Possessives Within and Beyond the NP

This paper is going to focus on the multi-faceted nature of possessive satellites in Russian nominal phrases. In particular, I will discuss the distinction between the so-called modificational or property-denoting possessives and regular or individual-denoting possessives (see Quirk et al. 1985, Munn 1995, Taylor 1996, Strauss 2004, Trugman 2004-5, 2005). Property-denoting possessive satellites, as in men's room, have been given a number of analyses: Barker (1991) and Taylor (1996) analyze them as lexical compounds rather than syntactic phrases; Munn (1995), in contrast, proposes to treat them as syntactic structures occupying a specifier lower than Spec, DP and derives their distinct properties from regular possessives based on this structural difference. Strauss (2004) checks the validity of Munn's analysis for Hebrew possessives and rejects the latter's proposal that individual-denoting possessives move to the Spec, DP rather than being directly merged there. Thus, according to Strauss, two types of possessives have distinct properties due to their different places of merge.

Russian radically differs from English and some other languages in that it prohibits phrasal possessives of the kind a very tall man's hat (Corbett 1987, Kopčevskaja-Tamm & Šmeljov 1994, Babyonyshev 1997, ao). I will argue that this morphological peculiarity affects the syntax of Russian possessives and allows the latter to be merged either as heads or as maximal phrases within the extended nominal projection. In particular, I will propose that Russian property-denoting possessives form 'weakly lexical constructions' in the sense of Sadler and Arnold (1994), forming zero-level adjuncts with the noun head, similarly to Russian restrictive adjectives, both relational and relational-possessive ones (Trugman 2005). Such Poss0+N0 units usually acquire idiomatic or emotive interpretations (cf. Taylor 1996), as in (1):

(1) a. adamovo jabloko b. mamen'kin synok
   'Adam's apple'    'mommy's boy'

Individual-denoting possessives, on the other hand, will be shown to be maximal phrases merged as NP-adjuncts or specifiers (depending on the type of the noun head) that can (but need not) move the Spec, DP to license the null D. This claim will be supported by instances of individual-denoting possessives hosted by indefinite or/and non-referring noun phrases, such as primary (2a) and secondary predicates (2b), nouns in opaque contexts (2c) and in approximative constructions (2d) (from Yadroff & Billings 1997), as illustrated below:

(2) a. Dom na gore ran'še byl [moim zavodom].
   House on hill earlier was my plant
   'The house on the hill was formerly my plant.'

b. On vsegda sčital menja [svoin drugom].
   He always considered me.acc self's friend
   'He always considered me his friend.'

c. Petja vsju žizn' iskal [svoje prizvanje], no tak i ne našel.
   Peter all life searched his calling but so and not found
   'Peter was looking all his life for his calling but hasn't found it yet.'

   Books five my friend so and got-left at me
   'Approximately five books of my friend's got left at my place.'

Assuming that non-argumental nominal phrases are NPs rather than DPs (Stowell 1981, Longobardi 1994), we must conclude that possessives in (2a/b) are merged within the NP. The bracketed indefinite noun phrases in (2c/d) are not necessarily DPs either. Hence, such examples undermine Strauss' proposal that all individual-denoting possessives are merged as high as the DP-level at the same time supporting Munn's movement analysis of possessives.

In addition, it will be shown how the morphology of Russian possessives, namely the selectional properties of the possessive head $H_{\text{poss}}$, can account for their dual (head vs. phrase) nature.
References:


