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The Role of Kinship in Nominal Morphosyntax

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1 Introduction

The goal of this Thesis is to explain how kinship plays a role in the morphological exponence of both word and phrasal morphosyntax. The objective is two-fold and the structure of the thesis is divided accordingly.

In the first part, I provide an expanded typological analysis of kinship based Differential Possessive Marking (henceforth DPM) in the Romance languages, with special consideration of the Occitano-Romance languages, which have, until this point, been understudied in this regard, at least when compared to the Italo-Romance and Gallo-Italic languages. As for DPM, I will argue for the encoding of a special feature found on kinship terms. This first assumption will be falsified and the feature will need to be reformulated in order to account for the fact that not in every language does every kinship noun participate in DPM, and that there are even certain nouns, which are not kinship terms, that do participate in it. For this variation, I will introduce uniqueness as a syntactic feature. The languages that I will look at are those spoken on the Italian peninsula, as well as those others that, in the Romance Continuum I consider to be displaying DPM too, namely Catalan, Occitan, and Aragonese, following thus too typological groupings. French and Spanish both lack the phenomenon.

In the second part I present a theoretical proposal for the analysis of kinship terms that has the goal of being explanatorily adequate both in terms of accounting for the typological variation found in the kinship terminologies around the world, as well as for localising the trigger for DPM. For that, I assume that kinship nouns, while still being a part of the substantive lexicon and being headed by a categoriser little *n*, they lack a root, having instead a universal functional structure, which I name kin-fseq, composed of a bound anaphor and hierarchical relational features. This structure feeds into an underspecified morphology, causing syncretism patterns, while it is continuously and recursively shipped to LF, explaining both the derivation of kinship terms inside of the syntax, as well as the parametrisation of uniqueness on a subset of kinship nouns.

2 DPM in (Western) Romance

Before starting to delve into the language data, it is necessary to mention the origin of the terminology here. DPM is observed in the (Western) Romance languages and consists, as Pescarini (2025, p. 187): “I dub Differential Possessive Marking (DPM) the phenomenon of a language’s exhibiting specialised possessive forms in given syntactic contexts.” His study, however, does not provide a syntactic account for the phenomenon but does give an extensive account of the distribution of DPM across the Italian Peninsula and the Island of Sardinia.

The classification of the possessive elements in the DP proposed by Pescarini (2025, pp. 4–5) diverges from the tripartition made in Cardinaletti (1998):

1. Possessive determiners, which are found on the DP, have the same distribution as other determiners (i.e. articles and demonstratives), and thus are found in complementary distribution to them. They can only appear in prenominal position and are the only ones that one finds in prenominal position in languages such as French or Spanish. They cannot license NP ellipsis and are always definite.
2. Possessive adjectives, which are preceded by determiners, and which can occur both in prenominal, as well as in postnominal position, which are the modification positions that interest us, as the other two positions in which can be found, predicative and NP ellipsis, are not cases of actual NP modification.
3. Finally, the author talks about possessive pronouns, which are not nominal modifiers.

I concentrate my attention on prenominal possessives, which can be both adjectival possessives and possessive determiners. Building upon Cardinaletti (1998), who makes a tripartition of possessive elements, like that made too in Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) of pronominal elements in a broader sense, into strong, weak, and clitic, I focus on both weak and clitic forms, and I further take the terminology used in Alexiadou (2006) of “possessive determiner”.

From the recent typological work by Pescarini (2025) the following two main points regarding the distribution of the adjectival possessives along the Italian peninsula and adjacent islands can

be abstracted:

1. The (prenominal) adjectival possessive is found overall, except in Occitan,¹ Franco-Provençal,² Rhaeto-Romance (excl. Friulian) and some varieties of Piedmontese.
2. The position of the adjectival possessive in the DP is split, with the exception of the islands, along the Rome-Ancona isogloss bundle (cf. Pellegrini, 1977), with the north having it in prenominal position, while the south postpones it. Sicily constitutes an exception in the south, as it also has a prenominal adjectival possessive. On the island of Sardinia, the zone corresponding to Sassarese and Gallurese, which are part of Corsican (which in turn is descended from Old Tuscan), follow, like Tuscan, the northern pattern. The island of Corsica is not present in the AIS, although I venture to speculate that it would have the same northern distribution.³ Sardinian has a southern distribution, meaning that it predominantly favours the use of postnominal possessives, and that is in all cases, although it does not have possessive. The Catalan variety spoken in l'Alguer is not documented.

When it comes to DPM, we see that there are some northern Italo-Romance varieties, mostly between the Spezia-Rimini and the Rome-Ancona lines that use the adjectival possessive preceded by a determiner with singular kinship nouns. This is also the case with northern Lombard varieties. The rest tend to omit the article.

We see also that the presence of the article + adjectival possessive combination is higher and much more spread in the plural, except in the Occitan spoken in Piedmont, as well as some Piedmontese varieties, Sardinian, some Salentine and Neapolitan, as well as Romanesco, Friulian, and most of Ladin and Venetan. Pescarini (2025, p. 9) notes that “the syntax of plural kinship terms seldom differs from the one of non-kinship nouns, except for the dialects spoken in central Veneto, central Latium, and central southern Sardinia”.

¹NB: This refers to the Occitan spoken in the Valadas Occitanas in the region of Piedmont, although there is a linguistic enclave in Calabria, which genealogically also belongs to the same dialect group (Vivaropenc), but which has in part calqued the system used in the Calabrian varieties around it (cf. Baldi & Savoia, 2021).

²See also Baldi & Savoia (2020, 2021) for the influenced systems of the Franco-Provençal enclaves in Apulia.

³This turns out not to be the case (see section 2.1.4).

Enclitic possessives with kinship nouns are only found in continental Italo-Romance below the Roma-Ancona Line. And in the plural only half of the places given in the atlas also use the enclitic form. It is these varieties which are interesting as the kinship noun still gets a possessive enclitic when we should expect it not to be the case.

Pescarini (2025) reduces the patterns of DPM found in what he calls Italo-Romance to the following two:

1. Languages that have default postnominal adjectival possessives and enclitic kinship possessives.
2. Languages that have prenominal adjective possessives and that also have “a dedicated series of possessives that is restricted to predicative position and licenses NP ellipsis”.

I argue that there is a 3rd pattern, which I attribute to its morphological definition of DPM, which is the one found in Italian, where the prenominal adjectival possessive is in complementary distribution with the definite article in NPs headed by a kinship term, but which do not have a distinct morphological set for it. And to that end I also add a fourth pattern, which is that of Catalan, Aragonese and Aranese Occitan, that have the same syntactic pattern as Italian, but that do have a distinct morphological set of (prenominal) possessives for kinship nouns. This means that if an article is missing from a possessive construction, it is because the possessive is found in its position, blocking its insertion. As such, *mia* in a context such as 1, is a possessive determiner, just like *ma* in 2

(1) Italian

Mia madre.
my.F mother
My mother.

(2) Catalan

Ma mare.
my.F mother
My mother.

The theoretical background for this phenomenon already stems back to studies on Italo-Romance languages and their possessive and pronominal systems, from both a typological view as well as from earlier formal studies on possessive and pronominal variation (most notably Cardinaletti, 1998; Cardinaletti & Giusti, 2019; Cardinaletti & Starke, 1999).

In this section I provide a revised overview of Romance languages that display DPM (or that belong to a subgroup that shows DPM), including those already commented upon in Pescarini (2025), as well as Occitano-Romance languages, i.e. Aragonese, Catalan, and Occitan, which I argue also have DPM. As the focus of the thesis lies in morphosyntax, morphophonological differences (of which there are a lot) will be given no attention. Gender, which in many of the languages can be syncretic depending on number or person, will only be treated if it affects DPM.⁴ I will refrain from using the term Italo-Romance in the same sense as Pescarini (2025), and reserve it for the languages in the Romance continuum that developed from Latin below the La Spezia-Rimini Line, while I will use the term Gallo-Italic to refer to those which have developed above it. Venetan and the Rhaeto-Romance languages (Friulian, Ladin, and Romansh) are given their own subsections. To avoid any confusion with Number, as it is a feature that appears on both the possessee, which is represented by the kinship terms, and the possessor, represented by the possessive element, 1_{PL}, 2_{PL}, and 3_{PL} possessives will be described as 4th person, 5th person, and 6th person possessives respectively.

2.1 Italo-Romance

2.1.1 Sicilian and Calabrian

From the description of Sicilian given by Fortuna (2002), the possessives do not seem to make a distinction between classes of nouns and can appear in both positions. If they appear in post-nominal position, the noun is preceded by a determiner. If the possessive appears in prenominal position, it appears in a reduced form and without the presence of any kind of determiner. The prenominal possessive in Sicilian can thus be said to be purely determiner-like, coinciding

⁴The interaction of Person and Number, or really just Number, with DPM is omnipresent, contrary to what happens with gender.

with many Occitan varieties, as well as Franco-Provençal, and French.⁵ The prenominal forms match the description by Ledgeway (2016a, p. 258): “Excepting the province of Potenza, extreme southern Calabria, and Sicily (Sic. *mè/tò maritu* ‘my/your.SG husband’), modern dialects present a dual series of adjectival and enclitic possessives.” The plural forms, even in prenominal position, need the presence of a determiner, which makes me suspect that in Sicilian we might also be dealing with a case of DPM.⁶

In Calabrian, some singular kinship nouns, just like in Neapolitan, take an enclitic possessive, and in the variety of Ardùri,⁷ there is also a form for the third person singular, as Masi (2020, p. 11) shows.

2.1.2 Neapolitan

Under the term Neapolitan I have included the so-called *dialetti meridiolani (intermedi)*, which span most of the former Kingdom of Naples. This variety, like all varieties below the Roma-Ancona isogloss bundle, places, as a default, the possessive adjective after the noun. Likewise, it also uses an enclitic possessive, although only when the possessor is a first or second person singular, with kinship nouns, and additionally with the word for ‘house’: *caste* (‘your house’), *pàtrete* (‘your father’), *fràtete* (‘your brother’), *sòrete* (‘your sister’), *marítete* (‘your husband’), *cuggínete* (‘your cousin’), etc. Granatiero (1987, pp. 48–49). Fierro (1995, p. 88) only mentions for Neapolitan proper the use of the enclitic possessives with ‘father’ and ‘mother’.

In some varieties, such as the one described in near the city of Benevento, the enclitic possessive is used with kinship nouns (of which Iannace, 1996, p. 32 only mentions ‘father’, ‘mother’, ‘brother’ and ‘sister’), despite only being morphologically realised for the 1st and 2nd person singular, it concords in gender and number with the kinship noun.^{8 9} Furthermore, the definite

⁵Despite this, there is no proof to Fortuna’s affirmation that this determiner possessive should be a loan from French. Short forms such as *mo*, *to* and *so* are derived from already existing forms in later Latin and are attested in other Romance languages that did not evolve in contact with French (Grandgent, 2009, pp. 162–163)

⁶Even in the example given in Ledgeway, the noun used is a core kinship term.

⁷*Ardore* in Italian.

⁸Although Neapolitan proper does not allow plural inflection (Bichelli, 1974, p. 101)

⁹Ledgeway (2016a, p. 258) mentions that the most common case is for enclitic possessives not to show agreement.

article is obligatory in the plural.¹⁰ See the examples below, based on Iannace (1996, p. 32):¹¹

- (4) *Fràtimo.*
brother=my.M.SG
My brother.
- (5) *I fràtimi.*
the.M.PL brother.PL=my.M.PL
My brothers.
- (6) *Sòrama.*
sister=my.F.SG
My sister.
- (7) *I ssòrama.*
the sister.PL=my.F.PL
My sisters.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mio</i>	<i>mia</i>	<i>mieje</i>	<i>meje</i>
2nd	<i>tujo</i>	<i>toja</i>	<i>tuoje</i>	<i>toje</i>
3rd	<i>sujo</i>	<i>soja</i>	<i>suoje</i>	<i>soje</i>
4th	<i>nuosto</i>	<i>nosta</i>	<i>nuoste</i>	<i>noste</i>
5th	<i>vuosto</i>	<i>vosta</i>	<i>vuoste</i>	<i>voste</i>
6th	<i>loro</i>	<i>loro</i>	<i>loro</i>	<i>loro</i>

Table 1: Adjectival possessives in the Neapolitan variety spoken in and around the city of Naples proper, the following possessive adjectives are given both in Fierro (1995, p. 88) and Bichelli (1974, p. 99).

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¹⁰Manzini & Savoia (2005, p. 675) include a single instance of this phenomenon, but in the singular, and with a third person enclitic:

- (3) *La mammà-sa*
the.F.SG mother-3P.POSS
His/her mother.

¹¹Note that the reduplication of the <s> at the beginning of the noun in the fourth example spells out the so-called *raddoppiamento fonosintattico*, which in this variety is triggered in plural feminine nouns when preceded by the definite article, which in this variety is syncretic for gender when inflected for plural number (Iannace, 1996, p. 11).

¹²Here I follow the spelling given in Bichelli (1974), where <j> represents /j/.

2.1.3 Central Italian

In Central Italian, in Italian often referred to as *dialetti mediani*, which is spoken, excluding Tuscany, below La Spezia-Rimini¹³ line and above more or less the northern border of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, but including the province of l'Aquila. A further distinction made in Loporcaro & Paciaroni (2016, pp. 228–229) is between median dialects *stricto sensu* and *perimedial* ones, cut by the Rome-Ancona isogloss bundle (cf. Pellegrini, 1977).

In the median varieties, kinship nouns, as well as (sometimes) the words for house and master, the possessive is enclitic, just like in Neapolitan, and it can in some cases to be found with plural kinship nouns Loporcaro & Paciaroni (2016), with the authors mentioning that in some towns, such as Sonnino, the possessive also has an enclitic form for the 4th and 5th persons. A prenominal, article-less possessive, which can therefore be identified as possessive determiner, can be found in Terni (the authors cite Moretti et al. 1987, p. 114), and this happens to be the case, as Moretti gives *mi patre*, *mi matre* and *su fiju*, as three examples of the DPM prenominal possessive construction, which coexists with the enclitic possessive construction (also a DPM construction; basically the Neapolitan DPM construction *par excellence*), giving *sorema* and *mojjema* as examples, while implying (with “*ecc.*”, i.e. *et cetera*) that there are more instances of both constructions, but without saying if they are found in free distribution or, if they are found in complementary distribution, which kinship terms take one or the other (Moretti et al. 1987, p. 114).

Taking a look at Romanesco, the variety spoken in Rome, we see that singular kinship nouns (including *moglie* ‘wife’) can take a prenominal possessive, which is usually impoverished, while in the plural, the possessive usually appears like with other common nouns, in postnominal position (Bernhard, 1998, pp. 217–219). In fact, the division between varieties that have a prenominal or postnominal possessive passes just below the city of Rome and is part of the isogloss bundle Rome-Ancona (cf. Pellegrini, 1977), meaning that Romanesco is expected to have a default prenominal possessive, without excluding the possibility of, at the same time, having an enclitic possessive for kinship nouns, while the variety spoken in L'Aquila, below

¹³Although in the Atlas by Pellegrini (1977) the line ends more to the south, near Senigallia.

the isogloss, defaults its possessives to postnominal position:

- (8) Based on Narducci (2020, p. 25), variety spoken in L'Aquila:¹⁴

Ju postu mé.

the place/seat my

My seat.

2.1.4 Tuscan, Corsican, and Standard Italian

Possessives in Tuscan and Corsican,¹⁵ as well as in Standard Italian, are found in prenominal position and preceded by the definite article. There are some localised varieties, such as the one spoken on the island of Elba, as well as southern Corsican, that also make use of the enclitic possessive with some kinship nouns (just like Neapolitan does), which is a construction that was much more common, even in mainland Tuscany, during the Middle Ages (cf. Ledgeway, 2016b, p. 218). Contrary to Standard Italian and Corsican, Tuscan proper does not have DPM.

- (9) Tuscan (based on Ledgeway, 2016b, p. 222)

**(La) mi mamma.*

the.F.SG mine mother

My mother.

- (10) Tuscan (based on Ledgeway, 2016b, p. 222)

**(La) mi casa.*

the.F.SG mine house

My house.

¹⁴The author gives the Italian translation *Il mio posto*.

¹⁵Tuscan is the Romance language spoken mostly in Tuscany, below the La Spezia-Rimini Line. It tends to be grouped together with Corsican, which derived from the Medieval Coastal Tuscan spoken by Pisan merchants and settlers to the island. Italian, as in the national language of Italy, and the one which is taught internationally, is based in great part off the Florentine variety, which ended up being used as a literary *koiné*, although it does not share many of the innovations that much of Tuscan underwent later on, such as the *gorgia toscana* (Ledgeway, 2016b, p. 206).

2.2 Gallo-Italic

2.2.1 Ligurian

In Ligurian, possessives are found in prenominal position and are normally preceded by the definite article (Toso, 1997, p. 64), except with kinship nouns (Manzini & Savoia, 2005, pp. 686–687). Except in the 4th and 5th person, possessives are not inflected, at least not in the Genoan variety described by Toso (see below).

(11) Based on Toso (1997, p. 100):

A mæ casa.
the.F.SG mine house

My house/home.

(12) Example from Varese Ligure, based on Manzini & Savoia (2005, p. 687):¹⁶

Mia seu.
my.F.SG sister

My sister.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mæ</i>	<i>mæ</i>	<i>mæ</i>	<i>mæ</i>
2nd	<i>tò</i>	<i>tò</i>	<i>tò</i>	<i>tò</i>
3rd	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>
4th	<i>nòstro</i>	<i>nòstra</i>	<i>nòstri</i>	<i>nòstre</i>
5th	<i>vòstro</i>	<i>vòstra</i>	<i>vòstri</i>	<i>vòstre</i>
6th	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>

Table 2: Prenominal possessives in the Genovese variety of Ligurian according to Toso (1997, p. 99)

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¹⁶For [ø] in Manzini & Savoia (2005, p. 687)

¹⁷Toso also mentions the existence of the secondary forms *teu* /tø/ and *seu* /sø/, in place of *tò* and *sò*, but only with kinship terms. These forms are also given in Manzini & Savoia (2005, p. 687) for the local variety spoken in the town of Varese Ligure, east of Genova and northwest of La Spezia, as shown in the example above the table.

2.2.2 Piedmontese

In Piedmontese, Brero & Bertodatti (2001) and Grosso (2002) assert that the possessive occurs in prenominal position and without an article (what I call a possessive determiner, although the authors yet call adjectival possessive), with all kinds of nouns, although the masculine plural can be built as an adjectival possessive. All of them agree in calling possessive pronoun that which is found not in an adnominal position, and which in Piedmontese is also easily identifiable for always being preceded by the definite article (Brero & Bertodatti, 2001, p. 79, as well as Grosso, 2002, pp. 73–74).

(13) From Grosso (2002, p. 52)

Ēl tèit ëd toa ca.
the roof of your house

The roof of your house.

Despite this, there are still some varieties of Piedmontese that do use an adjectival prenominal form, as is noted in Regis (2022), who also notes that the distribution of both adjectival and determiner forms in Old Piedmontese was much more varied, and didn't seem to follow any kind of featural restriction such as uniqueness.

As for the postnominal possessives, Brero & Bertodatti (2001) and Grosso (2002) do not mention them, and Villata (2012) reduces them to some idiomatic forms with some nouns, and always without the definite article, just like we have with Catalan *casa meua*.¹⁸

As they occur without the definite article (Grosso, 2002; Renzi, 2006; Tosco et al. 2023; Villata, 2012); however, the possessive remains morphologically identical, just like in Italian (Ledge-way, 2016b).¹⁹

¹⁸Although note the example above by Grosso (2002, p. 52) in which house uses the possessive determiner, which is also given in Brero & Bertodatti (2001, p. 58).

¹⁹The isogloss for this phenomenon should be put at, approximately, the Rome-Ancona Line.

²⁰Grosso and Villata use two different orthographic conventions that mostly affect the representation of vowel phonemes. Here I use Grosso's orthography, which follows the orthography based on Pacotto (1930). Villata uses an his own orthographical convention. For the differences between the two, I forward the reader to Coluzzi et al. (2019).

²¹The masculine plural form of the determiner possessive clearly shows that it is found in D, as it gets the inflection of the possessive.

