Paola Crisma - Università di Trieste,
Cristina Guardiano - Università di Modena e Reggio Emilia
Giuseppe Longobardi - University of York

Case at the interfaces: Genitive and beyond

1. Case and Minimalism. A fundamental question of linguistics is if and how the language faculty provides an optimal solution to the problem of connecting form and meaning (Chomsky 1995, 2001). In this work, based on a dataset of a few dozen languages from various families, we address this issue in the domain of Genitive (GEN) Case and its variable externalization. We propose that the reduction of Case to just two basic types, *interpretable* and *uninterpretable*, paired with a general Case-checking theory, accounts for all the variation in the realization of GEN. Then, we argue that GEN sheds light on the structure and function of Case more generally, since it displays two types of instantiations, which often may even co-exist in the same language. We term these GEN instantiations 'functional' and 'free', characterized by two clusters of distinct properties, which we derive precisely from their being (un)interpretable. *Functional* GENs (i) occur in either of two dedicated functional projections: GenH, which appears below D and above base-generated attributive adjectives, and GenL, below the same adjectives; (ii) under predictable conditions, they transmit their definiteness value to the whole DP (as in English *John's book*); (iii) they are often characterized by 'light' or Ø morphological marking, and are never introduced by a preposition. By contrast, *free* GENs (i) are freely iterable; (ii) they must be overtly marked (often by means of an adposition); (iii) they never induce definiteness inheritance; (iv) they obey Giorgi & Longobardi's (1991) Consistency principle: if they precede N, the realization is postpositional, if they follow N, it is prepositional.

2. Checking of Functional Genitive. In addition to occurring always in GenH or GenL, functional GEN appears in two (and only two) configurations:

i. in one configuration, functional GENs surface postnominally only as a result of N-raising. The raised N may cross over GenL only (Greek, Russian, Icelandic); over GenL and adjectives (Welsh); over GenH reaching D (Semitic). Thus, the GEN ends up in the c-domain of N, i.e. in its complement; the generalization can be extended to superficially pre-N GENs with determiner-like function (=definiteness transmission) by assuming covert N-raising.

ii. in the other configuration, pre-N GenH displays some form of φ-feature agreement with N, differently parametrized as either controlled by the GEN (Ugric and Turkic) or by N (adjectival GEN); thus, the checking of these GENs resembles that of NOM in clauses (George & Kornfilt 1980).

The correlation between the form of functional GENs and their structurally constrained distribution suggests that they are in need of syntactic checking. We therefore conclude that functional GEN is uninterpretable and, as such, must be checked and deleted. Thus, functional GEN mimics ACC and NOM; most variation reduces to the morphological availability of agreement with N, and the surface position of N, determined by independent parameters.

3. Free Genitive as unchecked Case. Free GEN is not subject to such distributional constraints, and is licensed as long as it can be linked to an appropriate role in the noun frame. We thus argue that free GEN is interpretable (and interpreted), and therefore does not need to be checked and deleted, hence its occurrence will be governed just by the Full Interpretation Principle (FIP). We crucially take it as a significant generalization that this property of not being checked/deleted is systematically mirrored by its always being formally marked by adpositions or robust inflection.

4. Unification of Case types across categories. The parallelism between adnominal Case and clausal Case suggested above (functional GEN as akin to NOM and ACC) can thus be further extended. In this perspective, free GEN would be analogous to interpretable clausal Cases such as Locative, Instrumental etc. We then regard as non-accidental that NOM and ACC, on a par with functional GEN, tend to exhibit PF-reduced or even Ø marking (and anyway no prepositional realizations ever), while semantically concrete notions realized as interpretable Cases such as Locative and Instrumental are always formally marked, often prepositionally,

exactly like free GEN.

Thus GEN turns out to be ambivalent: in the case of functional GEN, it can be used as a semantically abstract (i.e. uninterpretable) Case akin to NOM and ACC (Benveniste 1966) and in need of checking; on the other hand, as a free GEN, it expresses the semantic content of relatedness to the head noun (Planudes, Kuryłowicz 1964, Higginbotham 1985) and is therefore interpretable and unchecked (i.e. our free GEN).

Thus, functional GENs parallel and summarize the configurations in which structural and inherent Cases are licensed in the clausal domain.

Interpretable Case does not require any checking, be it a free GEN or a Locative or Instrumental etc.

Instead, uninterpretable Case requires checking under conditions that turn out to be very similar for functional GENs and for structural Case in clauses. For instance, in NOM-ACC systems: A. NOM is checked by T if DP_{NOM} agrees with T, for GEN see §2ii above; or B. NOM is checked by non-agreeing T if T overtly/covertly c-commands Spec-T (Aux-to-Comp contexts, Rizzi 1982), for GEN see §2i, and C. ACC is checked by a V that c-commands DP_{ACC} after raising, presumably at least to *v* or Voice, for GEN see again §2i.

In sum, Case checking can be generalized as follows:

(1)   Checking of Case feature α by licensing head β requires the conjunction of two conditions:
    a. α is in a designated Spec of (the extended projection of) β at PF
    b. α is in the complement of β at LF
       or
       α φ-agrees with β, like NOM subjects (Case as a free rider).

In sum, we propose that three types of surface Cases exist across languages, and that their formal and semantic properties are interconnected in a principled way: (i) Cases which are normally uninterpretable and tend to typologically display reduced or Ø realizations (NOM and ACC, always checked under (1)); (ii) Cases which are interpreted and always need to encode their meaning through formal marking, often adpositionally (Locative, Ablative, Instrumental, etc., always unchecked); (iii) Cases ambiguous between (i) and (ii), which may correspondingly exhibit two different formal realizations (functional and free GEN). This solidarity of formal and interpretive properties is largely deduced from the general condition in (1), based on principled tenets of the Minimalist Program, and their surface variation is shaped by a coherent and constrained system of parametric interdependencies.

5. Case and the structure of the language faculty. Chomsky, Gallego & Ott (2019) propose that "I-language is optimized relative to the C-I interface alone, with EXT ancillary". The picture of adnominal Case we propose here corroborates the first part of this conjecture. The mapping from the GEN Case system to the C-I component is straightforward: free GEN is mapped to a specific meaning ('related to' N), and functional GEN to no meaning at all, being checked and deleted, satisfying the FIP through normal θ-assignment, as for NOM and ACC. EXT displays various language-specific idiosyncrasies, but is highly constrained at the same time. We show that almost all variability follows from a tight deductive structure constituting an implausibly accidental crosslinguistic template for diversity. Such structure is expressed by a number of parametric subsystems that are: (i) internally *complete* (all the possible language types they generate are actually attested), (ii) constrained and connected to each other by implicational principles of logical or functional nature (e.g. Antisynonymy, Effability), and (iii) all settable from positive evidence only. We propose to reformulate Chomsky *et al.*'s (2019) conjecture above as: "I-language is optimized relative to the C-I interface alone, with EXT widely variable but highly structured". We argue that the source of this structuring (in UG and/or third factor) is a central topic of any linguistic theory concerned with explanatory and evolutionary adequacy.