’ not ‘article’ when we refer to the ‘genitive marker’ in Albanian and Romanian GenP.

### 3       **The syntactic role of the genitive marker**

According to Abney (1987, 271), determiners are in complementary distribution with possessives: AGR in D does not co-occur with lexical determiners:

- (9) \*John(‘s) the/that/some books

Assuming that possessors only appear when there is an AGR position in D (which assigns genitive Case), Abney claims that the inability of AGR to co-occur with lexical determiners explains the inability of possessors to co-occur with determiners. Hence, the genitival marker, as a possessor, cannot co-occur with other determiners in the GenPs.

In Romanian, GenP is used only after an indefinite noun (10), meanwhile in Albanian, it may follow a definite or an indefinite noun (11):

- (10) a. **Un caiet al Mariei**  
 a notebook<sub>ART</sub> Mary<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'Mary's notebook'  
 b. \**Caietul al Mariei*  
 notebook<sub>.DEF</sub> GEN<sub>ART</sub> Mary<sub>.GEN</sub>

- (11) a. **Krahu i fluturës**  
 arm<sub>.DEF</sub> ART butterfly<sub>GEN.DEF</sub>  
 'The butterfly's arm'  
 b. **Një krah i fluturës**  
 an arm<sub>ART</sub> butterfly<sub>GEN.DEF</sub>  
 'An arm of the butterfly'

There are constructions in Romanian (12) and Albanian (13) where the genitive marker is in D position, adjacent to the noun, and in a complementary distribution with other determiners:

- (12) a. **Caietul acesta al Mariei**  
 notebook<sub>.DEF</sub> this<sub>GEN.ART</sub> Mary<sub>.GEN</sub>  
 'This notebook of Mary'  
 b. **Caietul cel nou al Mariei**  
 notebook<sub>.DEF</sub> ADJ<sub>ART</sub> new<sub>ART</sub> Mary<sub>.GEN</sub>  
 'The new notebook of Mary'
- (13) a. **Krahët e bukur të fluturës**  
 arms<sub>.DEF</sub> ADJ<sub>ART</sub> beautiful<sub>GEN.ART</sub> butterfly<sub>.GEN</sub>  
 'The beautiful arms of the butterfly'  
 b. **Bota jonë e kinemasë**  
 world<sub>.DEF</sub> our<sub>GEN.ART</sub> cinema<sub>.GEN</sub>  
 'Our world of cinema'

But, there are examples in Albanian (14) and Romanian (15) in which the genitival marker may be in a Specifier position, i.e. it is not adjacent to the genitive noun. In this cases, it appears in the leftmost position in the GenP, in a non-complementary distribution with other lexical determiners like demonstratives and quantifiers:

- (14) **Krahu i një/kësaj/çdo fluturë**  
 arm<sub>.DEF</sub> GEN<sub>ART</sub> a/*this*/*each* butterfly<sub>GEN</sub>  
 'The arm of a/*this*/*each* butterfly'

- (15) **Al tuturor acestor fete**  
 GEN<sub>ART</sub> all<sub>GEN.PL</sub> these<sub>GEN.PL</sub> girls

‘Of all these girls’

In Albanian, the Genitival Phrase displays inflectional features not only on the possessor but also on the pre-nominal genitival article, which agrees in number, gender and Case with the head noun that precedes it:

(16)	Nom.	<b>libri</b> book. <sub>MASC.SING.NOM</sub>	<b>i</b> <sub>MASC.SING.NOM</sub>	<b>studentit</b> student
	Gen.	<b>i/e librit</b> book. <sub>MASC.SING.GEN</sub>	<b>të</b> <sub>MASC.SING.GEN</sub>	<b>studentit</b> student
	Dat.	<b>librit</b> book. <sub>MASC.SING.DAT</sub>	<b>të</b> <sub>MASC.SING.DAT</sub>	<b>studentit</b> student
	Acc.	<b>librin</b> book. <sub>MASC.SING.ACC</sub>	<b>e</b> <sub>MASC.SING.ACC</sub>	<b>studentit</b> student
	Abl.	<b>librit</b> book. <sub>MASC.SING.ABL</sub>	<b>të</b> <sub>MASC.SING.ABL</sub>	<b>studentit</b> student

‘The student’s book’

The above paradigm shows that the genitive marker morphologically agrees with the head noun, even if syntactically it is part of the genitive noun.

According to Likaj (2003, 54), both the article and the endings of the head noun originated from the same demonstrative. He assumes that the endings of the head noun, which belongs to the definite declension of the noun, come from a poly-definite construction:

(17)	<i>libr-i</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>nxënësit = libër</i>	<i>(a)i</i>	<i>(a)tij</i>	<i>nxënësi</i>
	book-the ART		student.GEN = book	this	that. <sub>GEN.</sub>	student

In Romanian genitive phrases there is not an inflectional paradigm on the genitival marker. Giurgea (2014, 72) notes that the genitive in Romanian is a syntactic notion, not a morphological one, as there is no distinct inflectional genitive Case. There is a morphological element restricted to genitive environments, but this is not an inflectional element: it is the possessive stem of agreeing possessors (Giurgea 2014, 4). In both languages, the genitival marker has the same origin from the articles (originally demonstratives), they differ only in their inflectional paradigm: in Albanian the genitive marker has an inflectional Case, in Romanian, instead, it agrees only in gender and number, not in Case.

As Catasso (2011, 85) notes, the agreement with the preceding noun in number and gender displayed by this genitival article “is significant for two reasons: on the one hand, as he argues for Romanian, it indicates an asymmetry between the preceding noun and the genitival phrase in that the ‘article’ displays a much stronger relation

to the former than to the latter – which is not the case in other languages of the Balkan Sprachbund (except Romanian) and is not so widely diffused from a typological perspective. Secondly, this controversial element is the same found in the AP, which suggests that a demonstrative-like features may be attributed to this ‘article’. Moreover, Catasso hypothesizes that a correlation between the element on the Adjectival Phrase and that in the GenP (if we assume that it structurally belongs to the GenP) is definitely present. See the Albanian examples in (18):

- (18) a. **Libri i tij**  
book<sub>DEF</sub> ART his  
‘His book’  
b. **Libri i studentit**  
book<sub>DEF</sub> ART student<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘The student’s book’  
c. **Libri i kuq**  
book<sub>DEF</sub> ADJ.ART red  
‘The red book’

Catasso (2011, 85) assumes that these three instances in the use of this element reveal that *i* has a special function: it seems to particularize the noun it follows by restricting the semantic domain (‘his book’ < ‘that of him’/ ‘that book which belongs to him’). The function of *i* in the possessive construction above, taken from Catasso, really seems to fulfill the role of particularizing the noun it follows by restricting the semantic domain. But, in the adjectival phrase in (18c), *i* has not the same function. The preposed adjectival article in Albanian takes a predicative meaning into a copular construction like *libri i kuq* – *libri është i kuq* / *libri që është i kuq* (‘the book red’ – ‘the book is red’ / ‘the book which is red’), as Campos (2009, 1028) notes for Greek APs to *vivlio to kokkino* (‘the book the red’). Even though its historical origin is the same, it originated from a definite article or a demonstrative pronoun.

In conclusion of this section, we list some similarities and differences between the genitive marker in both languages.

- a) Romanian *al* is dropped after the definite article (19), whereas in Albanian the genitive article *i/e* is obligatory (20):

- (19) **Băiatu’ vecinului**  
boy<sub>DEF</sub> neighbor<sub>DEF,OBL</sub>  
‘The neighbor boy’  
(20) **Djali i fqinjit**  
boy<sub>DEF</sub> ART neighbour<sub>GEN</sub>

‘The neighbor’s boy’

b) Romanian *al* is an obligatory constituent of GenP if the head noun is indefinite (21), which is the case in Albanian too (22):

- (21) **Un bǎiat a vecinului**  
a boy<sub>GEN</sub> neighbour<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘A neighbor’s boy’

- (22) **Një djalë i fqinjit**  
a boy<sub>GEN</sub> neighbour<sub>GEN.DEF</sub>  
‘A neighbor’s boy’

c) Genitive marker, in its main use, is in D in both languages, but it may display a specifier role preceding determiners. This is shown in the Romanian example in (23a) and in the Albanian (23b):

- (23) a. **Al tuturor ancestor fete**  
‘Of all these girls’  
b. **Krahu i një fluturë**  
‘The arm of a butterfly’

d) Both languages display an elliptic use of the head noun:

- (24) **Casa Mariei e mai mare decât a Ioanei**  
house Mary<sub>OBL</sub> is more big than of Ioan<sub>OBL</sub>  
‘Mary’s house is bigger than Ioan’s’
- (25) Shtëpia e Marisë është më e madhe se e Joanës  
house<sub>DEF</sub> GEN Mary<sub>GEN</sub> is more<sub>ADJ.ART</sub> big than<sub>GEN</sub> Ioan<sub>GEN</sub>  
‘Mary’s house is bigger than Ioan’s’

## 4 The Structure of the Genitival Phrase in Albanian and Romanian

What kind of constituent is the GenP in both languages, Albanian and Romanian?

In languages like English, the Possessor occupies a DP position (Alexiadou, Stavrou, Haegeman 2007). It is known as the first constituent of the phrase: ‘John’s book’.

In Albanian (26) and Romanian (27) things are different. Unlike many languages, the possessor in Albanian and Romanian follows the head noun, appearing in a lower position lower than that of the head noun:



- (26) **Libri i Gjonit**  
book<sub>DEF</sub> GEN John<sub>GEN,DEF</sub>  
'John's book'
- (27) **Un carte al elevului**  
a book GEN student<sub>GEN</sub>  
'A student's book'

The prenominal position is ungrammatical in both languages:

- (28) a. \***I Gjonit libri**  
b. \***Al elevului un carte**

The possessor occupies a lower position, to the right of the posses-  
sum. The extraction of the GenP is possible only in a copular con-  
struction. See the Albanian example in (29) and Romanian in (30):

- (29) **Libri është i Gjonit**  
Book<sub>DEF</sub> is GEN John<sub>GEN</sub>  
'The book is John's '
- (30) **Caietul este al profesorului/meu**  
Book<sub>DEF</sub> is GEN professor<sub>GEN</sub>/mine  
'The book belongs to the professor/ to me'

The examples above show that, in both languages, the genitival  
phrase is derived in a lower position: it doesn't move to the left edge  
to occupy a specifier position. It occupies a complement position  
which follows the head noun.

However, in copular constructions or in why-clauses, the posses-  
sor may occupy the Spec DP position:

- (31) a. **I Gjonit është libri/ ky libër?**  
GEN Gjon<sub>GEN</sub> is book<sub>DEF</sub>/this book  
'Is John's this book?'
- b. **A lui Gjon este cartea/această carte?**  
GEN Gjon<sub>GEN</sub> is book<sub>DEF</sub>/this book  
'Is John's this book?'

According to Cornilescu & Nicolae (2011, 38), the Romanian GenP  
may have another syntactic position: it may precede a head noun that  
has a possession meaning, like the Genitive Saxon in English 'coun-  
try's flag'. In these constructions, it has the role of a definite deter-  
miner and it is always the first constituent of the DP:

- (32) a. **Al      țării      steag**  
          <sub>ART</sub> country's flag  
          'Country's flag'  
      b. **Al      casei      prag**  
          <sub>ART</sub> house      threshold  
          'House's threshold'

Following Cornilescu, Nicolae (2011, 38), 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].

GenP preceding the Nominal Expression are not common in Albanian, where the unmarked order is head noun + genitive marker + noun<sub>gen.</sub> However, there are examples where the GenP appears at the left edge of the NP in some emphatic uses, in poetry, but unusual in other contexts:

- (33) a. **Unë, i      qiejve      agjikator** (Kadare, I. 2018, 158, 112, 115)  
          I<sub>NOM ART</sub> skies agitator  
          'Me, of skies agitator'  
      b. **I      mendimeve vargu      nuk      t'u      sos**  
          <sub>ART</sub> thoughts      verse<sub>DEF</sub> not get      limited  
          'Of thoughts the verse didn't get limited'

As Giurgea (2011, 27) notes for Romanian language, Genitive Phrases can be coordinated. In these cases, the article *al* can be realized in the second GenP:

- (34) **Apartamentul      [mamei      mele]      și      [al      Mariei]a      fost vândut**  
apartment<sub>NOM DEF</sub> mother<sub>OBL</sub> mine and GEN Mary<sub>GEN</sub> was sold  
'My mother's car and Mary's is sold out'

In Albanian, on the other side, the genitive marker must be realized in the first GenP otherwise the construction could be ungrammatical:

- (35) a. **Vetura      e      mamasë      sime      dhe      Marisë      është shitur**  
car<sub>NOM DEF GEN</sub> mother<sub>GEN</sub> my<sub>GEN</sub> and Mary<sub>GEN</sub> was sold  
'My mother's car and Mary's is sold out'  
      b. **\*Vetura mamasë sime dhe e Marisë është shitur**

## 5 Conclusions

In this paper, I have presented the Genitival Phrase of Albanian and Romanian. I have shown that it is unique among the other Balkan languages since its structure comprehends a head noun, a genitive marker, agreeing with the head noun, and a noun inflected for genitive Case. In both languages, the genitive marker is traditionally called ‘prenominal/genitival article’ and is derived from an article/demonstrative (Romanian/Albanian), but it is not related to the definite article or definiteness. Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the label ‘genitive marker’ instead of ‘prenominal / genitival article’.

The genitive marker displays two syntactic roles inside the GenP: it is a determiner D when it is in complementary distribution with other lexical determiners, but it may have the role of Specifier too, when it has a non-complementary distribution with pronouns or other elements within GenP.

Genitive Phrases of Albanian and Romanian usually are complements: they occupy a lower position in the Nominal Expression, to the right of the head noun. The extraction of the GenP is possible only in a copular construction or in why-clauses where the GenP may display a DP role, at the left edge of the Nominal Expression.

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