²²See Grosso (2002, p. 52) for the variation in the forms. Benincà et al. (2016) show the secondary forms for the variety of Piedmontese that they call Cairese, and in the same table also show the forms for the Turinese variety, which do not inflect for the plural masculine.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mè</i>	<i>mia</i>	<i>ij mè / mèi</i>	<i>mie</i>
2nd	<i>tò</i>	<i>toa</i>	<i>ij tò / tòi</i>	<i>toe</i>
3rd	<i>sò</i>	<i>soa</i>	<i>ij sò / sòi</i>	<i>soe</i>
4th	<i>nòst(r)</i>	<i>nòst(r)a</i>	<i>ij nòst((r)i)</i>	<i>nòst(r)e</i>
5th	<i>vòst(r)</i>	<i>vòst(r)a</i>	<i>ij vòst((r)i)</i>	<i>vòst(r)e</i>
6th	<i>sò</i>	<i>soa</i>	<i>ij sò / sòi</i>	<i>soe</i>

Table 3: Prenominal possessives in Piedmontese, based on Grosso (2002, p. 52) and Villata (2012, p. 49).

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2.2.3 Lombard

The western variety spoken in Cascinagrossa,²³ however, does have DPM with, at least, ‘father’ and ‘mother’, but not with ‘son’ Castellani (2002, pp. 36–37). The possessive is invariable, except in the feminine singular of the 4th and 5th persons (*nòstra*, *vòstra*). It needs to be mentioned, however, that the variety spoken in Cascinagrossa, as well as the one spoken in Borbanee/Borbané,²⁴ are quite western varieties that can be seen as transitioning towards Piedmontese.

(14) Based on Castellani (2002, p. 37):

E’ me fiò l’è brav.
the my son 3CL.is good

My son is good.

(15) Based upon the examples given in Castellani (2002, p. 37):

*(*E’) me par l’è brav.*
the my father 3CL.is good

My father is good.

Below is a table of the prenominal adjectival possessives used in the Milanese variety of Lombard, based upon the forms given in Benincà et al. (2016, p. 198), who also mention that, while the possessive is by default preceded by the definite article, this is not the case with some kinship nouns.²⁵

²³A village in the municipality of Lissandria (*Alessandria* in Italian), in southeastern Piedmont.

²⁴*Borgomanero* in Italian.

²⁵Benincà et al. (2016, p. 198): “*Within the NP the possessive is generally preceded by a determiner, by default the definite article, but, as in the standard [probably meaning Standard Italian], this is usually omitted*

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mè</i>	<i>mia</i>	<i>mè</i>	<i>mè</i>
2nd	<i>tò</i>	<i>tua</i>	<i>tò</i>	<i>tò</i>
3rd	<i>sò</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>
4th	<i>nòster</i>	<i>nòstra</i>	<i>nòster</i>	<i>nòster</i>
5th	<i>vòster</i>	<i>vòstra</i>	<i>vòster</i>	<i>vòster</i>
6th	<i>sò</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>sò</i>	<i>sò</i>

Table 4: Prenominal possessives in Lombard, based on Table 13.4 in Benincà et al. (2016, p. 198)

26,27,28

2.2.4 Emilian

In Emilian, at least in the local variety spoken in Bologna, Mainoldi (2000, p. 33) states that the adnominal possessive is used preceded by the article,²⁹ unless the head noun is a singular kinship term. The pattern is like the one in Italian.

(16) Mainoldi (2000, p. 33)

Mì mujêr.

my wife

My wife.

(17) Mainoldi (2000, p. 33)³⁰

Mì spåusa

my wife

My wife.

with singular names of relatives in most northern dialects, including Friulian—although this does not seem to be the case in eastern and Alpine Lombard, or Romagnol. The omission of the definite article can be restricted to a subgroup of kinship names,[...]”. The authors then go on to talk briefly on Venetan and the Piedmontese of Turin.

²⁶The open mid vowels written in the original with the IPA I have transcribed here using <è> and <ò>.

²⁷The variety of Pavia is completely invariable in the 1st/2nd/3rd persons, and the one spoken in Lodi makes a full gender and number distinction in the 4th and 5th persons aside from having specific forms for both the feminine singular and feminine plural in the 1st/2nd/3rd/6th persons (cf. Beretta, 1998, p. 44).

²⁸Comoletti (2002, p. 38) gives the spellings *toa* and *soa*, instead of *tua* and *sua*, all the other forms remaining the same. The same is true for Pagani (1945, p. 39) with the spellings *tôa* and *sôa*.

²⁹that means that it is found in prenominal position. At least, from the examples that he gives, and by the fact that he does not mention the appearance of the adjectival possessive in postnominal position, nor gives any examples of it, there is no reason to infer that they appear after the noun.

³⁰Both words for wife get marked for DPM.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mî</i>	<i>mî</i>	<i>mî</i>	<i>mî</i>
2nd	<i>tô</i>	<i>tô</i>	<i>tû</i>	<i>tâu</i>
3rd	<i>sô</i>	<i>sô</i>	<i>sû</i>	<i>sâu</i>
4th	<i>nòster</i>	<i>nòstra</i>	<i>nûster</i>	<i>nòstri</i>
5th	<i>vòster</i>	<i>vòstra</i>	<i>vûster</i>	<i>vòstri</i>
6th	<i>sô</i>	<i>sô</i>	<i>sû</i>	<i>sâu</i>

Table 5: Possessives in the Bolognese variety of Emilian, based on the table in Mainoldi (2000, p. 32)

2.2.5 Romagnol

Romagnol is the Romance language that can be said to form a dialect continuum with Emilian to its east, and which borders Median Italian at Senigallia, marking the eastern La Spezia-Rimini/Senigallia Line.³¹ Just like in Emilian, in Romagnol, pronominal possessives do not take the definite article if they modify a kinship noun. (Pelliciardi, 1977, p. 72) only lists as exceptions the nouns *bab* and *mama*, which would be to their Romagnol equivalents *pê* and *mê* what *dad* and *mom* would be to *father* and *mother* in English.

(18) Based on Pelliciardi (1977, p. 72):

Mi mê.
my mother
My mother.

A context in which kinship terms do make use of the common construction (def.art + poss.adj) is vocatives:

(19) Based on Pelliciardi (1977, p. 72):

E mi fiôl!
the my son
(My) son!

With certain words, such as house, the possessive is found in postnominal position.³² It also takes on a different, longer form.³³

³¹Rimini is still inside the Romagnol linguistic domain Pellegrini (cf. 1977).

³²Like in Catalan: *A casa meva*.

³³Unlike Catalan, but like Venetan, as shown in section 2.3.

(20) Based on Pelliciardi (1977, p. 72):

A ca mèja.
to house mine

To my house.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>
2nd	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>
3rd	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>
4th	<i>nöstar</i>	<i>nöstra</i>	<i>nöstar</i>	<i>nöstar</i>
5th	<i>vöstar</i>	<i>vöstra</i>	<i>vöstar</i>	<i>vöstar</i>
6th	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>

Table 6: Prenominal possessives in Romagnol, adapted from Pelliciardi (1977, p. 70).

2.3 Venetan

The examples for Venetan are taken from Cardinaletti & Giusti (2019, p. 142), who in turn take them from Cardinaletti (1998). The article and possessive forms (both prenominal and postnominal) I have crosschecked with the *Manuàl Gramaticale Xenerale de la Léngua Vènetà e le só varianti*, by Brunelli (2005), as well as with Belloni (2009).

(21) *El me libro.*
the my book
My book.

(22) *El libro mio.*
the book mine
My book.

We further have the possibility in Venetan, at least in the variety spoken in Mira (Cardinaletti & Giusti, 2019, p. 144), of having a possessive determiner with a plural kinship noun in concomitant distribution with the adjectival possessive, which, again, is homomorphous and does not inflect for gender or number:

(23) Taken from Cardinaletti & Giusti (2019, p. 144):

So fradei.
his/her brothers

His/her brothers.

(24) Taken from Cardinaletti & Giusti (2019, p. 144):

I so fradei.
the his/her brothers

His/her brothers.

The lack of marking is said to be characteristic in the languages spoken above the Rome-Ancona Line, as well as in Sicilian, “Weak possessives in prenominal position are the unmarked choice in northern dialects, western central dialects down to northern Lazio, and Sicilian dialects [sic!]” (Cardinaletti & Giusti, 2019, p. 143).³⁴ The languages south of the Roma-Ancona Line only allow postnominal possessives with common nouns. In such languages, the postnominal ones can also be weak, which is what is proposed for certain varieties of Neapolitan. According to Belloni (2009, pp. 99–100), the possessive determiner can also appear in the plural, and this is further confirmed in Masi (2020, pp. 6–8).

(25) Based on Belloni (2009, p. 100):

To cugine.
your cousins

Your cousins.

2.4 Rhaeto-Romance

2.4.1 Ladin

In Ladin, the adnominal possessive is found always before the noun and without the article, it has furthermore, in the masculine (both singular and plural), an optional reduced form for the

³⁴Leaving aside the ambiguous terminology, the authors seem now not to have any problems in affirming a broad spread of this phenomenon, despite having restricted it before to a single dialect of Sicilian. They cite the AIS map number 1554, but if one looks into it one sees that points 817 and 836 do not match the generalisation (although it could be the case that these are instances of the so called Gallo-Italic of Sicily). More or less the same ratio is found in Venetan.

first, second, and third/sixth persons, otherwise, the possessives are morphological identical to the forms used as pronouns, with the difference being that the possessive pronouns (which substituted the whole noun phrase) are composed of the possessive element itself preceded by the definite article (Gallmann et al. 2010, pp. 87–88).

(26) Based on Gallmann et al. (2010, p. 87):

(*I) *si ciavëi lonc.*
the his/her hair long

His/her long hair.

(27) Based on Gallmann et al. (2010, p. 88):

Sü ciavëis lunć.
his/her hair.PL long.PL

His/her long hairs.

Person	M.SG. ADJ.	M.SG. PRON.	M.PL. ADJ.	M.PL. PRON.	F.SG.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mi/mie</i>	<i>mie</i>	<i>mi/miei</i>	<i>miei</i>	<i>mia</i>	<i>mies</i>
2nd	<i>ti/tie</i>	<i>tie</i>	<i>ti/tiei</i>	<i>tiei</i>	<i>tia</i>	<i>ties</i>
3rd	<i>si/sie</i>	<i>sie</i>	<i>si/siei</i>	<i>siei</i>	<i>sia</i>	<i>sies</i>
4th	<i>nost</i>	<i>nost</i>	<i>nosc</i>	<i>nosc</i>	<i>nosta</i>	<i>nostes</i>
5th	<i>vost</i>	<i>vost</i>	<i>vosc</i>	<i>vosc</i>	<i>vosta</i>	<i>vostes</i>
6th	<i>si/sie</i>	<i>sie</i>	<i>si/siei</i>	<i>siei</i>	<i>sia</i>	<i>sies</i>

Table 7: Ladin possessives. Table based on the one in Valentini et al. (2001, p. 49)SPELL (2001:49)

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2.4.2 Friulian

Friulian shows DPM, although the forms of both the adjectival possessive and the possessive determiner are syncretic, and there seems to be no restriction on plurality.

(28) Based on Nazzi Matalon (1977, pp. 50–51):

No ai ancjemò cjapade la mê decision.
not have.1SG still taken.F.SG the.F.SG mine.F.SG decision

I have still not taken a decision.

³⁵The monovocalic forms in the adjectival masculine singular and masculine plural possessives correspond to the variety spoken in Val Gherdëina (Gallmann et al. 2010, p. 91).

(29) Based on Nazzi Matalon (1977, pp. 50–51):

No ur à pandût nuje a siei fradis.
 not 3PL.CL has.3SG explained nothing to his.M.PL brothers

He has not said anything to his brother.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>gno</i>	<i>mê</i>	<i>miei</i>	<i>mês</i>
2nd	<i>to</i>	<i>tô</i>	<i>tiei</i>	<i>tôs</i>
3rd	<i>so</i>	<i>sô</i>	<i>siei</i>	<i>sôs</i>
4th	<i>nestri</i>	<i>nestre</i>	<i>nestris</i>	<i>nestris</i>
5th	<i>vestri</i>	<i>vestre</i>	<i>vestris</i>	<i>vestris</i>
6th	<i>lôr</i>	<i>lôr</i>	<i>lôr</i>	<i>lôr</i>

Table 8: Possessive adjectives in Friulian, based on Nazzi Matalon (1977, pp. 50–51).

2.4.3 Romansh

In the variety of the Lower Engiadina (Ganzoni, 1983, p. 49), as well as the one in Upper Engiadina (Ganzoni, 1977, p. 50) and in Surselvan Romansh (Spescha, 1989, pp. 346–347),³⁶ the possessive occurs in prenominal position always without the definite article, regardless of the kind of noun that it takes, or of the plurality.³⁷

In the Surmiran variety the prenominal possessive is preceded by the definite article, except when the noun is a kinship term (Signorell, 1987, p. 58). Surmiran displays DPM, while the rest of the Romansh domain, does not.

(30) Based on Signorell (1987, p. 58):

La mia clav.
 the mine key

My key.

(31) Based on Signorell (1987, p. 58):

*(*La) mia mamma.*
 (the) mine mom

My mom.

³⁶Another thing that is mentioned in Spescha (1989, p. 350) is that the predicative possessive takes its own distinct form, different from the one taken in the possessive pronoun construction, which is built like in the other Romance languages as a standalone definite article plus the adjectival possessive.

³⁷It is however mentioned, at least for Surselvan, that the definite article does appear in older texts and in poetry (Spescha, 1989, p. 347).

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mieu</i>	<i>mia /ma</i>	<i>meus</i>	<i>mias /mas</i>
2nd	<i>tieu</i>	<i>tia /ta</i>	<i>teus</i>	<i>tias /tas</i>
3rd	<i>sieu</i>	<i>sia /sa</i>	<i>seus</i>	<i>sias /sas</i>
4th	<i>nos</i>	<i>nossa</i>	<i>noss</i>	<i>nossas</i>
5th	<i>vos</i>	<i>vossa</i>	<i>voss</i>	<i>vossas</i>
6th	<i>lur</i>	<i>lur</i>	<i>lur</i>	<i>lur</i>

Table 9: Adjectival possessives in Romansh from Upper Engiadina, based on Ganzoni (1977, p. 49).

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Specific for the variety of the Upper Engiadina, which is the one illustrated above, the words for father and brother, *bap* and *frer*, appear to take the plural form even in the singular: *mieu*(*s) *bap* (‘my father’).

2.5 Sardinian

In both main varieties of Sardinian, Campidanese and Logudorese, the possessive is always found in postnominal position, while the definite article, which is found before the noun, is obligatory (unless another determiner is being used), except for certain kinship nouns (Blasco Ferrer, 1994, p. 98):³⁹

(32) Logudorese example, based on Blasco Ferrer (1994, p. 98):

Sa domo mea.

the house mine

My house.

(33) Logudorese example, based on Blasco Ferrer (1994, p. 98):

Babo tuo no est in domo.

father yours not is in house.

Your father is not home.

M. A. Jones (1993, p. 44) also expands this to what he calls terms of endearment, giving the

³⁸Also applicable to the other varieties mentioned. In the variety of Lower Engiadina, the stem vowels of the masculine 1st/2nd/3rd persons are *-ei-* instead of *-ieu-*, and the singular and the plural forms end with an *-s*, i.e. *meis* instead of *mieu* (Ganzoni, 1983, p. 49).

³⁹See also Manzini & Savoia (2005, pp. 702–704), where they give examples from multiple Sardinian varieties, even with 4th and 5th person possessors.

example *coro meu* (lit. ‘my heart’, the author gives the translation ‘my darling’),⁴⁰ although the example is given without any context and resembles that of vocative constructions, which are also used in other Romance languages, such as Catalan, and which also coincide in the postnominal ordering of the possessive (*Amic meu!*, ‘(My) friend!’). This makes me conclude that, at least this example in particular, is not an instance of DPM in the sense that I am discussing in the paper.⁴¹

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>meu</i>	<i>mea</i>	<i>meos</i>	<i>meas</i>
2nd	<i>tuo</i>	<i>tia</i>	<i>teus</i>	<i>tias</i>
3rd	<i>suo</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>suos</i>	<i>suas</i>
4th	<i>nostru</i>	<i>nostra</i>	<i>nostros</i>	<i>nostras</i>
5th	<i>bostru</i>	<i>bostra</i>	<i>bostros</i>	<i>bostras</i>
6th	<i>issoro</i>	<i>issoro</i>	<i>issoro</i>	<i>issoro</i>

Table 10: Logudorese Sardinian possessives, according to Blasco Ferrer (1994, pp. 97–98).

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>miu</i>	<i>mia</i>	<i>mius</i>	<i>mias</i>
2nd	<i>tuu</i>	<i>tia</i>	<i>tuus</i>	<i>tuas</i>
3rd	<i>suu</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>suus</i>	<i>suas</i>
4th	<i>nostu</i>	<i>nosta</i>	<i>nostus</i>	<i>nostas</i>
5th	<i>bostu</i>	<i>bosta</i>	<i>bostus</i>	<i>bostas</i>
6th	<i>insoru</i>	<i>insoru</i>	<i>insoru</i>	<i>insoru</i>

Table 11: Campidanese Sardinian possessives, according to Blasco Ferrer (1994, pp. 97–98).

2.6 Occitano-Romance

In this subsection I’ll provide an analysis for the Occitano-Romance languages: Catalan, Aragonese, and Occitan. I follow Blasco Ferrer (2019) in having Aragonese too in this grouping, due to its morphosyntactic affinity to the other two languages, which is also evidenced in that it, like still some Occitan varieties,⁴² still preserves a go-past (Badia i Margarit, 1947; Buesa

⁴⁰We would seem to have thus a situation not unlike that of Catalan, which also has DPM with certain inalienable terms beyond its own subset of kinship nouns.

⁴¹It is also noted in Manzini & Savoia (2005, p. 661), although wrt the enclitic possessive in southern Central varieties and in Neapolitan, that its cooccurrence with postnominal possessives does not point to a same origin, mentioning the varieties of southern Marche and southern Calabria, which despite having enclitic possessives for kinship nouns, use prenominal possessives for all other nouns. This also applies to the Tuscan spoken on the island of Elba and to southern Corsican, as discussed in Section 2.1.4. In Sardinian no enclitic possessives with kinship nouns are found, despite the language having, by default, postnominal possessives.

⁴²Concretely that spoken in Calabria (Gardiòl), as well as the Gascon spoken in Bearn (cf. Schlieben-Lange, 1971, p. 165, as cited in Jacobs, 2011, p. 236).

Oliver, 1988; Nagore Laín, 1989; Plaza Boya, 1990).⁴³ As already mentioned in the introduction, these three languages (although in the case of Occitan, not all varieties show DPM) make use of a clitic form of the possessive, which is found in complementary distribution with the definite article, just like is the case with Italian, as well as the Gallo-Italic languages (Piedmontese, Lombard, Emilian, Romagnol, and Ligurian) and Venetan.

2.6.1 Catalan

Catalan, on the other hand, not only displays a lack of the definite article with kinship nouns but also has a separate set of possessive elements that differ from the possessive adjectives, which I identify as the clitic elements in the tripartition made by Cardinaletti (1998) and subsequent works. If not stated otherwise, the Catalan examples are representative of my own native variety, which is, broadly speaking, Central Catalan.⁴⁴

- (34) *La meva mare.*
 the mine mother
 My mother.

- (35) *La meva forqueta.*
 the mine fork
 My fork.

- (36) *Ma mare.*
 my mother
 My mother.

- (37) **Ma forqueta.*
 my fork
 My fork.

⁴³For the consolidation of Occitano-Romance as a grouping, see also Juge (2007).

⁴⁴This is the variety spoken in and around Barcelona, Manresa, Vilafranca del Penedès, up to Tarragona, and Girona. Regarding the variety spoken in Girona and its vegueria (up to the Pyrenees and Mediterranean coast), it has traditionally been regarded as an subdialect of Central Catalan, although whether it should have been a matter of debate lately (cf. Gros i Lladós, 2024, 2025, 2026).

