

## **The genitive case in Irish: A functionalist account of complex multifunctional syntax**

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Most languages have a distinctive word class of adjectives but also use nouns as modifiers. The morphological patterns associated with modifying nouns are generally referred to as the ‘genitive case’. Although the prototypical meaning of the genitive case in many languages is generally defined as possession, it marks a wide range of adnominal relations (Carlier & Verstraete, 2013). The structures using the genitive case in Irish are some of the most frequently used, and some of the most complex. This study explores these complexities, and assumes they are motivated by functionality.

Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) and some compatible theoretical work are used as the analytical framework for this study (Van Valin, 2005; Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997). Adjectival and nominal modification are usually defined as providing additional information about a characteristic of a noun. This paper provides specificity to this definition vis-à-vis nominal attribution in a way compatible with RRG. Generative Lexicon Theory, specifically Pustejovsky’s qualia analysis (Pustejovsky, 1995), is used to explain the modifying functions of the genitive case in Irish. Rijkhoff’s work on nominal aspect markers (Rijkhoff, 2004, p. 120-121) is also used in analysing the expression of quantification in Irish. The concept of syntactic templates in RRG is used throughout. Syntactic patterns are described in RRG as templates stored in a syntactic inventory, a sort of ‘constructicon’; language specific features of clause and NP structure are represented in the syntactic templates (Van Valin, 2005, p.13). The syntactic patterns of the NP in Irish are used to represent argument structure, and this is analysed using an RRG framework.

This paper demonstrates that the genitive structure in Irish performs three major functions, to specify a quale, quantification, and to encode relations between an argument and a nominalised form of the verb. There are two different types of modifying noun in Irish, one which follows the head noun in the genitive case and the other before the head noun and in the common case. Both modify the nucleus of the noun phrase, but differently. Modifying genitive nouns in Irish specify a quale and provide additional detail. The syntactic construction used to encode attribution is also used to encode quantification, but the quantifier as an Irish core modifier precedes the modified noun. Unlike the other attributive uses of the genitive, the privileged syntactic argument (PSA) is the noun in the genitive. A noun followed by one of these quantifying terms may be an argument of the main noun, including as the subject of the clause. The quantifying nouns are core operators, and the attributive nouns are part of the nuclear periphery. The Noun-Genitive Noun structure is also used to encode an event as an attribute of the undergoer and is used to form progressive structures. The Verb-Undergoer use of the Noun-Genitive Noun structure is motivated by the parallels between clause and noun phrase structures. The Verb-Undergoer relation is a semantic link that is considered to be a core relation in RRG. Most languages have the same PSA for most syntactic constructions. In Irish generally, the actor is the subject and is the PSA in the common case. The default in Irish is for the undergoer to be the object and follow the subject in the common case. The progressive forms which use the verbal noun followed by the genitive case have a different structure, the structure of a noun phrase, and therefore have a different mapping of roles. This Verbal Noun-Undergoer structure in Irish has the same logical structure as a clause and the syntax of a noun phrase.

Analysis of the Noun-Genitive Noun structure in RRG terms highlights the nature of the differences between two patterns of modification and allows them to be more accurately characterised. The Noun-Genitive Noun template in Irish is shown to be multifunctional; the

parallelism in clause and Noun Phrase structure is exploited to extend the range of possible expression.

### **References**

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