

# Reconstructing morphosyntactic changes: the independent partitive genitive from the ancient Indo-European languages to Baltic and East Slavic

## 1. Introduction

The paper examines the diachronic development of the morphosyntactic properties of the independent (or bare) partitive genitive (henceforth: IPg) from Proto-Indo-European to Baltic and East Slavic. The evidence on the state-of-affairs in Proto-Indo-European is mainly based on the unequivocal morphosyntactic correlations across such ancient Indo-European languages as Vedic Sanskrit and Ancient Greek (Seržant 2012).

In order to start examining the historical development of a particular grammatical category, first, the typologically idiosyncratic profile thereof must be established in the course of the synchronic analysis. Such a profile should encompass the morphology involved, since the phonological make-up of the morphological devices generally represents the typologically most idiosyncratic facet of a category. It should furthermore contain the *lexical profile* (based on the lexical input restrictions for that category). The syntactic profile (i.e. the list of the syntactic properties) and the functional profile (the list of the functional properties) are, finally, least conducive of the typological idiosyncrasy.

An important prerequisite for the reconstruction of a syntactic category is that its morphological profile can be reconstructed into the proto-language (using the Historical-Comparative Method). The second important prerequisite is that the lexical profile, at least partly, could be reconstructed into the proto-language. If both prerequisites are found only then the development of that category's functional and syntactic profile can be scrutinized.

Both prerequisites are present with the independent partitive genitive in Baltic and East Slavic.

## 2. Subject properties in the subject position

As stated in, inter alia, Schwyzer and Debrunner (1950: 101), Luraghi (2003: 60) or Bauer (2007: 133-4), there has been no restriction for the IPg as to which syntactic position in the surface structure it may occupy. Thus, the IPg does not only override structural case in the ancient Indo-European languages but also datives (Conti and Luraghi 2010) or non-argumental accusatives (*accusativus graecus*); furthermore, it overrides also the accusative case of the controlled subjects in the *accusativus cum infinitivo* construction (Seržant 2012).

There it has also been argued that the IPg, while being in the subject position, triggers semantically-based verbal agreement and can be coordinated with nominatives.<sup>1</sup> None of these subject properties is attested with the IPg of Baltic and East Slavic.

To account for these facts, it has been suggested that the IPg in Classical Greek is governed by an implicit syntactic position, which can formally be defined as a *pro* that assumes case and number but provides no or an arbitrary reference (Seržant 2012). The ability of the *pro<sub>arb</sub>* to assume case explains the morphosyntactic behaviour of the IPg in the subject position: the *pro<sub>arb</sub>* - being case-marked with nominative and marked for number - triggers verbal agreement along its number (singular vs. plural) and coordinates with other nominatives in the sentence. Additionally, it can assume the thematic role and, hence, its occurrence is not restricted structurally.

As regards Baltic and Slavic, the main changes that distinguish the IPg of Baltic and East Slavic from the IPg in the ancient IE languages concern the properties of this empty category. First, Baltic and East Slavic have considerably restricted the occurrence of the IPg: it can override only structural case here. Secondly, the IPg cannot be coordinated with nominatives or trigger verbal agreement while being in the subject position. It combines only with the third person singular (neuter) of the verb with no regard to the logical number (*default agreement*). Thus, I assume that the type of the empty category has changed in the course of time from a *pro<sub>arb</sub>* inflected for number and case and controlling the indexation to *PRO<sub>arb</sub>* with no bearings on the indexation.

Finally, the *PRO<sub>arb</sub>* is completely lost in some vernaculars of North Russian. This loss of the empty head can be shown to be fully accomplished in those vernaculars where the genitive NP (originally embedded under the covert head) acquires the access to the verbal agreement (Markova 2008: 154; Seržant, in print).

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<sup>1</sup> The verb copies the logical singular vs. plural number of the subset (not the formal number of the superset).

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