We see that the use of the possessive determiner in Catalan, beyond being limited to a subset of kinship terms, is also facultative and appears in competition with the adjectival possessive. The phenomenon was already noted in Picallo (1994), as well as in Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001, p. 210), who reproduce the following table from Alcover & Moll (1956) for the possessive determiner *mon*:

Noun	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
father	+	+	+				+	+	+	+	+	+
brother	+	+		+	+	+			+	+	+	+
uncle			+			+	+	+	+	+	+	+
cousin				+		+	+	+	+	+		+
brother-in-law						+	+	+			+	
nephew							+	+		+	+	
father-in-law					+							
godfather									+			+
grandfather												+

Table 12: Table showing the distribution of the Catalan 1st person masculine singular (*mon*) possessive determiner with several kinship nouns in 12 different varieties found in Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001, p. 210), who attribute it to Alcover & Moll (1956).

Looking at the entry for the word *mon* in the online version of the Diccionari Alcover-Moll, which is the digitised version of the work that Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001) refer to, *mon* is found to have the following distributions:

Noun	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l
father	+	+	+	+				+	+	+	+	+
brother		+		+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+
uncle			+	+			+	+	+	+	+	+
cousin					+		+	+	+	+	+	+
brother-in-law							+	+		+	+	
nephew								+			+	
father-in-law						+						
godfather									+	+		+
grandfather										+	+	+

Table 13: Reworked version of table 12.

- (a) Rosselló, Benissa, Patró, Mallorca, Menorca
- (b) Falset (southern Catalonia), Eivissa, Alguer (Sardinia)
- (c) Benassal, Alcalà de X., Castelló, Benigani, Gandia, Pego
- (d) Molvedre, València, Sueca
- (e) Igualada (central Catalonia)
- (f) Ponts
- (g) Lleida (western Catalonia)
- (h) Granadella
- (i) Riba-roja (south-western Catalonia)
- (j) Tortosa (extreme southern Catalonia)
- (k) Fraga (*Franja d'Aragó*)
- (l) Sant Llorenç de Morunys

From here, the following correspondences can be drawn: **a** matches with no pattern, **b** matches with 1 and 2, **c** matches with 3, **d** matches with no pattern, **e** matches with 4, **f** matches with 5, **g** matches with 6, **h** matches with 7 and 8, **i** matches with 9, **j** matches with no pattern, **k** matches with no pattern either, **l** matches with 12, 10 matches with no other pattern, 11 matches with no other pattern.

Within Catalan philologists, some have mentioned it in broader descriptions of specific dialects, such as Casanovas & Creus (1999), who acknowledge the use of the possessive determiner set with some kinship terms in the variety spoken in and around Lleida, for which we have the data for Fraga (k in the table above). They further note that in this variety it is common for the feminine form of the possessive determiner to be used too for masculine kinship terms in the singular, like is the case in Aranese Occitan (Carrera, 2007). I conclude the Catalan section with the tables for both the adjectival and determiner possessive paradigms.

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mon</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>(mo(n)s)</i>	<i>(mes)</i>
2nd	<i>ton</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>(to(n)s)</i>	<i>(tes)</i>
3rd	<i>son</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>(so(n)s)</i>	<i>(ses)</i>
4th	-	-	-	-
5th	-	-	-	-
6th	<i>son</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>(so(n)s)</i>	<i>(ses)</i>

Table 14: Possessive determiners in Catalan

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Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>meu</i>	<i>meva</i>	<i>meus</i>	<i>meves</i>
2nd	<i>teu</i>	<i>teva</i>	<i>teus</i>	<i>teves</i>
3rd	<i>seu</i>	<i>seva</i>	<i>seus</i>	<i>seves</i>
4th	<i>nostre</i>	<i>nostra</i>	<i>nostres</i>	<i>nostres</i>
5th	<i>vostre</i>	<i>vostra</i>	<i>vostres</i>	<i>vostres</i>
6th	<i>seu</i>	<i>seva</i>	<i>seus</i>	<i>seves</i>

Table 15: Adjectival possessives in Catalan

⁴⁵The forms given in parentheses represent the possible dialectal variation that may appear in some varieties of Catalan when it comes to the actual realisation of such forms. While for me, those forms are not productive, Ferrerós Pagès & Roca Urgell (2024, p. 90) do consider them to still be. It should be expected that, if these forms are differentially marked, they shouldn't have plural forms, and this is also born out in the article by Ferrerós Pagès & Roca Urgell (2024), as they do not provide any single modern Catalan example with the plural forms (they do however mention their use with pairs of body part nouns in a footnote on page 91, although they clarify that such forms are archaic and thus not part of the current language anymore. This is also found to be the case in Planas-Villalba & Villalba, 2026 for Old Catalan, as well as for Old Aragonese and Old Occitan, in the latter case independently of the variety.

2.6.2 Aragonese

Besides Catalan and Aranese Occitan, another language that has the same system is Aragonese, another Romance language, which as of today is still surviving natively in some valleys of the Aragonese Pyrenees.⁴⁶

Aragonese is quite uniform in that it marks the kinship terms for ‘mother’ and ‘father’ for DPM, this being the case in virtually all its varieties (cf. Arnal Purroy, 1998; Barcos, 2007; Lagraba & Lera, 1990; Lozano Sierra, 2006; Nagore Laín, 1986; Quintana Font, 2007; Saura Rami, 2003).

- (38) *La mía mai.*
the mine mother
My mother.

- (39) *La mía forqueta.*
the mine fork
My fork.

- (40) *Mi mai.*
my mother
My fork.

- (41) **Mi forqueta.*
my fork
My fork.

⁴⁶Once spoken throughout the Kingdom of Aragon (except for an eastern strip, *la Franja (d’Aragó)*, which is Catalan speaking), as well as parts of the Kingdom of Navarre and Kingdom of València, it became minoritised and displaced by Spanish. Beyond the valleys where the language is surviving, which might amount to a total of 10.000 speakers at most, and, although natives, of very advanced age, the language has since the eighties seen a revival in heritage speakers, or *neofablants* (lit. ‘neospeakers’), especially in the capital of the country, Zaragoza, thanks to associations such as the *Ligallo de Fablans de l’Aragonés* or *Nogará*, both of which offer language courses, as well as in Uesca, where the campus of the University of Zaragoza there has a one year postgraduate course in Aragonese Philology. This wouldn’t have been possible in the first place without the work done by philologists, the most notable of which is Franchó Nagore Laín, who published in 1989 the *Gramática de la Lengua Aragonesa* (Grammar of the Aragonese language). All this work has recently culminated in the establishment of the Academia Aragonesa de la Lengua, founded in 2013 by the Aragonese law Ley 3/2013, which gives it the right to establish the form in which the languages in Aragon (other than Spanish) are to be used. The Academy, which is composed of both an Institute for the Aragonese language, as well as one for Catalan, published in 2023 the *Ortografía de l’aragonés* (Academia Aragonesa de la Lengua, 2023), which has been since then the official spelling for Aragonese, as sanctioned by the 2013 law.

DPM with *tiu* (uncle) is also attested:

(42) Taken from Estudio de Filología Aragonesa (2021, p. 181)

Tu tiu ye arbanyil, pero tu paí no'n ye.
 your uncle is bricklayer, but your father NEG=PART is

Your uncle is a bricklayer, but your father is not.

The distribution of the possessive determiners in Aragonese is summarised in Nagore Laín (1989, pp. 90–91) as follows (own translation from the original in Spanish): *The abbreviated forms mi, tu, su, are used in certain places with kinship nouns –and only and specifically with those kinship nouns –. Thus, people popularly say: mi pai [= my father], mi mai [= my mother]. However, they say a mía muller [= my wife], o mío chirman [= my brother].*

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>	-	-
2nd	<i>tu</i>	<i>tu</i>	-	-
3rd	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>	-	-
4th	-	-	-	-
5th	-	-	-	-
6th	<i>su</i>	<i>su</i>	-	-

Table 16: Possessive determiners in Aragonese (Nagore 1986, 1989; EFA 2021).

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The morphosyntactic distribution of the adjectival and determiner possessives is like that of Catalan, barring the fact that the possessive determiner in Aragonese lacks gender inflection, and leaving besides the microvariation. Like in Catalan, the form is not available in the plural, defaulting to an adjectival possessive with a preceding definite article.⁴⁸ A feature that distinguishes Aragonese possessive determiners from the Catalan ones is their lack of gender inflection.

Aragonese a priori displays only this one set of adjectival forms, both in prenominal as well as in

⁴⁷However, consider the following example (emphasis in bold added by me):

(43) *Me conteron la noticia ahier, a **mis** país lis ne contarán hoi.*
 1SG.DAT tell.PRT.3PL the news yesterday, to my.PL parents 3PL.DAT PART tell.FUT.3PL today
 They told me the news yesterday, they'll tell my parents today.

⁴⁸Despite this, Pitarch & Faci (2005) mention that the Aragonese spoken in Agüero does have plural *mis*, *tus* and *sus*, although they fail to provide any example. It needs to be noted, however, that this village is found quite in the south of what is considered to still be Aragonese speaking territory ([CITE the lei de política lingüística]), and it should be no surprise if this anomaly were to be the result of Spanish grammar interference.

Person	M.SG	F.SG	M.PL	F.PL
1st	<i>mío</i>	<i>mía</i>	<i>míos</i>	<i>mías</i>
2nd	<i>tuyo</i>	<i>tuya</i>	<i>tuyos</i>	<i>tuyas</i>
3rd	<i>suyo</i>	<i>suya</i>	<i>suyos</i>	<i>suyas</i>
4th	<i>nuestro</i>	<i>nuestra</i>	<i>nuestros</i>	<i>nuestras</i>
5th	<i>vuestro</i>	<i>vuestra</i>	<i>vuestros</i>	<i>vuestras</i>
6th	<i>suyo</i>	<i>suya</i>	<i>suyos</i>	<i>suyas</i>

Table 17: Adjectival possessives in Aragonese (Nagore 1986, 1989; EFA 2021).

postnominal and predicative position, following a pattern like the one found in Catalan, as well as Italian (Nagore Laín, 1986, 1989). In postnominal position, the possessive can still appear complementing a noun preceded by a definite article, according to Nagore Laín (1989) with the same meaning as the prenominal possessive, although he still mentions that there appears to be a change in subjective meaning. This change in subjective meaning could be an endearing meaning, which in Catalan is also available, although in typical vocative constructions, which lack a determiner.

The use of the postnominal PP possessive construction, *de* ('of') + subject pronoun, is also used, although the selection of either one of the forms often is due to dialectal difference and not necessarily due to a change in meaning (Francho Nagore Laín, personal communication, 2026-01-22).⁴⁹

(44) Estudio de Filología Aragonesa (2021, p. 117):

Ixa nieta de vusté ye bien pincha!
that granddaughter of you.POLITE is very elegant

That granddaughter of yours is very elegant!

2.6.3 Occitan

This same set of possessives is also found in Occitan, although in this language, especially in the Lengadocian and Standard Varieties, this set has been generalised with all kinds of nouns (v. examples 5 and 7), without making a distinction with kinship terms (compare examples 2

⁴⁹Asturleonese has a similar construction in which, in the same postponed PP configuration, they put, instead of a subject or object pronoun, a reduced possessive form, morphologically identical to the adjectival prenominal one (Lorenzo, 2020, pp. 5–6).

and 3), and has even displaced the possessive preceded by the definite article (v. examples 6 and 8).

The distribution of this kinship prenominal possessive, which I will call, following Alexiadou (2006), possessive determiner, varies depending on the variety, too. Despite the fact that in Occitan, most varieties do not make a distinction because they either (i) have gotten rid of the adjectival possessive (just like is the case for French and Spanish),⁵⁰ as is the case for the varieties that Carrera (2011) mentions, to which Provençal also belongs (Bayle, 1989, p. 51), or (ii) do preserve the adjectival possessive in (syntactic) free distribution with the possessive determiner, with difference in pragmatic meaning (Taupiac, 2021; Vernet, 2020). Such a pragmatic conditioning is not noted in the descriptive grammar of Lengadocian Occitan by Alibèrt (1976), who also notes this cooccurrence of both adjectival and determiner forms, but does not mention as to whether there is a predominance of either form, something that Coba Femenia (2004, p. 238) does note in affirming that the variety spoken in Tolosa de Lengadòc⁵¹, which borders on Gascon Occitan, the adjectival possessive is much rarer. Nonetheless, Lengadocian Occitan does not seem to have kinship based DPM, and the medieval variation that is found in Old Occitan (cf. Planas-Villalba & Villalba, 2026) is still present, as already noted in Alibèrt (1976).

Niçard Occitan does have DPM like Catalan and uses the possessive determiners with kinship terms such as brother and sister, from which I assume that father and mother probably also get DPMed, as well as with certain honorific titles, and only in the singular. With all other nouns, the adjectival possessive in prenominal position, preceded by the article,⁵² is used (Toscano, 1998, pp. 49–50), with the possessive forms being like the ones shown for Catalan in tables 15 and 14.

Aranese Occitan, a variety of Gascon Occitan spoken in Val d’Aran, a special administrative region inside of Catalonia. This variety does have a DPM system like that of Catalan (Carrera, 2007, 2011), which is attributed to a possible case of contact induced language change by

⁵⁰See Alexiadou (2006) for an account of the evolution of possessive determiners in French, as well as in English and German.

⁵¹Also known by the francicised version of the name: *Toulouse*.

⁵²Be it the definite, the indefinite, in which case the possessive can also appear in postnominal position, just like in Catalan, or a demonstrative (Toscano, 1998, p. 51).

Planas-Villalba & Villalba (2026). The Gascon Occitan spoken in Bearn also makes a generalised use of the adjectival possessive, reserving the possessive determiner for kinship terms and other nouns such as ‘god’ or ‘home’ (Hourcade, 1986, pp. 75–78).

In most other varieties of Occitan, the possessive determiner, which in Catalan and in Aragonese is used for kinship terms, has spread to all forms in prenominal position, rendering a pattern identical to that of French or Spanish, with the adjectival form remaining in postnominal position. This is obvious in the following varieties: Provençal, Vivaroaupenc, Lemosin and Auvernhat. Gascon and Lengadocian, on the other hand, present intradialectal variation, which is a pattern found Old Occitan, Old Catalan, and Old Aragonese (Planas-Villalba & Villalba, 2026). Finally, there are contact varieties, such as the Calabrian Occitan, which is an Auvernhat variety spoken in Calabria, and Aranese Occitan, which is a variety of Gascon Occitan spoken in a small Pyrenean valley (Val d’Aran) which administratively belongs to Catalonia. This latter variety has the same pattern as Catalan and Aragonese (Carrera, 2007) and thus demonstrates a probable case of contact induced language change (Planas-Villalba & Villalba, 2026).

Despite this, both determiner and adjectival possessives are still present in all varieties of Occitan, even in those which have generalised the determiner in prenominal position, as the morphologically adjectival form can still be found in postnominal position, as well as in ellipsis constructions. We can see from the following forms, which represent General Occitan (Taupiac, 2021), that plural possessive determiners are available, contrary to Catalan.

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mieu</i>	<i>miá</i>	<i>mieus</i>	<i>miás</i>
2nd	<i>tieu</i>	<i>tiá</i>	<i>tieus</i>	<i>tiás</i>
3rd	<i>sieu</i>	<i>siá</i>	<i>sieus</i>	<i>siás</i>
4th	<i>nòstre</i>	<i>nòstra</i>	<i>nòstres</i>	<i>nòstras</i>
5th	<i>vòstre</i>	<i>vòstra</i>	<i>vòstres</i>	<i>vòstras</i>
6th	<i>lor/sieu</i>	<i>lora/siá</i>	<i>lors/sieus</i>	<i>loras/siás</i>

Table 18: Adjectival possessive in General Occitan, based on Carrera (2011), Taupiac (2021) & Vernet (2020).

In Aranese Occitan, the adjectival possessive works in the same way and has the same person, gender and number distinctions as its Catalan and Aragonese counterparts. As for the determiner possessive, it does not inflect for gender or number, and is only available in the 1st, 2nd and

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mon</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>mons</i>	<i>mas</i>
2nd	<i>ton</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>tons</i>	<i>tas</i>
3rd	<i>son</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>sons</i>	<i>sas</i>
4th	<i>nòstre</i>	<i>nòstra</i>	<i>nòstres</i>	<i>nòstras</i>
5th	<i>vòstre</i>	<i>vòstra</i>	<i>vòstres</i>	<i>vòstras</i>
6th	<i>lor/son</i>	<i>lora/sa</i>	<i>lors/sons</i>	<i>loras/sas</i>

Table 19: Determiner possessive in General Occitan.

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mèn</i>	<i>mia</i>	<i>mèns</i>	<i>mies</i>
2nd	<i>tòn</i>	<i>tua</i>	<i>tòns</i>	<i>tues</i>
3rd	<i>sòn</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>sòns</i>	<i>sues</i>
4th	<i>nòste</i>	<i>nòsta</i>	<i>nòsti</i>	<i>nòstes</i>
5th	<i>vòste</i>	<i>vòsta</i>	<i>vòsti</i>	<i>vòstes</i>
6th	<i>sòn</i>	<i>sua</i>	<i>sòns</i>	<i>sues</i>

Table 20: Adjectival possessive in Aranese Occitan, based Carrera (2007, 2011).

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>ma</i>	<i>ma</i>	-	-
2nd	<i>ta</i>	<i>ta</i>	-	-
3rd	<i>sa</i>	<i>sa</i>	-	-
4th	-	-	-	-
5th	-	-	-	-
6th	<i>sa</i>	<i>sa</i>	-	-

Table 21: Possessive determiner in Aranese Occitan, based Carrera (2007, 2011).

3rd/6th persons. It is also only used with a reduced set of kinship terms consisting of ‘father’ (*pair*), ‘mother’ (*mair*), ‘son’ (*hilh*),⁵³ ‘godfather’ (*pairin*), ‘godmother’ (*pairia*), and ‘daughter’ (*fraia*).⁵⁴

Why ‘godfather’ and ‘godmother’ get marked for uniqueness, despite not even being consanguineal kinship terms, can be explained, not by means of supposed affectiveness, but rather by seeing that both terms are directly derived by adding the diminutive suffix *-in* on the words for ‘father’ and ‘mother’, which are marked for uniqueness.

In Provençal Occitan, there is no prenominal adjectival possessive, but only a possessive determiner, which is rendered below, based on Bayle (1989, p. 51), but adapted to General Occitan orthography:

Person	M.SG.	F.SG.	M.PL.	F.PL.
1st	<i>mon</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>mi</i>
2nd	<i>ton</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>ti</i>
3rd	<i>son</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>si</i>
4th	<i>noste</i>	<i>nosta</i>	<i>nòsti</i>	<i>nòsti</i>
5th	<i>voste</i>	<i>vosta</i>	<i>vòsti</i>	<i>vòsti</i>
6th	<i>son</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>si</i>

Table 22: Possessive determiner in Provençal Occitan (Based on Bayle 1989:51).

The Provençal possessive paradigm can be extended to all of northern Occitan, with the occasional microvariation that can affect gender and number concord.⁵⁵

2.6.4 Calabrian Occitan and Apulian Franco-Provençal

Other interesting and outlying varieties are the varieties of Occitan and Franco-Provençal spoken in Calabria and Apulia respectively, which originate from communities founded in the 13th century by settlers, and are investigated in Baldi & Savoia (2021), who compare the adnominal possessive systems of these two varieties to their metropolitan counterparts, and it is shown that,

⁵³ And presumably also ‘daughter’ (*hilha*).

⁵⁴ Carrera (2007) does not give the word for ‘brother’ (*frair*), which might be an indicator that it is not marked for uniqueness. I make the contrary assumption as for ‘daughter’, as the feminine equivalent is in both cases built derivationally from the masculine one by the addition of the suffix *-a*.

⁵⁵ See Quint (1999, pp. 39–40) for an account of a western Vivaroaupenc variety, which contrary to the other varieties that I have shown has preserved and generalised the 6th person possessive *lor*, for which the author gives the phonetic transcription [yh].

while for most nouns the possessive construction has been assimilated to that of Neapolitan and Calabrese, which is characterised by the postposition of the possessive and the obligatoriness of the definite article (cf. Cardinaletti & Giusti, 2019; Pescarini, 2025), the construction used with kinship terms disallows the presence of the article and uses a possessive determiner instead. This strategy is only possible with singular kinship terms, with plural ones defaulting to the same construction used with common nouns (Baldi & Savoia, 2021, pp. 8–10). This is virtually the same system that is found in Catalan, Aragonese, and Aranese Occitan. Baldi & Savoia (2021) also note that this kinship construction is limited to a subset of kinship terms, which varies depending on the variety.

- (45) Gardiòl Occitan (Manzini & Savoia, 2005, p. 704)

Mon/ton/son frairə.
 my/your/his brother
 My/your/his brother.

- (46) Gardiòl Occitan (Manzini & Savoia, 2005, p. 704)

U frairə mevə/tevə/sevə.
 the brother mine/your/his
 My/your/his brother.

- (47) Apulian Franco-Provençal from Faeto (Manzini & Savoia, 2005, p. 704)

Ma sərawə
 my sister
 My sister.

- (48) Apulian Franco-Provençal from Faeto (Manzini & Savoia, 2005, p. 704)

Lə sərawə miə
 the.PL sister mine.F.PL
 My sister.

2.7 Interim summary

Occitano-Romance languages are special within the set of Romance languages that have kinship based DPM in that not only do they display a lack of determiner before the DPMed possessive,

but also by the fact that they use a different element altogether, making both a syntactic, as well as, a morphological distinction. We can thus have the following patterns in Romance DPM:

- No DPM:⁵⁶ (General) Occitan, Franco-Provençal, French, Spanish, Tuscan, Romansh (Lower and higher Engiadina, and Surselvan), Ladin, Sicilian?
- Syntactic DPM:⁵⁷ Gallo-Italic languages, Venetan, Standard Italian, Central Italian above the Rome-Ancona line, Sardinian, Friulian, Surmiran Romansh.
- Morphosyntactic DPM:⁵⁸ Catalan, Aragonese, (Aranese, Calabrian, and Niçard) Occitan, Apulian Franco-Provençal, Neapolitan, Central Italian below the Rome-Ancona line, Calabrian.

At the level of syntax, both DPM systems work in the same way, as is evidenced by the complementary distribution of the DPMed possessive with the definite article, or any other kind of D-element for that matter, as well as with plural number as seen in examples (44).

(49) Catalan

**La ma mare.*
the my mother
My mother.

(50) Standard Italian

**La mia madre.*
my mother
My mother.

(51) Catalan

**Mes mares.*
my mother
My mothers.

⁵⁶Uniqueness may be found on nP, but the possessive does not have a free slot for it.

⁵⁷Uniqueness may be found on nP, and the possessive has a free slot for it. When it comes to Vocabulary Insertion, however, there is only one possessive form available.

⁵⁸Uniqueness may be found on nP, and the possessive has a free slot for it. When it comes to Vocabulary Insertion, there is both a morphological form specified for uniqueness, as well as one which does not have the feature.

(52) Standard Italian

**Mie madri.*

my mothers

My mothers.

2.8 On uniqueness

Using the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz, 1993, 1994; Harley & Noyer, 1999), I propose that any kind of crosslinguistic lexical variation in prenominal possessives that undergo DPM is to be attributed mainly to post-syntactic operations involving underspecification of vocabulary items. Here, a line can be drawn between languages like Catalan, that have a DPM specific morphological form for the possessive, and Italian, whose possessive forms are all syncretic.

Another thing to note that makes Italian distinct from both Catalan and Aragonese is that the set of kinship nouns that take the possessive determiner is different. Beyond kinship terms, there are a couple of words that also make use of the possessive determiner, at least in Catalan, such as *vida* (“life”):

(53) *Això no ho he dit en ma vida!*
this not 3CL.INAN have.1SG say.PTCP in my.F.SG life

I’ve never said this in my life!

This is also noted by Egerland (2013), who attributes the phenomenon to the nouns undergoing it having a unique interpretation. This property has also been taken up by Caro Reina (2022b, p. 18), who attributes the variation in article selection in Balearic Catalan to it, which shows a tripartite system of definite articles: *en/na* (*n*-series), *el/la* (*l*-series), and *es/sa* (*s*-series). The first set is only used with proper nouns, the second one with what would be unique nouns, and the third one, with common nouns. One has minimal pairs with both the *l*- and *s*-series, while the *n*-series is reserved for proper nouns, which would be on the top of a uniqueness scale.

(54) *La terra.*
the earth

Earth.

(55) *Sa terra.*
the earth

The earth/soil.

(56) *Na Maria.*
the Mary

Mary.

Central Catalan lacks the *s*-system and preserves, although only in the masculine singular, the *n*-series, and only with nouns starting with a consonant, all other nouns are incorporated under the *l*-series (the generalisation of the *l*-series for all nouns is found in northwestern Catalan). Most of southern Catalan, that spoken in southern Catalonia and most of the Valencian Country, has a system in which the *s*-series is subsumed under the *l*-series, and the *n*-series is substituted by a null-series, i.e. proper nouns in Valencian Catalan varieties, and also in the Valencian standard of Catalan, do not take the definite article. This can also be seen as a case of uniqueness affecting the selection requirement, just like it is also the case in other languages, such as Spanish and Standard German.

What I argue for is that the DPM possessive form can be attributed to a lexically specified feature encoding uniqueness ([UNI]), which is present in the subset of the kinship terms that get selected for the possessive determiner. This feature also explains how the DPM strategy is not available in the plural, as uniqueness presupposes the singularity of the element to which it attaches. From there, this feature can enter in an agreement relationship through Feature Valuation (Roberts, 2024), meaning that once the possessive is valued, the process can be repeated, and because the feature [uD] on D is an EPP, the possessive pied-piped by the feature [UNI] to the specifier of DP. To explain why this strategy is not available in all languages, I propose that this unvalued feature slot on the possessive can be subject to parametrisation, explaining how Tuscan only has an adjectival possessive in prenominal position.⁵⁹

A further division within the languages that actually have DPM occurs between those that on the

⁵⁹Although in this case, even if the prenominal possessor does not have a slot for [UNI], it should not be an intervener, allowing for the percolation of the feature, which would also entail pied-piping, in this case of the nP itself, which one could argue it explains the postnominal possessive in *casa meva* (Catalan for ‘my house/home’), although this would mean that the possessive, in this specific case does not have a feature valuation slot for [UNI], when it is assumed to be present in Catalan per default. These assumptions do not follow in Tuscan.

surface just seem to disallow the definite article, such as Italian, and those that use a possessive determiner, such as Catalan, with the former displaying just syntactic DPM, while the latter have the phenomenon carry over onto the morphological component. This is, in turn, explained by the fact that [UNI] is a deficient feature, meaning that its presence in the syntax does not also imply its presence at PF, which is made evident by the lack of dedicated [UNI] possessive forms in Italian.

In the case of Spanish and French, Alexiadou (2006) & Schoorlemmer (1998) allow the possessive to carry an inherent [+definite] feature, subject to parametrisation, which following the movement account in Cardinaletti (1998) makes it move to the specifier of DP. This same feature is assumed in Alexiadou (2006) to be the cause of a grammaticalisation process of the possessive in definite contexts already in Old French,⁶⁰ that would have also happened in Spanish, explaining thus how these languages seemingly lack a prenominal adjectival possessive.^{61,62} The movement of the possessive to the specifier of DP blocks the insertion of the definite article, which is regarded as a last resort operation (Brugè, 2002),⁶³ adhering thus to the Doubly Filled Complementiser Filter (Chomsky & Lasnik, 1977), assuming too the parallelism between CP and DP.

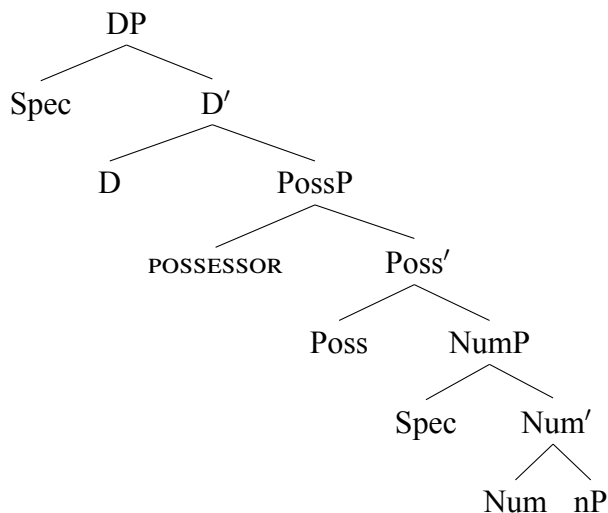
(57) Adapted from Schoorlemmer (1998, p. 57):

⁶⁰As well as in English and German.

⁶¹This is regarding definite contexts, as DPM cannot occur in indefinite ones, although it is to note that, even in indefinite ones, prenominal adjectival possessives are quite rare (cf. Eguren & Roca, 2025).

⁶²This grammaticalisation process can also be proposed for Spanish, and added to the virtual absence of prenominal adjectival possessives in these two languages, it makes me doubt whether they even have a PossP.

⁶³In her work on Spanish demonstratives, which posits them being base generated in a low adjectival position, just like what is assumed of possessives.

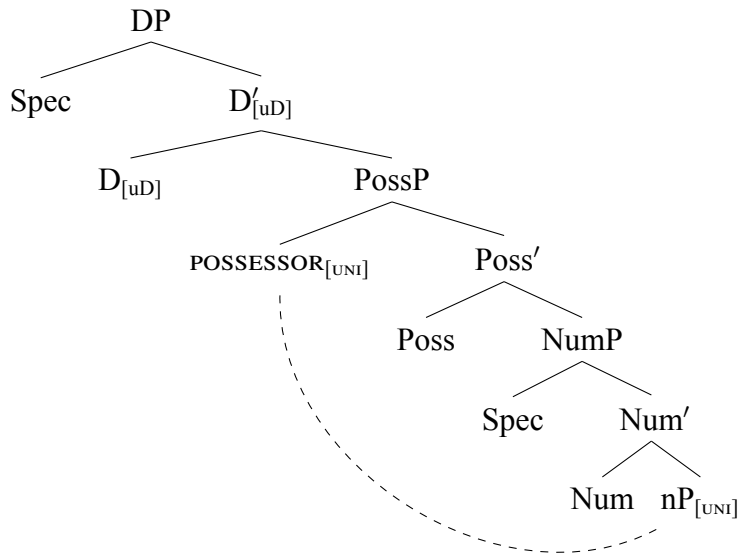


Now, one would expect the Possessive projection (Poss) to be obligatory, but that is not apparent from the Neapolitan varieties that we have seen above, as they seem to just go from a postnominal adjectival possessive to a determiner one (for kinship), without showing any kind of middle stage that would resemble a prenominal adjectival position. This, however, does not mean that for kinship terms the possessive jumps from its base position, we can still hold the same analysis that we have for Spanish and French in proposing the raising of the possessive to a high position, although for this moment we will propose this to be like in Catalan, through the feature [UNI], which is only encoded with a subset of kinship terms (and, as we have seen, in the plural the enclitic construction is not possible). If all possessives are to be base generated in base position and we have that in Neapolitan they do not raise to Poss, then we cannot propose it to move to move to D, due to cyclicity. Unless it is proposed that the possessive needs to raise to Poss with kinship terms, from which it then inevitably raises to D, as the D contains an EPP feature, [uD], of which [UNI] is a subset of, meaning that the feature [UNI] that has percolated from the kinship noun will be able to check this EPP, or, in terms of agreement as feature valuation, value it. Because the EPP is a strong feature, the percolation of [UNI] triggers the movement of the possessive with it, the movement is purely structural and needed to complete the derivation. The first valuation, that of the possessive by the uniqueness feature of the noun already happens in a local position, most likely on the Specifier of nP, as proposed by Armstrong (2024) for inalienable nouns. The movement of the possessive from a base position to the specifier of PossP can be accounted for by Form Copy. (Chomsky et al. 2023, p. 24).⁶⁴

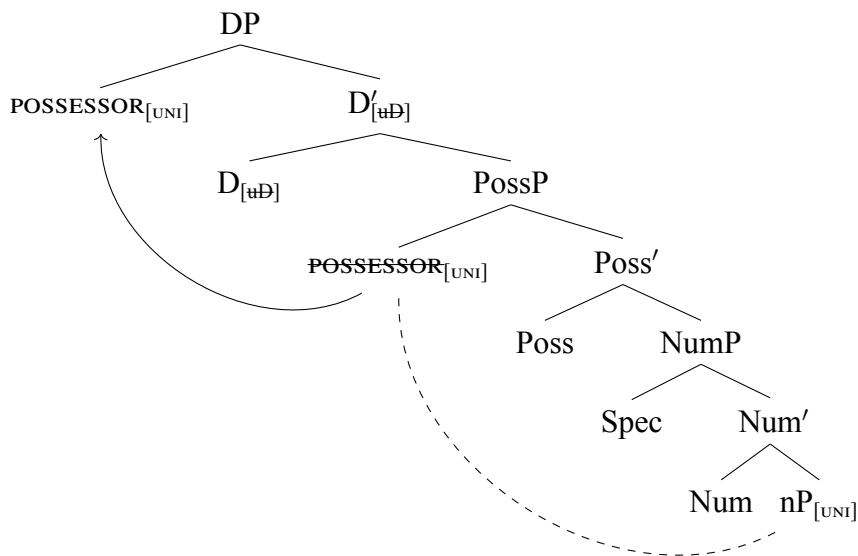
⁶⁴“Where X, Y are structurally identical, FC(X, Y) interprets X, Y as copies, that is, the inscriptions are inter-

At Spell-Out, the lower copies are eliminated by PF (Chomsky 1995:202).⁶⁵

(58)



(59)



Both DPM and the differential article selection in Balearic Catalan (Caro Reina, 2022b) can be explained with a unified approach, which is that of having the feature [UNI] project from nP and copying itself to D, which has a feature valuation slot open, represented above as [uD]. In

preted in exactly the same way” (Chomsky et al. 2023, p. 24).

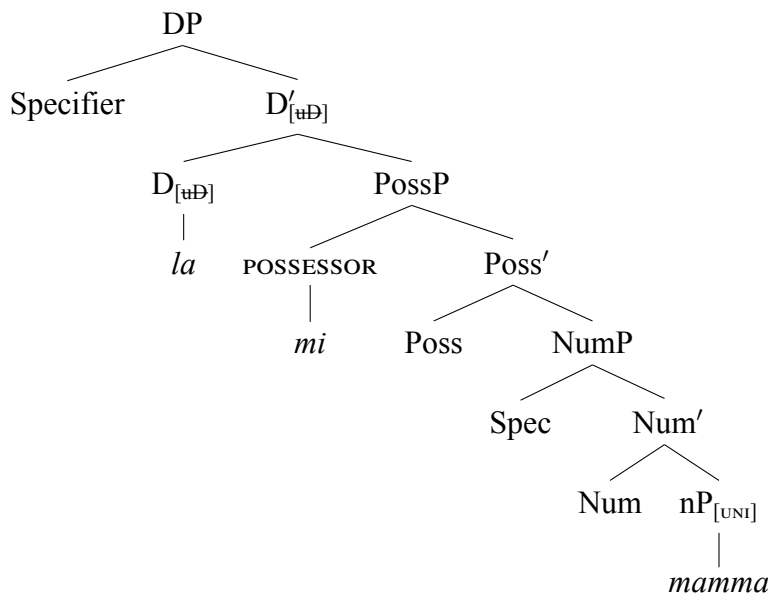
⁶⁵An approach that has occasionally been suggested is the copy theory of movement: the trace left behind is a copy of the moved element, deleted by a principle of the PF component in the case of overt movement. But at LF the copy remains, providing the materials for reconstruction.” (Chomsky 1995:202).

such a case, if there is a possessive in between, the feature [UNI] will move to the possessive iff the possessive also has an open feature valuation slot, which we assume to be the case for the languages that have DPM, meaning that if the language does not show DPM, not even syntactic DPM, it is because the possessive does not have this feature valuation slot. If it has the feature valuation slot, the possessive gets valued for the feature [UNI] and because D always has a feature valuation slot open, which can be said to be a kind of EPP, once the possessive gets valued for [UNI], [UNI] will also, inevitably, percolate to D. This movement should entail pied piping of the possessive, as DPMed possessives are found in a different position to that of the non DPMed possessive, which is also explained by [uD] being an EPP. If the possessive does not have an open feature valuation slot for [UNI], even if the noun has the feature, the possessive will not raise. In such a case, the definite article is inserted as a last resort (Brugè, 2002). This is the case for Tuscan, as illustrated in example (9), recovered below:

(60) Example based on Ledgeway (2016b, p. 222)

**(La) mi mamma.*
 the.F.SG mine mother
 My mother.

(61) Tuscan *La mi mamma*.⁶⁶



We see that if the possessive lacks a feature valuation slot for [UNI], the percolation of the feature

⁶⁶For illustrative purposes, the lexical items are displayed inside the structure.

still takes place, as the possessive element is not an intervener.⁶⁷ And this is also what happens with 4th and 5th person possessives, cannot be DPMed, at least in the Occitano-Romance languages, as [PL] and [UNI] are incompatible.⁶⁸

If the noun does not have a feature [UNI] to begin with, there is no movement whatsoever. The *l*-article with unique nouns in Balearic Catalan follows straightforward. There is, in such contexts, no possessive that would be able to intervene, intervening in the sense of blocking the percolation of the [UNI] feature because they themselves do not have a feature valuation slot for it. Having such a context, the feature can directly percolate to D, and once there the spell out of D is the *l*-article and not the default *s*-article. We need to assume, just like we do with Italian DPM, that in varieties of Catalan that do not have the distinction in the article forms, that the feature [UNI] is also present, and that its percolation also follows in the same way, but that there is only one set of vocabulary items for the article.⁶⁹

The appearance of the feature uniqueness can be also attributed to the simple spell out of the kinship term, which makes it get interpreted, possibly at LF or even at the syntax-pragmatics interface, if we assume it is a module found after narrow syntax (cf. López, 2009, p. 23). [UNI] must therefore be inserted at a phasal boundary, in the case of kinship terms, as well as other nouns carrying the feature, at little *n*. This also means that [UNI] should be able to be parametrised.

If we say it is purely dependent on the categoriser, which said that they are the only lexical elements, as this would also be a case of parametrisation which seems to conform to the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture, then the quality or nature of the feature [UNI] should be seen similar to the one for gender, which is also a feature introduced by little *n*. Furthermore, we also see that gender can also be proposed to be found below little *n*, at least with kinship terms, and just because kinship terms are their own functional sequence of purely syntactic projections.

Uniqueness as a concept is not new. In Löbner (2011) the feature is explained in detail, from

⁶⁷Not that this matters anyways, as if the feature valuation slot is present, it still allows the feature to further percolate. That is the main reason why I have decided to go with this strategy instead of feature checking, with the exception of the EPP, which will be mentioned again later.

⁶⁸4th and 5th person, as explained in the beginning, is used as an alternative notation to 1st person plural and 2nd person plural respectively.

⁶⁹For the *n*-article, used only with proper nouns, one can propose a further feature [PROPER], which is also part of the set of D-Features.

a semantic perspective, and linked to definiteness. As such, uniqueness is described as being a feature interpretable from a singular definite interpretation (Löbner, 2011, p. 7), but which can also have its polarity changed depending on the syntactic context, explaining how things such as plural quantification might render something negatively unique, i.e. not unique. Kinship terms like brother (Löbner, 2011, p. 304) and sister (Löbner, 2011, p. 307), however, are not considered to be unique, although under certain circumstances, such as in a definite clause or when governed by a possessor, they can be made unique (Löbner, 2011, pp. 298, 304). Caro Reina (2022b, p. 5) however states the following: “Inherently unique nouns comprise individual and functional nouns while non inherently unique comprise sortal and relational nouns. Note that kinship terms can be either relational (*brother, sister*) or functional (*father, mother*).” And we have also seen that there are nouns, such as *vida* or *casa*, that can be marked for uniqueness. This consideration of [UNI]queness as a pragmatic feature (deviating from the coining of the term by D’Alessandro, 2004) is useful in explaining why in some varieties of Catalan, DPM seems to be optional, although in such cases it cannot be argued that this feature .

(62)

La meva mare.
the mine mother
My mother.

(63)

Ma mare.
my mother
My mother.

Linking it to the discourse is an easy solution, however not without shortcomings, such as why it only happens with a subset of kinship nouns. If it were the case that [UNI]queness is simply a pragmatic feature, it should be able to also combine with all kinds of nouns that are discursively unique, not only with kinship and inherently unique nouns. To avoid that, the feature would need to be parametrisable on the syntax, rendering items like *father*_[UNI] different from *father*, the selection of which would still be a question of discourse requirements. As for roots, in the framework of Distributed Morphology, this does not pose a problem considering that kinship

nouns can be thought of as functional elements likewise composed of feature bundles (Cinque, 2016).

The possessive determiner is always definite, i.e. it cannot have an indefinite interpretation, and this has been attributed to a feature [+definite] on the possessive itself, which is what also forces it to raise to DP (Schoorlemmer, 1998), blocking the insertion of the definite article.⁷⁰

But, while it can indeed explain the pattern that we have in French, the same cannot be said about the languages that show DPM, as in these languages the possessive determiner is incompatible in DPs that are plural.⁷¹ A feature [+definite] can perfectly combine with it, and that is what I support for the analysis of non-DPM languages, but it is not suitable for languages that do have DPM. Rather, [UNI] is a much better candidate. Uniqueness denotes a definite individual, or element, and has the advantage of explaining the incompatibility of the DPM with plural marking, at least when it comes to concord, although Franco (2021, p. 75) shows the following instances of Italian allowing 4th and 5th person DPMed possessives, which in Catalan aren't possible:⁷²

For a similar reason, alienability, which in some languages it is attributed to be the main differentiating feature for the presence of DPM (Lødrup, 2014), is not ideal, as body parts do not get DPMed in the Romance languages, and even in Norwegian they recur to a different strategy than that of kinship nouns (cf. Lødrup, 2014). One of the advantages of proposing uniqueness instead of inalienable as a feature that is encoded in the syntax is that not only is uniqueness

⁷⁰In a diachronic study based on corpus data from Old Catalan, Old Occitan, and Old Aragonese to track the development of the possessive systems and their evolution in all three languages up to the present day, Planas-Villalba & Villalba (2026) show what seems to be a case of degrammaticalisation, contrary to what happened in Old French, which in Alexiadou (2006) is considered to be grammaticalisation. As such, Old Catalan shows a much higher and even predominant use of the possessive determiner, with the following percentages: physical kinship nouns (85%), physical alienable terms (74%), non-physical inalienable terms (48,5%), physical inalienable terms/body parts (46%). What is remarkable from these percentages is that, at a first glance, while one would expect kinship and body part nouns to behave in a comparable way, this is clearly not the case and, more so alienable terms show a similar high percentage to that of kinship terms. A unitary feature accounting for the phenomena that pattern both kinship terms and body part terms alike cannot be sustained in this case, meaning that [UNI] cannot be the cause for it, but maybe rather just definiteness.

⁷¹As well as with 4th and 5th person possessors, the referent of which is necessarily plural. With 6th person possessives this is a bit more tricky, as languages differ as to whether they have a distinct form for the 3rd person plural possessive, from Latin *ILLORUM*, or just use the same form for the 3rd person singular possessive. Languages such as Catalan, Aragonese, and Aranese Occitan make no such distinction.

⁷²However, as a native speaker of Catalan myself, I find the 5th person possessive without an article to be acceptable when the possessor is not actually a 2nd person plural, but rather an honorific 2nd person singular.

⁷³To me, the use of *son* for the 6th person is deviant, although I wouldn't rule it as completely ungrammatical.

Person	Italian	English	Catalan
1st	<i>mio padre</i>	‘my father’	<i>mon pare</i>
2nd	<i>tuo padre</i>	‘your father’	<i>ton pare</i>
3rd	<i>suo padre</i>	‘his/her father’	<i>son pare</i>
4th	<i>nostro padre</i>	‘our father’	*(<i>el</i>) <i>nostre pare</i>
5th	<i>vostro padre</i>	‘your father’	*(<i>el</i>) <i>vostre pare</i>
6th	(<i>il</i>) <i>loro padre</i>	‘their father’	(# <i>son</i>) <i>pare</i>

Table 23: DPMed 4th and 5th person possessives in Italian (based on Franco, 2021, p. 75), compared to Catalan.

73

a semantically motivated feature, as we have seen above, but also it is a feature that is tightly related to definiteness and determinacy, i.e. to D. This is crucial in accounting for the DPM affecting the left periphery of the nominal domain, as if we return our attention to the parallelism between the DP and the CP, however, we can also propose, following the analysis by Giusti (2006), that the DP, just like CP, is not a single projection, but rather an amalgamation of diverse pragmatic projections. We can thus not only propose that the nominal in Neapolitan moves to one of these positions, but we can also justify the presence of the feature [UNI], which we had proposed to be a pragmatic feature, within the DP.

A further point to have uniqueness as a defining feature of kinship nouns is their relationship with other nouns denoting properties, as elaborated in Caro Reina (2022a, p. 56), who draws a hierarchy from most to least unique nouns, with kinship nouns having a high degree of uniqueness, although, as we can see from their own semantics, not all of them do (cf. also Löbner, 2011). From this, one can further defend the proposal that uniqueness is the defining feature for kinship nouns to behave differentially. Thus, we expect those kinship nouns that aren’t unique to behave like common nouns wrt to phenomena such as DPM. For this we must consider both kinship and uniqueness as formal features of their own right. Furthermore, having them be formal features allows us to treat them as such and have them be subject to parametrisation. From here we abstract that any changes in the set of the kinship nouns that partake in differential marking can be due to the changes of their formal features, in other words, any changes are to be expected in accordance with the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture (Baker, 2008; Borer, 1984; Chomsky, 1995).

As how it interacts, I consider [UNI] to be a feature present on nPs that then can percolate to

the prenominal possessive, but only if the possessive has an unvalued corresponding feature valuation slot. If it does not have one, then the possessive does not raise due to uniqueness. It still can raise however, if it has another feature that makes it do so, such as the [+definite] feature in Schoorlemmer (1998), which is what is assumed for French, Spanish, Franco-Provençal, as well as all other languages that lack a prenominal adjectival possessive. In this case, deficiency also holds, as the feature, which is only present on little *n*, is not overtly realised, meaning that it is deficient. The fact that both definiteness and uniqueness may move up to DP suggests that both are features compatible with D, namely d-features. Here what I assume is that D does not encode definiteness, but rather any kind of feature that matches it, specifically, a D-feature, and that definiteness is only one type of d-feature, if one can even give an intensional definition of definiteness. I consider this reformulation to be important, as having definiteness would then not explain the incompatibility of uniqueness and plurality, given that with such a system (cf. Schoorlemmer, 1998) we would need to accept that uniqueness is just definiteness. Once [UNI] is postulated, there is the need to redefine what can be inserted at D, as we have seen that [UNI] can.

An argument against [UNI] would be that there are certain varieties of Neapolitan and Venetan, as well as Campidanese Sardinian (Pescarini, 2025), that seem to allow for plurally inflected DPM possessives. Although it could also be the case that the distinction between those nouns which trigger DPM and those that do not is simply a differentiation between alienable and inalienable nouns (contra Haspelmath, 2017).

3 Kinship

Now I turn my attention to kinship and ask why is it that only a subset of kinship terms, which may vary across languages, but which overall shows a consistent tendency of differentially marking core kin relations, are marked for uniqueness, as well as to how might this be connected with the inner feature specification of kinship terms themselves, the interaction of which with the interfaces leads to syncretism phenomena, such as the one observed by Cinque (2016), as well as to the several distinct kinship systems found around the world.

Previous studies, apart from Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2001), have usually treated kinship from an anthropological perspective, studying the various kinds of systems and their social impact on ethnically diverse communities. Beyond the social and anthropological considerations of kinship, I will talk about the encoding of such relations in language and from a language based perspective in that not only I present a featural account on the different oppositions one finds in the various kinship systems one finds, but also in that I explore the conceptual categorisation of Kinship and try to define the limits of the conceptual space encoded by such elements of the substantive lexicon. But first what needs to be established is what exactly are the items of kinship? Not all languages encode kinship in the same way, just like they do not encode every other category in the same way. This variation, following the framework of principles and parameters, falls within the second realm, in that it is parametrised, although contrary to what had been established by the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture (Baker, 2008; Borer, 1984; Chomsky, 1995). Parametrisation extends beyond functional categories and also affects lexical ones, a very clear example being that of kinship terms, as is illustrated in Cinque (2016) with terms such as *nipote* in Italian, which corresponds to four kinship terms in English: *grandson*, *granddaughter*, *nephew*, and *niece*.

3.1 Deriving kinship terminology

Cinque (2016) establishes a first feature approach to the formal differentiation of kinship terms (as well as body-part nouns and such) in proposing bundles of binary features that should be

able to derive each and possible kin relation, bottom up, departing from EGO, i.e. the referent to which every relationship is anchored. From here, a node will extend, with different specifications for each relationship, to parents, siblings and progeny. Cinque proposes movement along these two dimensions⁷⁴ with two distinctive binary features: [+/- ASCENDING] and [+/- DESCENDING]. [+ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] codifies the parents, [-ASCENDING, +DESCENDING] codifies the progeny, and [-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] codifies the siblings. To account for the syncretism between the terms for nephew, niece, grandson, and granddaughter, which in Italian are all spelled out as *nipote*, Cinque argues that the first line of features actually contains an underspecified DESCENDING feature, and gives the following feature specification for the Italian item *nipote* as follows (Cinque, 2016, p. 89):

- 1st line: +/- DESCENDING, - ASCENDING
- 2nd line: - DESCENDING, - ASCENDING

[+ASCENDING, +DESCENDING] is not a valid combination, as it would encode the progeny of EGO being their parents at the same time and vice versa.

parent =	[[+ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]
mother =	[feminine [[+ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
father =	[masculine [[+ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
daughter =	[feminine [[-ASCENDING, +DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
son =	[masculine [[-ASCENDING, +DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
sister =	[feminine [[-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
brother =	[masculine [[-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
grandparent =	[[+ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [[+ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]]
grandchild =	[[-ASCENDING, +DESCENDING] [[-ASCENDING, +DESCENDING] [EGO]]]

Table 24: Some kinship terms and their internal features, with the dimensions ordered hierarchically (based on Cinque, 2016).

Here appear the first limitations of the model: what would [[-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [

⁷⁴Giancarli (2023, p. 13) names them generations.

[-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]] give? Given that each degree is a node built on the previous one so that the next degree node departs from this new anchor that we have established, this combination would just give sibling of sibling of EGO, meaning that if EGO only has one sibling, then the combination equals EGO.

The bundle [-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] can give back EGO or SIBLING. The model over generates by a lot. We see the paradox that second degrees can give us the following three results:

- Second nodal degree and second generational degree (both feature bundles containing: grandfather, grandchild
- First generational degree: grandfather, grandchild, aunts and uncles
- sibling = [[-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] [EGO]]

These correspondences do not differentiate between maternal and paternal family members, which some kinship systems, such as the one in Seneca (Jones 2010), do. For this, further down the line I propose that the gender feature can be iterated with each degree.

The use of binary features in Cinque (2016) also has the downside of over-generating by allowing combinations such as [+ASCENDING, +DESCENDING], which seems to be nonsensical. I propose, instead, to have both [ASCENDING] and [DESCENDING] be unary features, which should make their cooccurrence at the same level impossible. In this way, the notion that sibling relationships are [-ASCENDING, -DESCENDING] is translated as the lack of both features, which is less than ideal because, if what is left is just the anchor (EGO) and a gender projection, there is nothing preventing the interfaces from interpreting the derivation as a gendered anchor.⁷⁵ For this reason, I propose that both ASCENDING and DESCENDING, while unary features, are not found on the same level, but are ordered hierarchically, and the minimal presence of either one is essential in deriving a kinship relation. In this system, it is the combination of both features that yields the relation SIBLING. But if both [ASCENDING] and [DESCENDING] are ordered features, what order are they supposed to come in? Should there be a difference between [[ASCENDING]

⁷⁵This does not mean that having gendered anchors is an undesired result. As shown in Read (2013), kinship terminology in Shipibo takes into consideration whether or not the speaker (or EGO) is a male or a female.

[[DESCENDING] [EGO]]] and [[DESCENDING] [[ASCENDING] [EGO]]]? I argue that there effectively is, and that the difference is quite substantial.

If [ASCENDING] is added on top of EGO, the dimension ‘parents’ is derived, from which one can further derive distinct terminology for both *father* and *mother* by adding [gender]; if then [DESCENDING] is added on the already built ‘parents’, the point of reference of the derivation refers back to EGO’s dimension, being able to refer to EGO, but also to EGO’s siblings, from which a gender distinction can be drawn, in the same way as with the ‘parents’ dimension. *Brother* and *sister* being indirectly derived from EGO by first going through the parents has been proposed to hold psychologically (cf. Wierzbicka, 2017).⁷⁶ A drawback is the possibility of deriving ego itself again, although this can be ruled out by proposing an interpretational constraint on self identification, meaning that EGO can only be interpreted as itself when there are no relational features on top of it.^{77 78}

If, instead, [DESCENDING] is merged on top of EGO, the structure derives EGO’s children; when a further [ASCENDING] node is added on the dimension of EGO’s children, the derivation then also returns to the dimension of EGO, but not necessarily to it, as the level that is being derived is that of ‘parents of the children of EGO’, which describes a set of people composed also of EGO’s spouse (or mate with which EGO shares the responsibility of, or generated, the children). If the ordering of the derivation can only follow a hierarchy in which [ASCENDING] needs to be merged before [DESCENDING] and cannot be merged after, then it (the kin-fseq) cannot derive ‘spouse’ nor, I expect this to also hold true, other kin relationships that are not consanguineal, but rather affinal. A strict ordering of [ASCENDING] before [DESCENDING] can only account for blood relatives and not for political relatives, i.e. those that enter in a kinship relationship through marriage.^{79 80} A syntactic prototype of a kinship derivation, which I name kin-fseq,

⁷⁶The equivalences given in Read (2001, pp. 251–252), in which BROTHER = MOTHER’S SON = FATHER’S SON, but at the same time not being identical to EGO, also favour this ordering of the features [ASCENDING] and [DESCENDING].

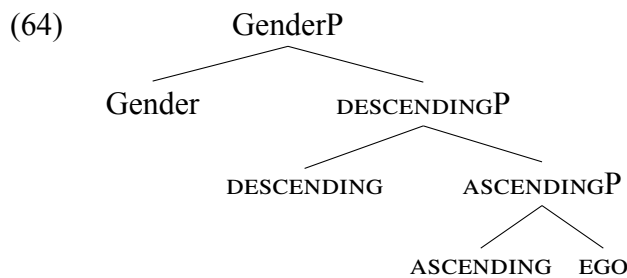
⁷⁷Gender is not relational, and thus can still appear on top of a bare EGO, explaining systems such as the one of Shipibo (Read, 2013).

⁷⁸This also means that there is no need to propose semantic-relational primitives such as Br (for ‘brother’) or Si (for ‘sister’) as in Murdock (1959) and Wallace & Atkins (1960).

⁷⁹I need to note that blood relatives need not be actually related by blood, but just by genealogy, including thus adoptive genealogical family members.

⁸⁰A caveat of this is that while the structure alone, in single application is barred from deriving affinal kinship, there is the possibility, as seen below, that affinal terms can indeed be derived from the multiple iteration of the sequence.

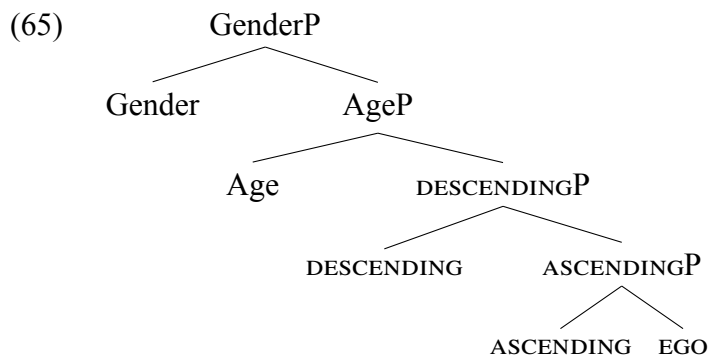
looks like this:⁸¹



The structure as it is right now can derive parental relationships in both directions, i.e. both parents and children, as well as siblings. Spouses are banned from occurring due to the strict ordering. The layer gender is able to distinguish between brother and sister, but the system cannot differentiate between two siblings of the same gender. One could say that, because the kinship terminology in English, as well as in the Romance languages, does not make a morphological distinction between the words used to design different siblings of the same sex, one should not need to encode them in the syntax either. But this is not completely true, and there are even languages, such as Mandarin, which use distinct, non-compositional vocabulary items, for siblings of different ages relative to that of EGO, so that while it is true that English disambiguates by using modifiers such as the adjectives older and younger, the fact that we have languages such as Mandarin suggests that a universal functional sequence of kinship would need to account for age relative to EGO. For this purpose, I propose to include an Age projection in the derivation. Its position, I propose to be found just below Gender, and above DESCENDING. I refuse the possibility of having siblings be encoded without the generational nodes [ASCENDING] and [DESCENDING], as having Age above EGO would derive EGO with some specific Age value. This also begs the question as to what Age should actually encode, and whether its value should be fixed or be allowed to be relative. Finally, Age has the advantage of being able to relate not only to siblings of EGO, but also to the siblings of EGO's parents, as well to multiple children of EGO. For now I consider Age to be a variable with no fixed values, and give a second version

⁸¹The lack of gender specification, which is not necessarily to mean lack of gender projection, would yield, in the case of just having [ASCENDING] on top of EGO, the meaning 'parent' (cf. D'Andrade, 1995, p. 36).

of the kin-fseq below:

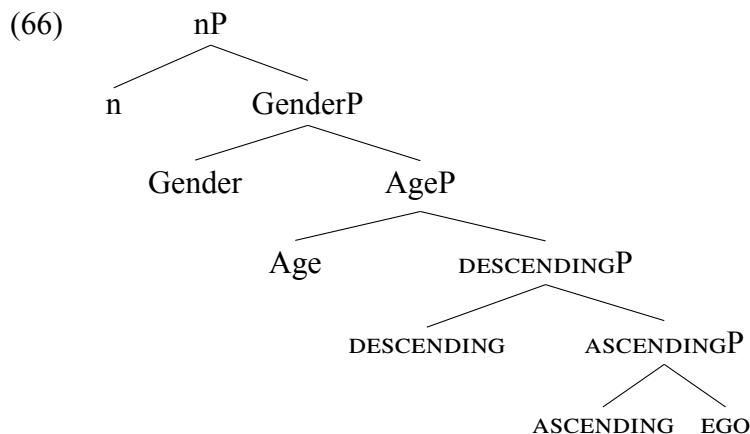


To summarise, the features conforming the kin-fseq are the following:

- **ASCENDING**: It shifts the reference point one generation above that of **EGO**, deriving **EGO**'s parents.
- **DESCENDING**: It moves the reference point one generation below that of **ASCENDING** or, in the case of **ASCENDING** not being present, ego, deriving both ego's siblings, as well as ego's children, respectively.
- **Age**: It applies after **DESCENDING**, independently of whether **ASCENDING** is present in the derivation or not. It allows to distinguish the members of one same generation.
- **Gender**: it makes a distinction between male and female kinship terms.

Once the tree is finished, it gets selected as the complement of a categoriser little *n*, completing an nP, and thus having a spell-out of this phase, which results in the tree being morphologically realised as the Vocabulary Item that matches its feature the best, each projection of the kinship tree representing a feature. While either **ASCENDING** or **DESCENDING** can be absent from the derivation, as a consequence of being unary features, **Age** and **Gender**, having multiple possible values,⁸² will be assumed to always be present.

⁸²In the case of **Age**, even an undetermined value, similar to the undetermined referential value of **EGO**.



One of the consequences of the functional structure is that it forces us to accept that kinship terms do not have roots, but are rather compositional, and at core functional, elements. But because they are selected by a little *n*, they are nominalised and thus are elements of the substantive lexicon. What little *n* does is lexicalise the kinship term, as in Panagiotidis (2011, p. 371), where the author proposes that each different categorial feature has a different interpretation at LF: “A [V] feature imposes an extending-into-time perspective at LF; an [N] feature imposes a sortal perspective at LF.”

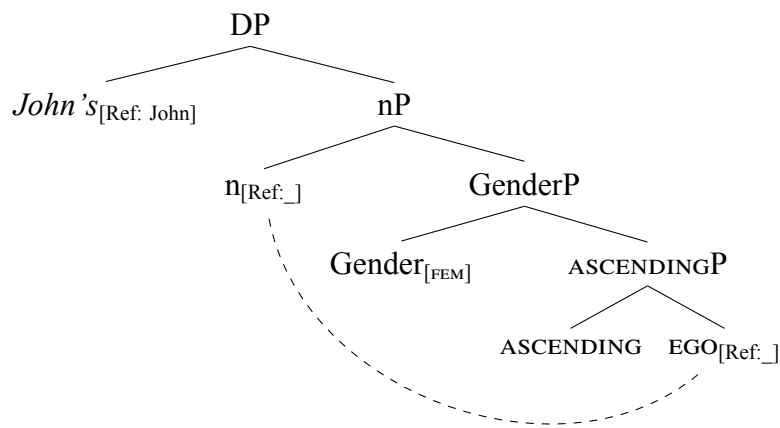
Take for example the sentences *My mother* and *John’s mother*. In both cases, the derivation for the word ‘mother’ follows from the same structure, but this ‘mother’ is not the same for both me and John, and this follows from the reference of EGO in *John’s mother* shifting to John. This is possible because EGO is a bound anaphor, which means that it obeys Condition A on Binding (Chomsky, 1981). But nP is a phase, so EGO and its properties should not be visible to elements found outside of it unless they move to its edge, which would lead to *John’s mother* not referring to the mother of John, but rather to EGO.

To avoid this I propose that, just like [UN_I] can percolate because it is part of the set of D-Features, the referential feature of EGO is part of the set of features found on little *n*, meaning that little *n* also carries a referential feature.⁸³ Consider the following kin-fseq’s:⁸⁴

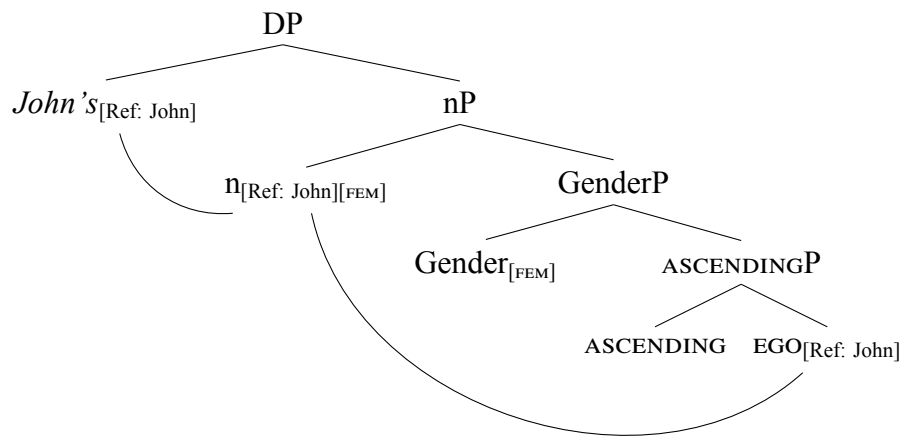
⁸³The anaphoricity of kinship nouns and their quality of needing to be valued can also be seen in some languages that have obligatory possessive marking Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm (cf. 2001, p. 211), a phenomenon in which even when there is no contextual possessor, overt possessive marking is present. Navajo and Guaraní have this phenomenon (cf. Velázquez-Castillo, 1996, p. 62), which bears some similarity to subject marking in non-null subject languages, such as French and English, which even when there is no subject, they require the insertion of an expletive.

⁸⁴The DP structure in the examples that follow is a simplification of the trees on page 39.

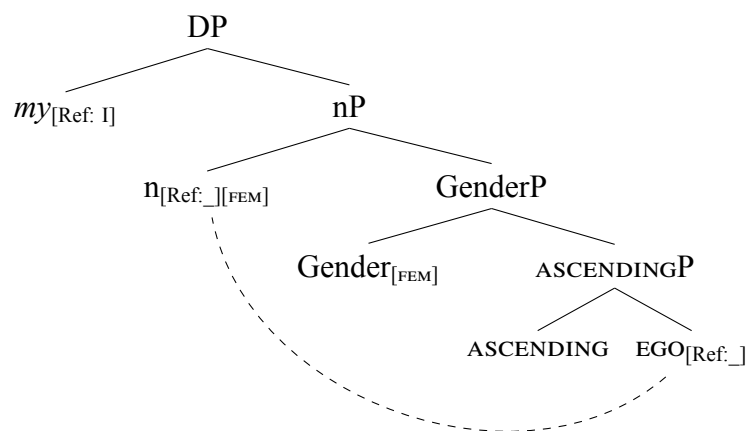
(67) *John's mother*



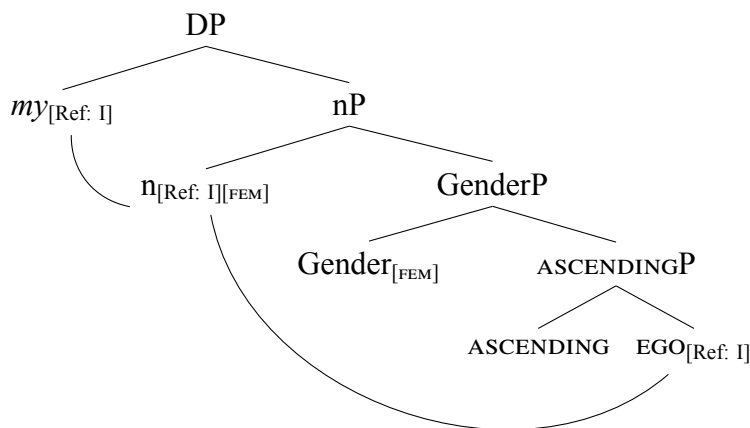
(68) *John's mother*



(69) *My mother*

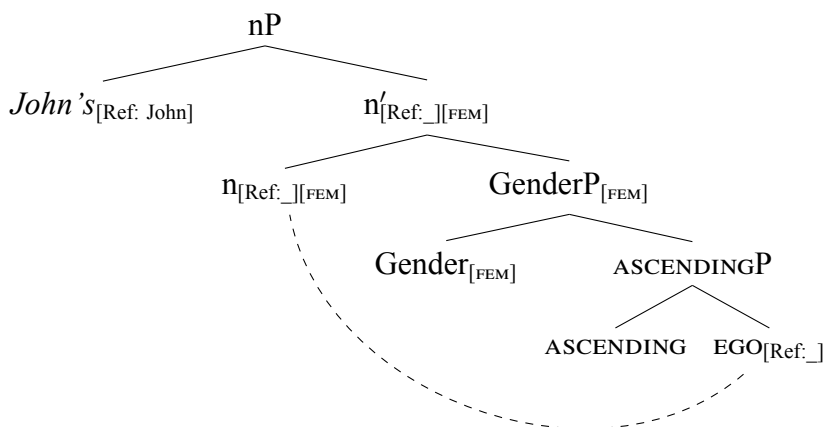


(70) *My mother*



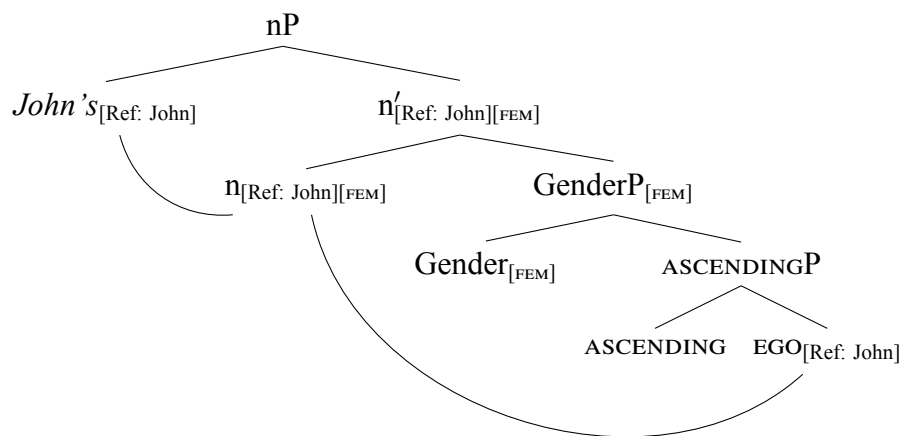
Once little *n* is merged, spell out to both PF and LF takes place and the kinship term gets overtly realised. In this configuration, the referential feature of EGO, which percolates to little *n*, is able to be valued directly within the nP itself, if a possessor is inserted in the Specifier of nP, as in Armstrong (2024), who proposes this to be the case for inalienable nPs, under which kinship terms would be included.⁸⁵ This means that the trees (67) to (70), although they would eventually have the possessor sit at DP assuming a raising approach, would have the possessor first merge in the specifier of nP, as in examples (71) to (74).

(71) *John's mother*

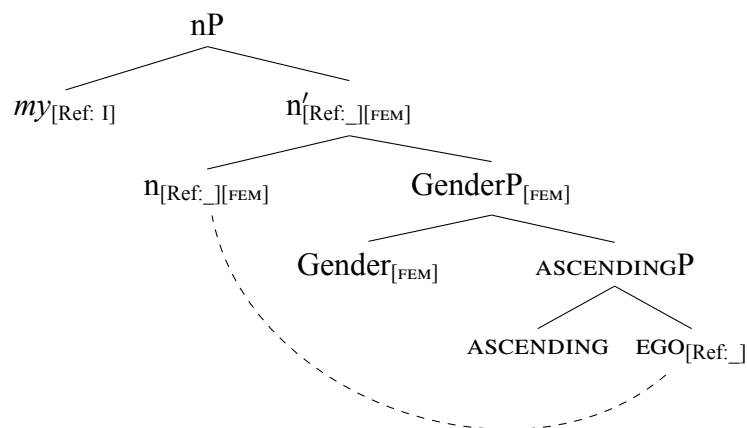


⁸⁵This also follows from the principle that lexical elements project theta roles (Corver & van Riemsdijk, 2001, p. 2), thus the possessive in the Specifier of nP would be an argument of the noun, probably an internal one that then has to raise to a higher position, just like the subjects of unaccusative verbs.

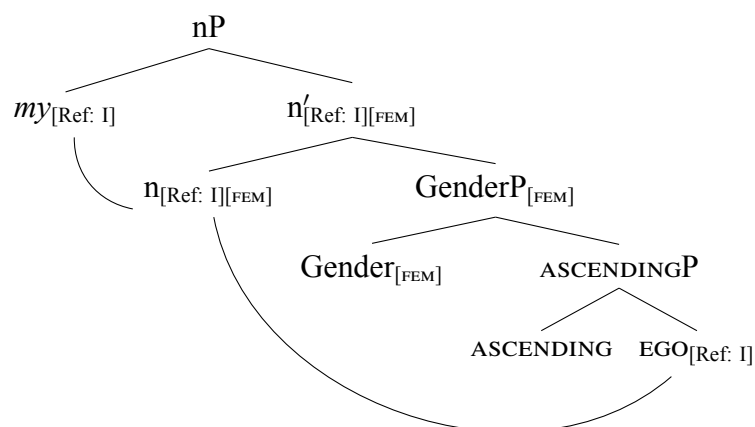
(72) *John's mother*



(73) *My mother*



(74) *My mother*



A problem that arises in having nP imposing a phase that results in spell out of the syntactic

derivation to both LF and PF is that this makes it impossible to account for the derivation of non-core kinship terms under one single nP. But at the same time the kin-fseq is unable to, by itself, derive anything beyond core kin, unless it is recursive and can be iterated in order to derive these other, more complex relations. The premise here is that a completed kin-fseq can serve as the base for another kin-fseq, and that this is supported by the referentiality feature of EGO percolating, and with each iteration changing the anchor, thus deriving non-core kin relationships with only core kin relationships, like it has been traditionally conceptualised in Read (2001, pp. 251–252), who proposes the core interpretation BROTHER = MOTHER’S SON = FATHER’S SON, and which can be applied to (MATERNAL) UNCLE = MOTHER’S BROTHER.⁸⁶ This iteration of the structure needs to follow, if a phase is introduced, with the shift in the anchor, as EGO would stop being visible, and the properties of the nP that gets selected by the next iteration of kin-fseq would be different, meaning that, because it also carries the referentiality feature of EGO, kin-nP serves as a new anchor (or EGO).

This shifting of the anchor of EGO raises the question as to what EGO actually is. Within a framework of Distributed Morphology, and considering that EGO itself bears reference ([Ref: _]), albeit an empty one, i.e. an index, it could be classified as a root. In Acquaviva & Panagiotidis (2012), roots are assumed to have the following three properties:

1. They are category neutral and are only categorised when they enter the derivation, be it by little *n*, little *v*, etc.
2. They are meaningful, although it is not clear how much content they have.
3. They are identified as “forms” phonologically speaking.

The first point is incommensurable, so far as it is assumed that the kin-fseq cannot be considered a root itself, nor can EGO, as it seems to be able to be inserted into the kin-fseq without the help of a categoriser. The second point holds true of EGO and of each of the projections of the kin-fseq as a whole. While the content of ASCENDING and DESCENDING is the relation that they themselves express, Gender is a label for the features MASC and FEM, which encode sex-based gender the

⁸⁶See also the similar compositional notation used in Allen (1989, p. 175).

content of Age is not clear, and its label remains as a placeholder for the actual feature, if one, that will be introduced, similar to the projection for Gender, except that for this one its content is known: MASC OR FEM). The third point is, in my opinion, not applicable, as kinship terms although relational and compositional in the narrow syntax, do not show this compositionality in morphophonology.⁸⁷

Acquaviva & Panagiotidis (2012) further make a distinction between syntactic and morphological roots, with the latter being the morphological realisation, i.e. the vocabulary items, of the roots found in the syntax, given that roots are devoid of form when inserted into the syntax. Syntactic roots are then demoted to being simple indexes that match with both a semantic/encyclopaedic meaning, as well to a (morpho)phonological realisation (Harley, 2014). This idea of having the syntactic roots be numerical indexes (Harley, 2014, p. 242), which has been expanded upon by Panagiotidis (2020), is similar to proposing a referential feature for EGO.⁸⁸ Other views on roots also include those of Arad (2005), who is for considering that roots may express a common semantic denominator, i.e. an impoverished semantic meaning, as well as those of Alexiadou & Lohndal (2017) and Saab & Lo Guercio (2019), who consider that there are different types of roots depending on their denotation, which poses in itself a problem for the assumed indivisibility of the root, and would speak in favour of an atomicity approach to roots, akin to what I propose with the decomposition of kin-nP into a categoriser little *n* and the kin-fseq.

Another thing that is assumed by Panagiotidis (2011, p. 379) is that functional structure needs to build upon lexical elements, and if only the categorisers may be treated as lexical elements, then EGO would need to be, if not a categoriser, a conjunct of indexical root selected by a categoriser. Whether then one should consider the index of EGO to be a root would just be a terminological matter, as the spell-out and morphological vocabulary insertion would follow like always. Considering the set of categorisers as being equal to the set of lexical items is not without problems, as categorisers are parametrisable, and this had been assumed, at least un-

⁸⁷This can be seen as a point in favour of a nanosyntactic account, as spell out happens ph(r)asally, although only for words, speaking also in favour of dividing the narrow syntax into two different components: a word syntax and a phrasal syntax (Ackema & Neeleman, 2004).

⁸⁸With the main difference being that the referential feature on EGO is unspecified, explaining why it has the necessity to raise.

til Cinque (2016) to only hold of the functional lexicon, as per the Borer-Chomsky Conjecture (Baker, 2008).⁸⁹ However, categorisers are lexical, as their projections can be pluralised, which for little *n* means, that it is part (or just is, by itself) of the substantive lexicon. The BCC fails at capturing this, which is a point of critique raised in Cinque (2016) and then in Kallulli & Roberts (2025), with the latter also noting the lack of intensional definition of the set of Formal Features, defining, in Kallulli & Roberts (2025, p. 14), Formal Features on the grounds of them undergoing either Redundancy or Deficiency, the former being feature invisibility at PF and the latter one being feature invisibility at LF. To paraphrase, if a feature of the syntax does not have a morphological equivalent or a semantic equivalent, then it is formal. The proposal is compiled in the Kallulli-Roberts Conjecture (KRC):

- (75) “The Kallulli-Roberts Conjecture (KRC):
All parameters of variation are attributable to $\mathfrak{R}$ or $\mathfrak{D}$ of formal features of the functional heads in the Lexicon.” (Kallulli & Roberts, 2025, p. 14)

From this point of view, the features that compose the kinship terms are also Formal Features by virtue of being deficient, as evidenced by the multiple array of syncretisms that are found in kinship terminology across languages. This assertion would seem to be premature, as the features *ASCENDING* and *DESCENDING* appear to always be present in the morphology if they are given in the syntax, at least with core kin terms, considering that at least one of them needs to be present in order to derive any kind of kinship term, and that the terms that they derive are never syncretic. There is no language a speaker of which would use the same kinship term to refer to both their parents and their children, as a kinship term like this would need to be composed of only *ego*, and *EGO* does not even have a kinship term. So it would seem that *ASCENDING* and *DESCENDING* are actually not Formal Features, as they are fully interpreted at LF,⁹⁰ as well as at PF, mapping one to one with both interfaces.⁹¹ They are however deficient features in a system that has iteration of the kin-fseq, resulting in the possible non-realisation of either one of the features (but not both) in a second dimension.

As seen, roots cannot just be inserted into the syntax, they need a categoriser.⁹²⁹³ Panagiotidis

⁸⁹Based on Borer (1984) & Chomsky (1995).

⁹⁰Just like Gender and Age

⁹¹And apparently being the complete opposite of the EPP, which is interpreted on neither.

⁹²Although see Saito (2021) for a counterargument regarding grammaticalisation as decategorialisation.

⁹³See the Categorisation Assumption (Embick & Marantz, 2008, p. 6).

(2011, p. 373) says that “a root cannot be directly merged with a functional head”, which is then why the author also claims that categorisers are not functional heads, but rather lexical ones. The interpretation of roots is thus bound to the interpretation of categorisers. The consequence of this is clear: if $\sqrt{roots}$ can only be merged with categorisers and thus only enter the syntactic derivation in that way, then, (i) EGO needs to be selected by a categoriser, let’s say δ , from which there is the downside that the referentiality feature of EGO will not be accessible anymore, as it is assumed that, like all other categorisers, δ introduces a phase, and EGO is not found in its edge, unless (ii) it somehow moves to head adjoin to δ , so that the feature can percolate, at which point (iii) EGO effectively becomes just δ , doing away with the notion of a $\sqrt{root}$ whatsoever. We should thus accept that kinship terms do not have a root at their core. From both the merging of little n with GenderP and the possibility of having δ be a categoriser, like little n , follows the possibility of having δ select GenderP. And from δ being at the base of any kin-fseq, it also follows from the referential feature’s necessity to percolate that if the kin-fseq is to be iterated, the category linking both of them can also be δ , allowing me to propose that δ can also be found on top of the kin-fseq. This one, unlike the one found at the base, selects GenderP as its complement, meaning that it is a complex phrase (again, just like nP would be in the same position) that does not have the same properties as the δ found at the base of the kin-fseq, but rather it spells out a kinship term.

