

Analytical Genitive Constructions of Sanna

A Lexicalist Approximation

Edgar David Martínez García
Department of Languages and Literature, University of Nicosia
martinezgarcia.ed@unic.ac.cy

1 Background

Sanna, also known as Cypriot Arabic, is a dying variety of Arabic endemic to Cyprus spoken by the Catholic Maronite community, currently in active use mainly in the Kormakiti village located in the north-west section of the island. Due to the division of the country following the invasion by the Turkish army in 1974, the geographical base of Sanna has been cut off from the majority of the Maronite community, who mostly relocated to Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, in the aftermath of the invasion. Since Cypriot Maronites have long been fluent in Cypriot Greek, the community has abandoned, for the most part, the use of Sanna as their mother tongue adopting Cypriot Greek instead.

Sanna has attracted sparse scholarly interest for the last 60 years; noteworthy publications include Newton's (1964) and Roth's (2004) documentation efforts, the seminal work by Borg (1984, 1997) on Sanna's phonology, and the only glossary of the language, produced by the latter author (Borg 2004). The focus of more recent work has been the production of reference and pedagogical materials, such as Frankiskou's (2014) grammar of the language and Kiourti, Zonias, and Dimitriou's (2021) textbook. The syntax of the language has received some passing attention, especially by Newton (1964) and Roth (2004), Shormani (2023) and Armostis and Karyolemou (2022). To my knowledge, there does not exist academic work solely dedicated to explore the syntax of Sanna, let alone its semantics. This paper intends to be a modest attempt towards the alleviation of such a gap. More concretely, I intend here to give account of the syntactic patterns and semantic composition of possessive constructions in Sanna that make use genitive markers.

2 Sanna's Possessive Constructions

Sanna employs two possessive constructions whose use is constrained by their perceived alienability from the perspective of the speaker. For unalienable possessions, kinship terms, and body parts, the nouns denoting them are followed by a clitic-like bound possessive pronoun, while for alienable possessions the bound pronoun attaches to a genitive marker instead (Newton 1964). Examples of the former are presented in (1) while those of the latter are shown in (2). This paper will give account of the data presented in (2).

- (1) a. umm -i
mother poss.1sg
'My mother' (from Newton 1964, p. 46)
- b. ism -ak
name poss.2sg.m
'Your name'
- c. pátn -i
belly poss.1sg
'My belly' (from Roth 2004, p. 58)
- d. mbrat -i
wife poss.1sg
'My wife'
- (2) a. li tsaéra šait -u
DET chairSG.F GEN.SG.F POSS.3SG.M
'His chair' (from Newton 1964, p. 46)
- b. l- aftokínito tél -ak
DET carSG.M GEN.SG.M POSS.2SG.M
'Your car'
- c. t- telefona šat -on
DET telephonePL GEN.PL POSS.3PL
'Their telephones'

- d. Ankonoui tél -i
Grandchild GEN.SG.M POSS.1SG
'My grandson'
- e. Ankonoui šait -i
Grandchild GEN.SG.F POSS.1SG
'My granddaughter'

Structures in which the relation between a possessum (i.e., a possession) and its possessor is mediated by a genitive marker are common in Semitic languages (Morano 2022; Shlonsky 2004; Qarabesh and Shormani 2018), being regularly referred to as analytic genitive constructions (AGCs). The AGCs in Sanna exhibit two noteworthy features: first, their genitive markers are sensitive to the gender and number features of the possessum, while the possessum itself ought to be preceded by a definite determiner. Both these characteristics are illustrated in the data collected in (2).

That markers *tél*, *šait*, and *šat* are properly used depends on their number and gender features agreeing with those of the possessum: *tél* is uniquely used with nouns marked as singular and masculine, *šait* with singular and feminine nouns, while *šat* is used with plural nouns. This is a trait Sanna's genitive markers share with markers from varieties of Arabic such as Egyptian Arabic, Palestinian Arabic, and certain uses of the Yemeni Arabic marker *haqq* (Qarabesh and Shormani 2018).

The genitive phrase formed by the marker and the bound pronoun seem to preferably work as the complement of nouns with a definite determiner as their specifier. This is the case of all the examples collected in (2) except for (2d) and (2e) in which the determinerless and seemingly gender neutral noun *ankonoui* is employed. The gender and number features of the markers themselves help define the gender of the main noun in these phrases.

3 Syntactic and Semantic Treatment

In this paper, I intend to capture the syntactic patterns and semantics of Sanna's AGCs. Syntactically, I will assume that AGCs in Sanna build complex noun phrases headed by the noun encoding the possessum. More concretely, the bound pronoun introducing the possessor will form a phrase headed by the genitive marker. At the moment, I abstract away from questions concerning the categorial status of genitive markers since this is still a subject of debate (Qarabesh and Shormani 2018). The genitive phrase thus formed functions as a complement of the main noun depicting the possessum, noun which will take a definite determiner as its specifier.

