

## Adjectives and determiners

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### Abstract

Traditional grammar conflates a variety of categories that are distinguished in modern syntactic theory. Items now classified as degree elements (*very, extremely, mostly, completely*) are assimilated by traditional grammar into the broad class of adverbs. Likewise items now classified as determiners (*the, that, a, every, both*) are assimilated into the class of adjectives. The distinction between A and D assumes particular importance within recent debates about whether languages might lack the D category – the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis of Fukui (1986), Corver (1992), Zlatić (1997), Baker (2003), Bošković (2005), Despić (2011), among others. This view holds that languages lacking a definite article do not project DP at all, and realize typical determiner elements uniformly within the category of adjective. In this paper I examine data from Serbian, a much discussed candidate for “DP-less” status, looking at the behavior of the relevant elements both with respect to proposed universal diagnostics for adjectivehood and in comparison with neighboring, uncontroversial DP languages (Macedonian, Bulgarian). I show there is no evidence from either source for assuming adjectival status of the relevant items in Serbian. This finding opposes the crucial prediction of the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis. This work is intended to contribute to the existing cross-linguistic discussion on the issues of determiner parameterization (Bašić, 2004; Pereltsvaig, 2007; Caruso, 2011; Bailyn, 2012; Pereltsvaig, 2013, i.a.).

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### 1. Cross-linguistic variation in category

An important, but still unanswered question for modern syntactic theory is whether the set of grammatical categories constitutes a fixed list {A,N,V,P,T,C,...} that all human natural languages must realize, or whether it constitutes a “space,” similar to the space of vowel or consonant sounds in phonology, from which all human natural languages must draw. On the former view, all categories must be present in all languages, albeit possibly in obscured form. On the latter, categories might be genuinely absent from a language, just as a language might lack unrounded back vowels.

The question of category universality for syntax intersects the question of “category plasticity” for semantics. Natural language concepts can often be realized through a range of grammatical categories. For example, temporal precedence/subsequence can be expressed in English through adjectival, prepositional and verbal means (1a–c). Likewise many relational psychological states can be expressed either with verbs (2a) or adjectives (2b):

- |     |    |  |     |
|-----|----|--|-----|
| (1) | a. | John arrived earlier/later than Mary arrived.    | (A) |
|     | b. | John arrived before/after Mary arrived.          | (P) |
|     | c. | John’s arrival preceded/followed Mary’s arrival. | (V) |

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- (2) a. John envies/desires/distrusts Mary. (V)  
 b. John is envious/desirous/distrustful of Mary. (A)

This raises the broad possibility that the “expressive burden” shouldered by a range of categories {A,B,C} in one language might be fully taken over by a subset of those categories {A,C} in another language, with category B entirely absent, but without loss in expressive capacity.

### 1.1. The categories A and D

Traditional grammar conflates elements like articles (*the, a*), demonstratives (*that, this, these, those*), quantifiers (*every, some, both, many, most, neither*), numbers (*one, two*) and possessives (*my, your, his, hers*) into the broader class of adjectives.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, since Chomsky (1957) modern grammar has separated out such elements as belonging to a distinct class of determiners (Ds). Subsequent theorizing, particularly since Abney (1987), has underscored this separation, placing adjectives within the class of lexical categories, and determiners within the class of functional categories.

The question of A vs. D status for “determiner elements” has resurfaced recently in an interesting way in the context of apparent “article-less” languages like Japanese and Serbian. Two main proposals have emerged. The Universal DP-Hypothesis holds that all languages project DP (Progovac, 1998; Leko, 1999; Rappaport, 2001; Bašić, 2004; Cinque, 2005; Pereltsvaig, 2007, i.a.). Hence, “article-less” languages project DP just like languages with articles.

By contrast, the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis claims that languages without (definite)<sup>2</sup> articles do not project DP (Fukui, 1986; Corver, 1992; Zlatić, 1997; Baker, 2003; n2008; Bošković, 2012a; Despić, 2011, i.a.). In other words, whether a language realizes or fails to realize the category D can be determined (by the language learner or the linguist) from the presence/absence of definite articles. Presence of a definite article enables or “activates” the category D, making it available as a category to which other elements, such as indefinite articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, etc., may be assigned. Hence in DP-less languages, items that might otherwise be realized as determiners must be realized in some other available category.

Regarding the latter, advocates of the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis have proposed either that indefinite articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, etc. are As in a DP-less language like Serbian<sup>3</sup> (Zlatić, 1997; Bošković, 2003, 2005, i.a.)<sup>4</sup> or that they show “adjectival behavior” (Despić, 2009, 2011, 2013; Bošković, 2013).

In this paper I examine the arguments offered by proponents of the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis for classifying indefinite articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, etc. in Serbian as adjectives. I argue that none of these arguments is convincing. I furthermore show that the relevant items in neighboring, uncontroversial DP languages (Macedonian and Bulgarian) pattern identically to their Serbian counterparts. I show that data from other DP languages, such as Hungarian, German, Brazilian Portuguese, Spanish, Greek and Italian further support this finding. I conclude that there is no secure empirical evidence for assuming adjectival status of the relevant items in Serbian. This crucial prediction of the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis is therefore without support.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This tradition goes back to at least Dionysius Thrax (ca.100BC).

<sup>2</sup> Zlatić (1997) claims that it is both indefinite and definite articles that are privileged items participating in parameter setting, whereas Bošković (2008) argues that it is only the definite article. Bošković’s claim is based on Slovenian, a language with indefinite articles, which, he claims, patterns with DP-less languages with respect to several generalizations that he offers.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term *Serbian* to refer to the language spoken in ex-Yugoslavia (~45° N, 20° E). I will use this term even when referring to works of authors that use different terms. I am doing this exclusively in order to avoid confusion as to what language is under discussion given that there are a variety of terms available. The lexical choice I made has no political implications whatsoever.

<sup>4</sup> There are some exceptions to this; Zlatić (1997) claims that some determiners are nouns while Franks (1994), Bošković (2006), Despić (2011) argue that some determiners head their own projections.

<sup>5</sup> In the discussion to follow, I focus on the claimed adjectival properties of determiners and leave aside the question of category labeling, AP or XP, and syntactic positioning of determiners. Proponents of the Parameterized DP-Hypothesis claim that determiners in DP-less languages are, syntactically speaking, NP-adjuncts. Bošković offers a number of generalizations that he claims stem from the proposed differences in nominal phrase structure (presence/absence of a DP) and syntactic positioning of determiners (NP-adjuncts vs. D-heads) in DP and DP-less languages, such as binding, extraction out of nominals, etc. (Bošković, 2008; Bošković, 2012b; Bošković, 2013). However, in order to account for some of the relevant data, Bošković (2006) and Despić (2011) propose that, in fact, some determiners in DP-less languages head their own projections: FP/QP. In other words, some determiners are not adjectives/NP-adjuncts. Positing a separate projection for these determiners raises two relevant questions: (a) how unified is the advocated approach in terms of the categorial status of the non-cardinal determiners in DP-less languages and, (b) what constitutes a crucial difference between a DP and FP/QP projections above an NP.

Furthermore, it has been noted in the literature that some of the generalizations need to be reexamined (Rappaport, 2001; Bašić, 2004; Runić, 2006; Pereltsvaig, 2007; Ivšić, 2008; Caruso, 2011; Bailyn, 2012; Schoorlemmer, 2012; Pereltsvaig, 2013; Stanković, 2013; Dubinsky and Tasseva-Kurkchieva, 2014, i.a.). While these issues certainly need to be addressed, it is beyond the scope of this paper to do that.

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