Because the merging of GenderP to an iteration of δ as some kind of selectional requirement, there is no motivation to propose movement. One could argue that this would cause a problem for the valuation of the referentiality feature, but the selection of kin-fseq by little n cannot be motivated by movement either, as even if it is the case that the features of δ are a subset of the features of little n ,⁹⁴ and the valuation of the referential feature still happens nonetheless. Instead of movement, I propose that any higher δ be merged and identified as a copy of the lower δ through the application of Form Copy

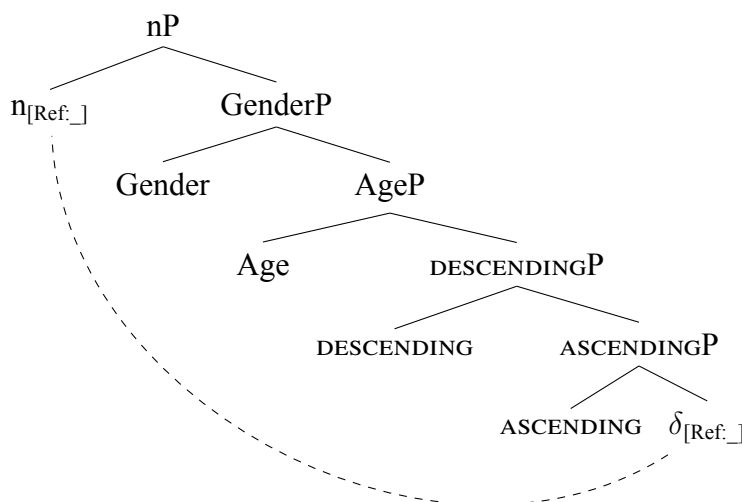
The introduction of this new δ also introduces a change in the anchoring, which must be due to a phase. But if that is the case, then it should trigger spell-out, shipping the material to both PF and LF. That is unless δ triggers asymmetrical spell-out (Marušič, 2009), establishing only

⁹⁴There are features of little n that are not included in δ , making movement implausible too.

an LF phase, and so allowing a shift in the anchor without, at the same time, triggering overt realisation of the already built kin-fseq, reserving this for when little *n* is merged. This explains why MOTHER’S SISTER can be spelled out as a non-compositional morpheme *aunt*, as well as why syncretic forms such as the Italian *nipote* emerge. Little *n* is still necessary, as it triggers spell-out and shipping of the structure to the morphology, where it gets matched with vocabulary items.

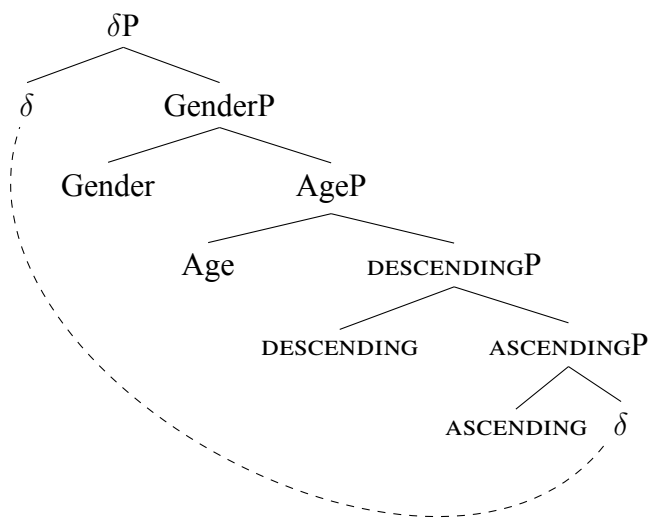
The final insetion of a categoriser little *n* introduces a phase that spells out the derivation at both PF and LF. This does not pose a problem, considering that little *n* can also carry a referential feature, which is justified by saying that the properties of δ are a subset of the properties of little *n*: $\{\delta\} \leq \{n\}$. This includes, at least, both the referential feature and gender, as seen in the previous derivations. The specification of a gender feature on δ accounts for systems such as Seneca, which distinguish matrikin D. Jones (2010), and which will be shown in the following section how they are derived. All of this allows for an unimpeded percolation of the referentiality feature, which in itself is just a collection of unvalued features found at each phase boundary (*n* and δ), and the coreferentiality between each other follows from c-command and, more generally, Binding, or just as instances of Form Copy.⁹⁵

(76) Coreferentiality through c-command



⁹⁵ Although is not really what happens when *n* is merged, because it, as already mentioned, can have more features than δ .

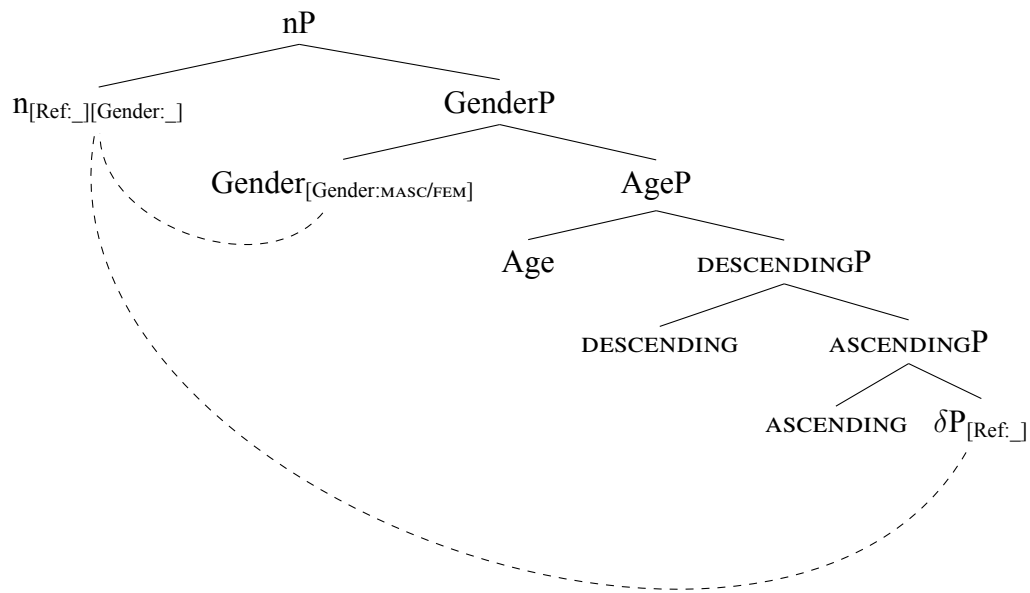
(77) Kinship fseq with δ P



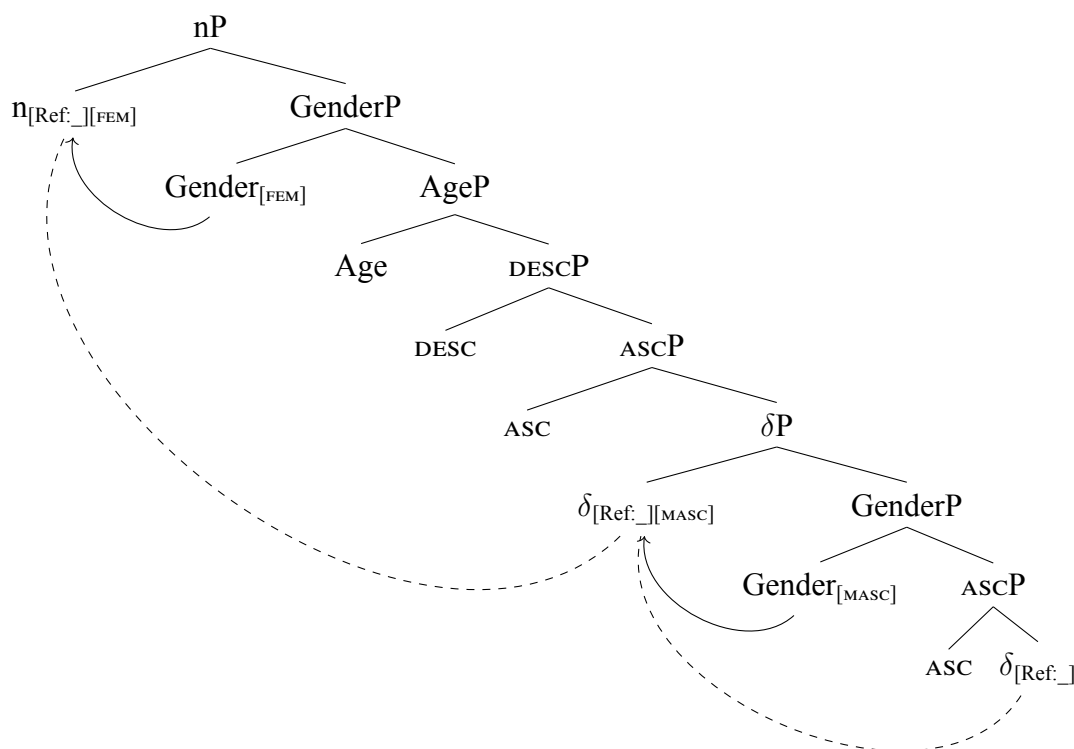
Turning again to the point raised above that the properties of δ are a subset of the properties of little n . This is not a problem for having the feature [UNI], as other nouns, which are (for all we know) just nPs consisting of little n and a $\sqrt{root}$, can encode the feature, such as *vida* or *casa*, meaning that uniqueness is one of the properties that both little n and δ share. As for the valuation of the [Ref:_] feature slot found on δ , assuming that the properties of δ are a subset of the properties of little n will mean that [Ref:_] can also be present on little n and will therefore be visible outside of the phase imposed by it. Finally, having the referent be visible too at nP could explain the high compositionality of kinship terms that are found in Mandarin (see section 3.2), as the anaphor, which serves as anchor, being visible, would allow for further iterations of the kin-fseq, which, because the nP below them has already been spelled out at PF, would not be able to be spelled out together with it in a portmanteau. The feature on Gender, [MASCULINE] or [feminine], also obligatorily percolates to the edge of each phase, or at least tries to do so. Inside of δ P it allows e.g. to make distinctions of matrikin, while at the edge of the nP, as a feature found on little n too, Gender can be accessed by other elements beyond the nP, triggering concord. This mapping follows the same principle of coreferentiality through c-command as in the tree in example 76 for the referential feature [Ref: _], as illustrated in 78, in which nP has an empty feature valuation slot [Gender: _]. Sex and grammatical gender are expected to match perfectly, unless little n either carries its own gender feature that blocks the

insertion of the one from Gender or lacks a slot for it altogether, and only the feature on the highest Gender projection can value the Gender feature slot of nP due to minimality (Rizzi, 1990, 2001). Each Gender feature, which is individually specified, acts as an intervener to each other, effectively banning Gender features from crossing δ phases.

(78) Final iteration of a kin-fseq:



(79) Kin-fseq for *paternal aunt* (SISTER OF FATHER OF EGO):⁹⁶⁹⁷



A problem: If the information below δ is not accessible anymore, how can non-core kinship terms ever be derived? The solution: Thanks to the change in anchor, i.e. Form Copy being applied to δ . Thus δP has been spelled out multiple times at LF and therefore the anchor has changed, meaning that delta, although not overtly, has changed and now refers to whatever kin term it was that was derived in the previous iterations. δ is not the original δ anymore, but the feature valuation slot for the referent continues to be free and able to be valued. It has changed, which is to mean that the structure that belonged below it is still there, but hidden. δ , the symbol, is supposed to mean this variable, as it is just a variable that has changed its index. This simplification of the syntactic derivation comes at the cost of moving it to δ , and at the same time makes the transfer to the morphology much simpler. A last detail of δ is that it can too host a gender value, valued in the same way that is valued on little n ,⁹⁸ saving matrikin distinctions

⁹⁶In the notation by Allen (1989) this would be FZ; see that this notation happens to reflect the number of iterations, one for each letter, needed for the derivation of each kinship term.

⁹⁷The designations ASCENDING and DESCENDING have been shortened to ASC and DESC respectively

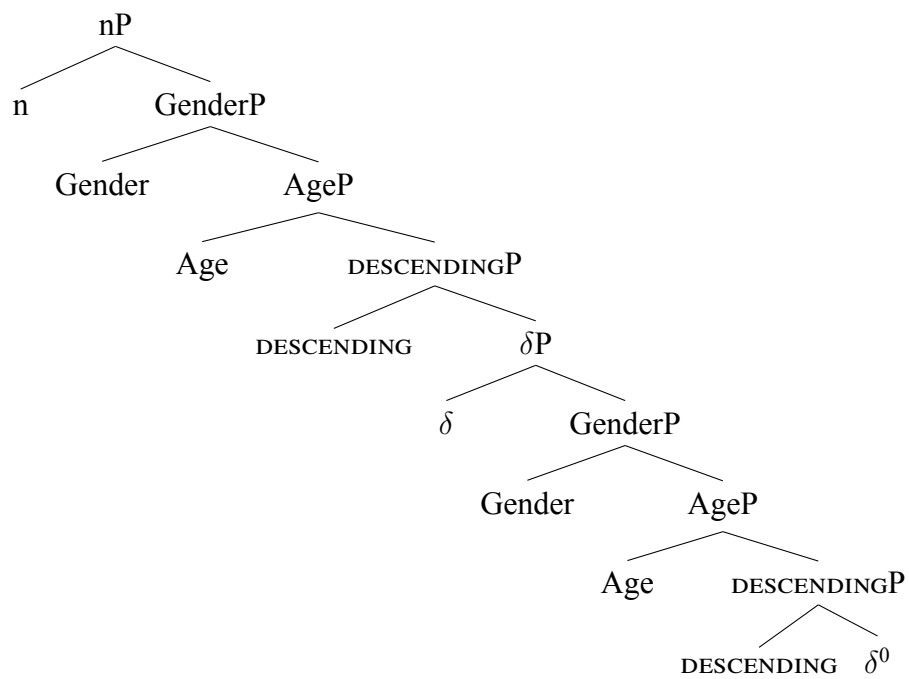
⁹⁸As the properties of δ are a subset of the properties of little n , δ is bound to have all of its features shared with little n , without excluding little n from having more, meaning however that, if δ has multiple features, these are going to be also features of little n .

in kin terminology from being trapped behind a phasal boundary, as well as supposedly those which represent age. What LF-only phases do is not allow the pronunciation of the built element, but an internal kin-fseq which is specified for ‘mother’ is spelled out and interpreted as ‘mother’. If it is lexicalised by the insertion of little *n*, it will also be pronounced, if not, then it will remain covert. Just like that, we can explain the derivation too of syncretic elements such as *nipote* in Italian, by just recurring to the second iteration, which is a kin-fseq composed of no ASCENDING feature and merged on top of a δ P encodes the kin-fseq for either ‘son’, ‘daughter’, ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. If there is syncretism, it needs to come from the mismatch in the mapping of the first iteration of the kin-fseq. In all four concepts, the features that they have in common in the first iteration is DESCENDING. Italian *nipote* is a Vocabulary Item that encodes, as Cinque (2016) already proposes, two levels (or iterations).⁹⁹ I follow the same principle in having this same system, which up until now I have applied to the syntax, at the morphological level too, with the following feature specifications: $[_n \text{ DESCENDING } [_\delta \text{ DESCENDING, EGO }]] = \textit{nipote}$.¹⁰⁰

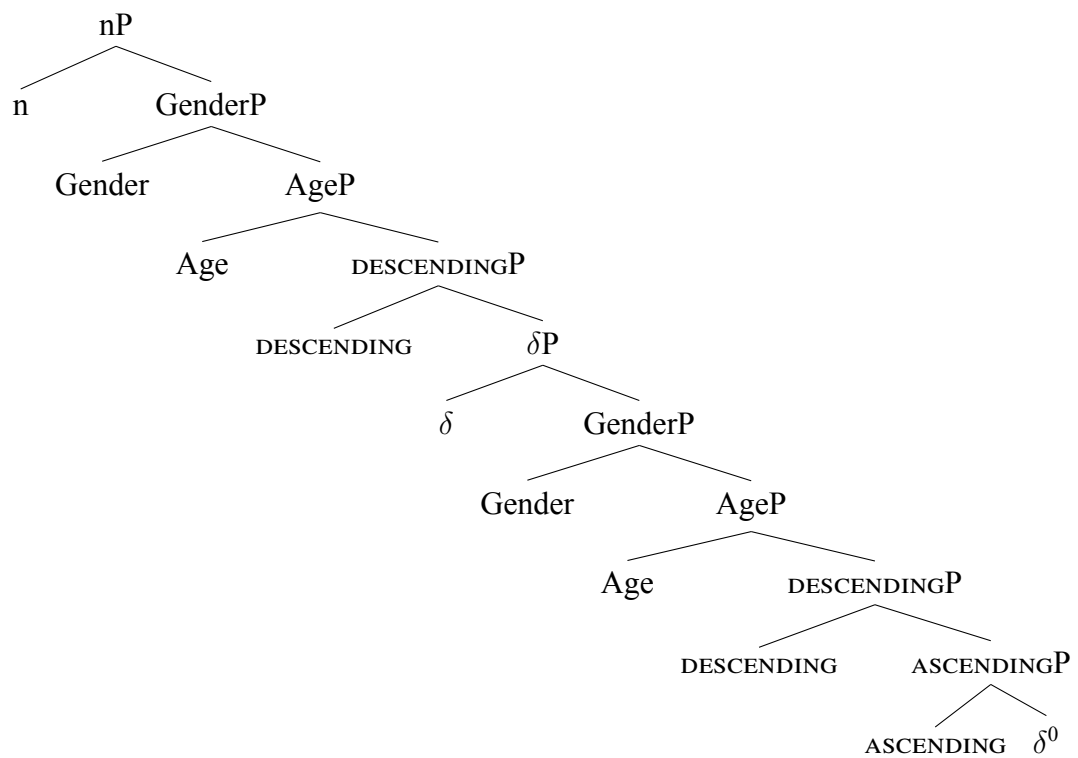
⁹⁹Its four English equivalents do too.

¹⁰⁰NB that Age and Gender are not features of the Vocabulary Item *nipote*, meaning that, while it will be specified in the syntax, it will not be in the morphology, explaining how the noun nonetheless triggers gender concord: *(il) mio nipote/(la) mia nipote*.

(80) kin-fseq for deriving grandchildren



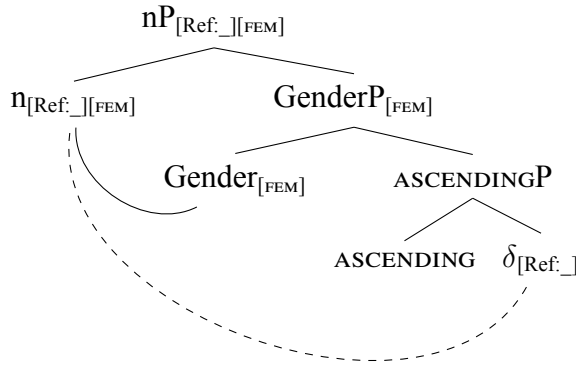
(81) kin-fseq for deriving nephews and nieces



3.2 Morphological realisation

The variation that can be found in the languages of the world with regards to the amount of the set of distinct terms that they use to refer to kin relations actually depends on the morphological realisation of a functional tree such as example (82).

(82) *Mother*



Kin-fseqs enter the derivation fully specified, as a consequence of the asymmetrical spell out introduced by δ , which is also noted in Marušić (2009). The complete kin-fseq is shipped to PF only once little *n* has been merged. This is the case for the tree in (82), which means *mother*, and which, because it has no syncretism with any other kinship term, I assume to take the following vocabulary item: $\langle n \text{ FEM, ASCENDING, } \delta^0 \rangle \leftrightarrow \textit{mother}$. These values are present in the morphology,¹⁰¹ and languages may or may not have all the specification that is given in the kin-fseq coming from the syntax. As one can also see by comparing tables 25 and 26, English does not have a specific kinship vocabulary item to refer to an older or younger sibling or child. Morphological realisation follows from the main three principles of Distributed Morphology (as found in Halle & Marantz, 1994, pp. 275–277):

1. **Late insertion:** Lexical items (read Vocabulary Items) are inserted after a syntactic derivation has been shipped to PF.
2. **Underspecification**, and the Subset Principle. The features of Vocabulary Items are a subset of the features of the syntax.

¹⁰¹Like the proposal in Acquaviva & Panagiotidis (2012) of having syntactic and morphological roots.

3. **Syntactic Hierarchical Structure all the Way Down:** If the syntax is hierarchical, the morphology will be too, distinguishing similar features according to the δP they belong too, and avoiding any intermixing of levels.