Semantically, the genitive marker introduces a two-place predicate $\lambda x \lambda y. \text{POSS}(y)(x)$ that establishes that a certain entity (x) possesses an entity (y). To capture Sanna's AGCs' semantics I will implement the combinatorial tools of Lexical Resource Semantics (LRS) (Levine, Richter, and Sailer in press; Richter and Sailer 2004).

An analysis on these lines captures the new data brought to the fore by studying Sanna with well-known and extensively tested HPSG tools such as the head-complement and head-specifier principles (Pollard and Sag 1996; Sag, Wasow, and Bender 2003), necessary for capturing the syntactic patterns of AGCs as presented above. The implementation of LRS allows a cleaner treatment of the semantic import brought by each one of the lexical items composing AGCs phrases.

To illustrate my proposal I will show a derivation example for the phrase in (2a) repeated below:

- (3) a. li tsaéra šait -u
DET chairSG.F GEN.SG.F POSS.3SG.M
'His chair'

Here, I will mostly spell out the details for the lexical entries of the genitive markers and the bound pronoun. The bound pronoun *-u* will be assigned the category *noun* and no valence features while being indexed with masculine and singular gender and number features respectively. The pronoun also introduces a variable that will be one for the arguments of the predicate **POSS** introduced by the genitive marker. See the lexical entry in figure 1.

Lexically, the genitive marker will be simply categorized as *gen(itive)*, thus remaining agnostic in regards to its categorial status. *Šait* will take *-u* as a complement and introduce gender and number values that agree with those of the main noun. As mentioned previously, the marker will encode the predicate **POSS** that will take as its arguments the semantic content supplied by the possessum and the possessor. See the lexical entry in figure 2. The variables **POSS** takes as arguments are presented in the lexical entry in italics to represent their not being saturated.

Finally, the main noun *tsaéra* will take the resulting genitive phrase as a complement, and the definite article will simply introduce the operator λ . For a more detailed treatment of definite determiners implementing LRS tools see Sailer and Am-David (2016). The final derivation will be presented in figure 3.

4 Conclusion

This article intends to capture the syntax and semantic of the analytical genitive constructions (AGCs) of Sanna, an understudied and dying variety of Arabic only spoken in Cyprus. My proposal offers a couple of innovations. First, framing some of the language's possessive constructions within the general scholarly discussion concerning Semitic AGCs allows for a more principled comparison of Sanna with other varieties of Arabic that goes beyond speculations concerning how much of Arabic there is in Sanna (Borg 2004; Newton 1964). Second, the conservative implementation of HPSG's analytical tools to new data offers a sure-footed first approximation to the syntax and semantics of Sanna's AGCs.

5 Figures

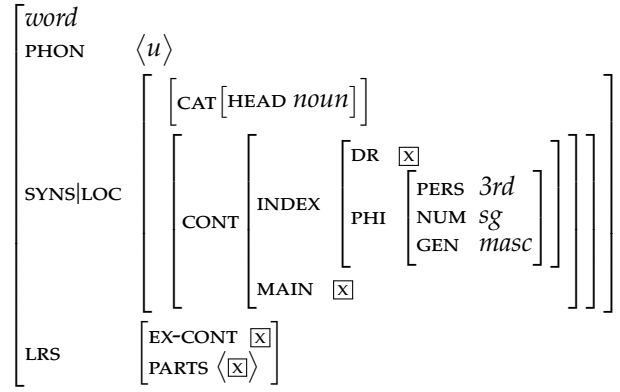


Figure 1. Lexical entry for the bound possessive pronoun "-u"

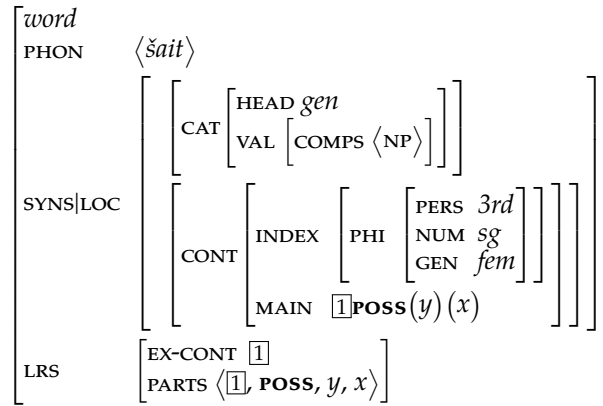


Figure 1. Lexical entry for the genitive marker "šait"

