

NPs as just NPs

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Abstract

The hypothesis initially defended in [Abney, S.P., 1987. The English noun phrase in its sentential aspects. Ph.D. dissertation, MIT] that determiners, quantifiers, and adjectives are heads and NP is their syntactic complement became one of the standard analyses within P&P and early minimalist syntax, but, examined in an unprejudiced way, causes more difficulties than it solves at both the empirical and the conceptual level. Without rejecting the head status of articles and the DP view of nominals, Kayne [Kayne, R., 1994. The Antisymmetry of Syntax. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA], Cinque [Cinque, G., 1995. On the evidence for partial N-movement in the Romance noun phrase. In: Cinque, G. (Ed.), *Italian Syntax and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 287–309] and others have subsequently proposed that demonstratives, quantifiers, possessives, and adjectives be considered phrasal specifiers of various functional projections, rather than heads, with only articles treated as heads of DP, and such is now the standard view within Chomskian generative grammar, but the specifier theory is itself subject to serious objections. This work evaluates afresh the pros and cons of both accounts, but finally rejects them to return to the earlier NP analysis of NPs and the traditional view of articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, adjectives, PPs and relative clauses as modifiers of the noun, which, under the theory of modification presented in [Escribano, J.L.G., 2004. Head-final effects and the nature of modification. *Journal of Linguistics* 40, 1–43], accounts for the facts quite well and meets the Occamian ideals of Minimalist Theory rather better than current competitors.

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1. Determiners and modifiers: Standard views within P&P/Minimalist syntax

1.1. The head theory

In essence, what Abney's (1987) DetP Hypothesis helped explain with respect to the grammar of English nominals¹ was (1) why some determinerless NPs cannot function as arguments, (2) why articles, demonstratives, genitives and quantifiers precede nouns, (3) why only one token of each is possible *per* NP, (4) why determiners and adjectives seem to reject complements of their own if considered as phrasal dependents of nouns, (5) why strong determiners and certain adjectives license ellipsis of the XPs that follow them, and (6) why some 'personal pronouns' can occur (apparently) in the position of D preceding NPs, but not before DPs. None of those phenomena was accounted for under the traditional analyses offered in Chomsky (1972) or Jackendoff (1977), and therefore Abney's proposal was, and has remained, immensely influential.

However, as to (1), although, in English, singular common count nouns cannot be used to refer to individuals unless accompanied by a determiner, proper nouns refer on their own (indeed, they *reject* Ds, Qs, etc.), as can plural count and mass common nouns, and the situation across languages in this respect is complex (cf. Carlson, 1977; Chierchia, 1998; Longobardi, 2001). In retrospect, Stowell's (1989) and Longobardi's (1994) equation NP = predicate vs. DP = argument is misleading or just wrong both ways in view of the existence of (a) (presumed) DP predicates, cf. (1a,b), (b) presumed NP arguments (cases cited, plus *home* in (1c–d) and the like), (c) impossible bare NP predicates, cf. (1e), and (d) predicative NP antecedents of relative clauses, cf. (1f), etc.,² although the fact that D can be phonetically empty in such analyses makes them difficult to falsify.³

¹ Of course, Abney's hypothesis had other attractive implications, e.g., it allowed for analysing *ing* nominals and sentential phrases in a parallel way, and it is not my purpose to deny its *other* merits. What is under scrutiny here is whether the generative grammarians' decision to start considering determiners as functional heads/specifiers of functional heads, instead of modifiers of nouns, was well supported on empirical grounds and has led to a simpler and more explanatory overall grammar than could have been developed on the basis of the traditional view.

² Williams (1981, p. 86; 1983a, p. 436; 1983b, p. 297; 1984, p. 643; 1989, pp. 286–287) has argued in detail that determiners and possessives/genitives are specifiers of NPs and may be structural subjects in cases like *Joe's destruction of the furniture*, but play no role in the saturation of the R feature that makes NPs alternatively referential and predicative. Rothstein (1985, p. 170), who follows Higginbotham against Williams in this respect, adds the important qualification that the closing category may act simply as a 'place-holder' turning NPs into arguments or predicates as needed.

³ See Giusti (1997, p. 102) on the non-semantic reasons why article-insertion is needed in certain languages, which Longobardi (2001) accepts. Longobardi (2001, p. 590) also notes that proper nouns refer *without* raising to D in English. That would seem to be an important exception to his basic proposal in Longobardi (1994), but, of course, if N-Raising is subject to parametrization, it is hard to prove the theory wrong. What triggers N-raising is the strength of D (see Longobardi, 2001; Giusti, 2002), which is claimed to be strong in Romance, where nouns raise, but weak (?) in English, where they do not, so the theory stands even if English would seem to be a blatant exception to the original proposal. Nevertheless, the correlation between argumenthood, referentiality, and D is much weaker and more indirect than initially claimed. Giusti (2002, p. 65), for example, concludes that the article is *not* the carrier of the [+Ref] feature at all, but, even if a correlation exists, it is mediated by such a complex system of parameters (cf. Longobardi, 2001, p. 584) that it no longer directly argues for the head status of D with respect to NP.

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