$\langle_{nP} ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	‘parent’
$\langle_{nP} MASC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	‘father’
$\langle_{nP} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	‘mother’
$\langle_{nP} DESC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	‘child’
$\langle_{nP} MASC, DESC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	‘son’
$\langle_{nP} FEM, DESC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	‘daughter’
$\langle_{nP} ASC, \langle_{\delta P} MASC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	PARENT OF FATHER
$\langle_{nP} MASC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} MASC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	FATHER OF FATHER
$\langle_{nP} FEM, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} MASC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	MOTHER OF FATHER
$\langle_{nP} MASC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	PARENT OF MOTHER
$\langle_{nP} MASC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	maternal grandfather (= FATHER OF MOTHER)
$\langle_{nP} FEM, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	maternal grandmother (= MOTHER OF MOTHER)
$\langle_{nP} DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	sibling
$\langle_{nP} MASC, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	brother
$\langle_{nP} FEM, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	sister
$\langle_{nP} OLDER, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	older sibling
$\langle_{nP} MASC, OLDER, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	older brother
$\langle_{nP} FEM, OLDER, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	older sister
$\langle_{nP} YOUNGER, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	younger sibling
$\langle_{nP} MASC, YOUNGER, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	younger brother
$\langle_{nP} FEM, YOUNGER, DESC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	younger sister
$\langle_{nP} MASC, DESC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} MASC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	paternal uncle (= BROTHER OF FATHER)
$\langle_{nP} FEM, DESC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} MASC, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	paternal aunt (= SISTER OF FATHER)
$\langle_{nP} MASC, DESC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	maternal uncle (= BROTHER OF MOTHER)
$\langle_{nP} FEM, DESC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	maternal aunt (= SISTER OF MOTHER)
$\langle_{nP} \langle_{\delta P} FEM, DESC, ASC, \langle_{\delta P} FEM, ASC, \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	maternal aunt (= SISTER OF MOTHER)

Table 25: Non exhaustive list of some possible kinship terms in their English notation and their correspondent, fully specified feature sets.

102,103

The matrikin distinction, to give an example, can be explained by the realisation or non-realisation of Gender. Assuming that the distinction is held at LF, but not at PF, and thus conforming to the definition of Deficiency (Kallulli & Roberts, 2025), that allows having such a projection, meaning that any syncretism between two different syntactic trees will need to be the result of an underspecified morphology. Following the premise that morphology is syntax all the way

⁻¹The angle brackets represent that the set is ordered, following Distributed Morphology’s property of Syntactic Hierarchical Structure all the Way Down (Halle & Marantz, 1994, pp. 276–277).

¹⁰³Being fully specified, these morphological kin-fseqs correspond one to one with their syntactic counterparts.

down (Harley & Noyer, 1999; Marantz, 1997), there is no reason to propose morphology specific processes for the deletion of features, such as Impoverishment (cf. Bonet, 1991, 1995). The following table is an example of the morphological exponence of the main kinship terms in English, followed by corresponding tables in Catalan, Italian, and Seneca:

$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>father</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>mother</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>grandfather</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>grandmother</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ MASC, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>brother</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ FEM, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>sister</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ MASC, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>uncle</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ FEM, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>aunt</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ DESC } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>cousin</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>son</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>daughter</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, DESC } \langle_{\delta} \text{ DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>nephew</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, DESC } \langle_{\delta} \text{ DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>niece</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, DESC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>grandson</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, DESC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>granddaughter</i>

Table 26: Kinship vocabulary items in English

$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>pare</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>mare</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>avi</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>àvia</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ MASC, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>germà</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ FEM, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>germana</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ MASC, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>tiet/oncle</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ FEM, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>tiet/tia</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, DESC } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>cosí</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, DESC } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>cosina</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, DESC, } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>nebot</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, DESC, } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>neboda</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, DESC, } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>net</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, DESC, } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>neta</i>

Table 27: Kinship vocabulary items in Catalan

Compared to Catalan and English (tables 27 and 26 respectively), which have distinct lexical items for *nephew* and *niece*, and grandson and granddaughter, each with its respective feature specifications, Italian collapses all of them into $\langle_{nP} \text{ DESC } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ DESC } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \leftrightarrow \textit{nipote}$. The syncretism in Italian compared to the other two languages can be explained as *nipote* being un-

derspecified for ASC in the first dimension, which makes it akin to grandson and granddaughter, and for Gender in the second.¹⁰⁴ Seneca displays an age distinction between siblings, mark-

$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>padre</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>madre</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>nonno</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>nonna</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ MASC, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>fratello</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ FEM, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>sorella</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ MASC, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>zio</i>
$\langle_{nP}, \text{ FEM, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>zia</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC DESC } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>cugino</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM DESC } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>cugina</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ DESC } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ DESC } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>nipote</i>

Table 28: Kinship vocabulary items in Italian

ing both older and younger ones, and a gender distinction in both siblings of EGO and of EGO's parents, in the latter of which it results in those siblings of EGO's parents which share the same sex with EGO's respective parent to be marked the same as EGO's said partner (D. Jones, 2010, p. 370). In such a system, EGO would call EGO's mother and aunt both as *mother*, and uncle, because it has a different sex, as *uncle*, and vice versa with EGO's father's siblings.¹⁰⁵ These two types of distinction, which are encoded morphologically, are an indicator that the syntax encodes such relations, and in the case of Seneca, these distinctions are carried on to the morphology, although there is no actual overt distinction between both *ahgareseh*, which could be resolved by an impoverishment rule that would get rid of both gender features. If *ahgareseh* were to be represented by a feature bundle without any Gender specification that would distinguish matrikin (i.e. $\langle_{nP} \text{ DESC } \langle_{\delta P}, \text{ DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$), we would get a term that gets a one to one mapping with the feature specification of the English vocabulary item *cousin* (see

¹⁰⁴The lower Gender feature is not present in any of the three languages, as they do not distinguish matrikin, and the top Gender feature, while suppressed at PF, is still active in the syntax, allowing for concord to occur:

- (83) *La nipote di Gianni è intelligente.*
the.F niece/granddaughter of Gianni is intelligent
Gianni's niece/granddaughter is intelligent.
- (84) *Il nipote di Gianni è intelligente.*
the.M nephew/grandson of Gianni is intelligent
Gianni's nephew/grandson is intelligent.

¹⁰⁵I've used the English equivalents for mother, father, uncle and aunt as simplifications.

table 26).¹⁰⁶

$\langle_{nP} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>hanih</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>noyeh</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, MASC, OLDER, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>haje</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, MASC, YOUNGER, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>haga</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, FEM, OLDER, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>ahje</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, FEM, YOUNGER, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>kaga</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, FEM, OLDER, DESC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>haga</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, FEM, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>ahgahuc</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{, MASC, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>hocnoseh</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ DESC } \langle_{\delta P} \text{, FEM, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ MASC, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>ahgareseh</i>
$\langle_{nP} \text{ DESC } \langle_{\delta P} \text{, MASC, DESC, ASC, } \langle_{\delta P} \text{ FEM, ASC, } \delta^0 \rangle \rangle \rangle$	$\leftrightarrow$	<i>ahgareseh</i>

Table 29: Kinship vocabulary items in Seneca, adapted from the ones given in D. Jones (2010, p. 370)

As a last featured language, I include Mandarin, as it seems to contradict the model that I have proposed.

(85) Adapted from Wu (1927, p. 321).¹⁰⁷

English	Mandarin
father	<i>fu</i>
mother	<i>mu</i>
father's father	<i>tsu fu</i>
mother's father	<i>wai tsu fu</i>
father's mother	<i>tsu mu</i>
mother's mother	<i>wai tsu mu</i>

The morpheme *tsu* can be seen as being the overt realisation of the ASCENDING node, while the morpheme *wai*, which only appears to mark feminine gender is the overt exponent of Gender specified for [FEM], while [MASC] is not overtly realised. At the same time, both *fu* and *mu* are specified for gender themselves, meaning that they need to be complete trees including both a feature ASC, as well as Gender. The compositional building of kinship terms in Mandarin, if it truly is compositional, seems to follow from left to right, meaning that, if *tsu* marks ascending, and *wai* marks feminine gender of the lower generation, the part of the tree that would correspond to the level EGO's PARENTS is realised with different morphemes when governed by another kin-fseq: $\emptyset$ for the part that corresponds to EGO's FATHER, and *wai* for the part that corresponds

¹⁰⁶This derives from the necessity of solving any competition that might arise as a result of the subset principle (cf. Halle & Marantz, 1994, p. 278).

¹⁰⁷The marking of tones is not present in the source either.

to EGO'S MOTHER. This also holds when deriving the grandchildren, with an overt exponent SUN that stands for DESCENDING. An asymmetry is present, namely the lack of a morphological exponent on the top kin-fseq of the term that what would correspond to the english *grandson* (or the higher SON projection in SON OF SON OF EGO):

(86) Adapted from Wu (1927, p. 322):

English	Mandarin
son	<i>tze</i>
daughter	<i>lǚ</i>
son's son	<i>sun</i>
daughter's son	<i>wai sun</i>
son's daughter	<i>sun lǚ</i>
daughter's daughter	<i>wai sun lǚ</i>

Tze is not overt beyond for realising $\langle_{\text{nP}} \text{MASC, DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle$, while *lǚ*, which encodes $\langle_{\text{nP}} \text{FEM, DESC, } \delta^0 \rangle$, is. By its distribution, *wai* is not the gender marker of the spelled out kinship term itself, but rather a marker of matrikin, which is a distinction encoded by Mandarin is also interesting in that it does not overtly realise the head noun in the masculine with such DESCENDING kinship terms, and it also makes a distinction in the derivation between core and non-core kinship, having suppletive stems for core relationships and compositional nouns for non-core ones.¹⁰⁸ Mandarin compound kinship nouns suppose the following problems: (i) the gender feature of the lower kin-fseq, which determines matrikin, needs to be lower than either the ascending or the descending feature, against universal ordering of the kin-fseq, and (ii) if the elements are truly compositional, meaning that each kin-fseq is headed by an nP, one would expect there to be a repetition of lexical items in son's son, instead of having just *sun*, as the item is biphasal.

¹⁰⁸It is also worth mentioning that Mandarin is a head final language (cf. Ma, 2024), which thus explains the ordering of the components in the compositional constructions.

3.3 The parametrisation of [UNI]

If we further assume that uniqueness is a feature that is parametrised on certain kinship nouns, and we propose that it is to be found on little *nP*, then we can also propose at the same time the link between the referentiality of δ and uniqueness. Uniqueness thus can be considered a formal feature according to the intensional definition given in Kallulli & Roberts (2025, p. 14), which states that a feature is a formal feature of UG only if it is redundant, meaning that it is invisible at LF, or deficient, meaning that it is invisible at PF. Uniqueness is a deficient feature, as is clear in Italian, where the feature triggers movement of the possessive to DP but is not present in the morphology, shown by the lack of a dedicated possessive determiner form, unlike in Catalan or Aragonese, where a distinct set of vocabulary items specified for the feature is used. If it is a Formal Feature, that means that it is present in the syntax, and the Uniformity Principle dictates that it should be available in all languages: “In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, assume languages to be uniform, with variety restricted to easily detectable properties of utterances.” (Chomsky, 2001, p. 2), shifting variation to mismatches between Narrow Syntax and its interfaces, or just to Interface Conditions. Catalan, and the languages that have uniqueness-based DPM have a full on uniqueness specification on the possessive, meaning that, at least from the possessives alone, the feature is not deficient, but because it is not overtly realised on *nP*, it is also deficient.

As for the idea that uniqueness tends to be present when we get the least amount of iterations, this is already encoded by default in the *kin-fseq*. If this is what decides to give a kinship noun, i.e. a *kin nP* the feature [UNI], we cannot just explain why this also happens with other nouns, such as *vida* in Catalan, nor why there are some kinship items that are not specified for [uni]. A solution is to say that [UNI] is a feature introduced from outside of the syntax, when the kinship element, or *vida*, for that matter, is shipped to the interfaces upon completion of the phase, which takes place at the insertion of the categoriser little *n*. Because *nP* is a phase, the element will automatically be spelled out and given [UNI]. Another option is for kinship nouns to have the feature added when δ ships the kinship derivation to the LF interface. Adding this feature to the syntax when it is not originally part of the numeration is in clear violation of the

Inclusiveness Condition (Chomsky 1995:225), but the Inclusiveness Condition itself is just a property of phases.¹⁰⁹

I go a step further and propose that, in order to account why usually there seems to be a universal hierarchy of kinship and uniqueness, in which, if there is uniqueness marking, then it is for those kin terms that are closer to δ^0 .¹¹⁰ This follows from the same iterations that spell-out LF-only phases. The more iterations, each of which accounts for a single, one-dimensional change (which is a restriction that needs encoding), the bigger the distance from δ^0 , which translates into a lower level of uniqueness. Or put in another way, the more instances of δ , the higher the chance of the referent being spelled out as not-unique.¹¹¹ The valuation of the feature [UNI] at LF follows from Löbner (2011), who considers this semantic feature to be open for modification from the syntactic input, and hence its insertion into the syntax also follows if Inclusiveness stops being a Condition on Grammar (as proposed in Chomsky, 1995, p. 225), and is seen as purely a property of phases. With the extrasyntactic insertion of [UNI] and the reintroduction of the completed phase into the syntactic derivation, be it as δP inside of a kinship term, be it as nP, a new numeration is effectively created, as the features from the previous numeration are not visible due to the Phase Impenetrability Condition. I argue that this is also the reason why derivational elements may have no effect upon the uniqueness value of a kinship term, which might be the reason why the words for ‘godfather’ and ‘godmother’ in Aranese Occitan and in some Catalan varieties, which are, at least in origin, diminutives of the words for ‘father’ and ‘mother’ respectively, can also be marked as unique, despite not only not being core kinship, but also not describing a consanguineal kinship relationship. With this, [uni] can be seen as a further feature of δ , which like the referential feature, and also like gender, percolates, but which can end up being lost throughout the derivation. As to why this happens, I think that Tables 11 and 12, which mark the uniqueness specification of several (masculine) kinship terms in twelve different varieties of Catalan, can be of help, the core kinship term *fill* (‘son’) does not appear. This could be an indicator of not only the lack of DPM with a word such as ‘son’, but also

¹⁰⁹Moving perhaps closer to the definition of Inclusiveness given by Ackema & Neeleman (2004, p. 101), who also propose a having a generative word syntax distinct from phrasal syntax.

¹¹⁰ δ^0 being the lowest anchor, which would equate to EGO.

¹¹¹And even with only a single iteration of the kin-fseq, we see that the more active layers it has, the less likely it also is that it will be marked as [UNI].

of the possibility that the conservation of the feature [UNI] throughout the derivation might be dependent on the presence of ASCENDING.¹¹² As such, a sentence like the following is expected to be ungrammatical:

- (87) **Mon fill.*
 my son
 My son.

The same holds true for *net* ('grandson'), which, like *fill* does not have any ASCENDING feature, while *nebot* ('nephew') has two, and therefore can still be marked for uniqueness, as seen in tables 12 and 13.

3.4 Interim summary

In this section I have proposed a model that derives kinship terminology from within the syntax itself by getting rid of the conception that nouns are exclusively composed of a root and a categoriser little *n*, and instead defending that kinship nouns are nPs composed of a little *n* that selects a functional structure kin-fseq on top of a bound anaphor. The bound anaphor accounts for the referential shift kinship nouns in possessive contexts, as well as within the kin-fseq itself, which depends on the iteration of said anaphor, in form of a variable/categoriser δ in order to allow for the derivation of non-core kinship terms, introducing with each step an LF phase that delays the shipment of the derivation to PF until little *n* is merged. Once transferred to the morphological component, kin-fseqs get matched with morphological kin-fseqs, which are underspecified, resulting syncretic lexical items.

What authors like Read (2001, 2013) & Read et al. (1984) fail to account for is the syntax of kinship nouns, in, seemingly, tacitly assuming a lexicalist approach. I, however, ground my distinction and proposal of a syntax for kinship on the framework of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz, 1993, 1994). The distinction between atomic and reciprocal terms that Read (2001, pp. 248–249) describes are of little to no importance to the syntax. The Optimality

¹¹²Which seems logical, as reproduction results in population growth, and the more elements sharing the property X, the less unique the property becomes. If I, Ignasi, only have one child, this child (read 'element') is the only one that has the property X, X = being Ignasi's child, making the element unique. Once I have a second child, this does no longer hold.

Theory based constraints in D. Jones (2010), which, among other things, are used to derive the different kinship terminologies, can account for the variation in the available kinship vocabulary items among languages. The model is not without limitations, as evidenced by its inability to derive Mandarin kinship terms.

Finally, the iteration of kin-fseq, facilitated by the merging of multiple δ s, resulting in kinship terms further away from EGO can be the cause of the parametrisation of the feature [UNI] in kinship nouns.

4 Conclusions

In this Thesis I have explained how kinship interacts with both word and phrasal morphosyntax. In the first part, I have provided an expanded typological analysis of kinship based Differential Possessive Marking (henceforth DPM) in the Romance languages, with special consideration of the Occitano-Romance languages, which had, until that point, been understudied in this regard, at least when compared to the Italo-Romance and Gallo-Italic languages. I have proposed and defended that DPM is triggered by uniqueness, which is encoded as a formal feature on a subset of kinship nouns, as well as in some non-kinship nouns that also undergo DPM, demonstrating that DPM is not caused by kinship, although they are correlated. I have also established that uniqueness is a D-feature that will try to check, whenever inserted, the EPP feature on D, and that DPM is only possible if the prenominal possessive has a feature valuation slot for uniqueness, to which [UNI] can be valued and from which it continues towards D, as one of the consequences of feature valuation is that the inserted feature continues being available for the syntax. Finally, although [UNI] is generally a deficient feature, it is not in the prenominal possessives of Catalan, Aragonese, some Occitan varieties, which have an extra set of VIs for possessives marked with uniqueness.

In the second part I have presented a theoretical proposal for the analysis of kinship terms that has the goal of being explanatorily adequate both in terms of accounting for the typological variation found in the kinship terminologies around the world, as well as for localising the trigger for DPM. For that, I assume that kinship nouns, while still being a part of the substantive lexicon and being headed by a categoriser little *n*, they lack a root, having instead a universal functional structure, which I name kin-fseq, composed of a bound anaphor and hierarchical relational features. This structure feeds into an underspecified morphology, causing syncretism patterns, while it is continuously and recursively shipped to LF, explaining both the derivation of non-core kinship terms inside of the syntax, as well as the parametrisation of [UNI] on a subset of kinship nouns, which is inserted into the syntax upon the completion of the phase introduced by *n*, going against the Inclusiveness Condition, and is sensible to both the presence of the feature ASCENDING and the distance of the referential feature of little *n* wrt the one on δ^0 , with

the amount of iterations allowed for its insertion seems to be variety dependent, as observed in Catalan.

Finally, the current thesis leaves some questions unanswered, such as: (i) the mapping of syntactic kin-fseq to their morphological counterparts in Mandarin, (ii) the plural inflection of DPM possessives in varieties of Neapolitan, Venetan, and Campidanese Sardinian, (iii) the enclitic position of the DPM possessive in Neapolitan and southern Corsican.

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Zusammenfassung in deutscher Sprache

In dieser Masterarbeit stelle ich eine theoretische Analyse vor, um zwei unterschiedliche, aber durch Verwandtschaft (*kinship*) verwandt, Phänomene zu erklären, nämlich *Differential Possessive Marking* und synkretische Verwandtschaftsnomen. Ich argumentiere, die Ursache von *Differential Possessive Marking* liege an einem syntaktischen Merkmal, welches Einzigartigkeit (*uniqueness*) kodiert und dessen Parametrisierung von der internen Struktur von Verwandtschaftsnomen, welche in hierarchische syntaktische Merkmale dekomponiert werden, abzuleiten ist. Dies soll, zusammen mit der Unterspezifizierung der Morphologie, sowohl unterschiedliche Systeme von *Differential Possessive Marking* als auch synkretische Verwandtschaftsnomen ermöglichen.

Abstract in English

In this Master's Thesis I propose a theoretical analysis for explaining two different phenomena, which are nonetheless related by involving kinship: Differential Possessive Marking and syncretic kinship nouns. I argue that the cause of Differential Possessive Marking is a syntactic feature that encodes uniqueness and whose parametrisation depends on the internal structure of kinship terms, which can be decomposed into other hierarchical syntactic features. This, together with the underspecification of the Morphology, accounts for different patterns of Differential Possessive Marking, as well as for syncretic kinship nouns.