1 Introduction

One of the oldest and most well-known arguments for the DP hypothesis in Abney (1987) is that determiners cannot appear together in nominals as they would compete for the same syntactic slot:

(1) *the they
(2) *this the dog
(3) *this my/our chair
(4) *the John’s video game

The challenge for the NP-hypothesis here is that it is not obvious why such combinations should be banned. The DP hypothesis can explain this pattern in English easily by stating that determiners do not c-select DPs as complements. But the DP hypothesis here overgenerates, because all of these combinations are possible in many other languages, regardless of whether or not they have articles. (2) is possible in at least Greek, Portuguese, Javanese and Hungarian. (3) is possible in at least Turkish and Portuguese. (4) is possible in at least Portuguese and Hungarian. If Abney’s argument is correct, then we shouldn’t expect this to be possible in any language, but it is. So this can’t be the full explanation. Something else is going on here.

The research questions for this presentation are as follows. Is it possible for the DP hypothesis to account for the sentences in (2)-(4)? If so, can it do it in a manner that is not ad hoc? That is, will the solution be in the minimalist tradition? I think that recent approaches to the DP layer may not be simple enough. The solution in this presentation will be to develop a new approach, based on an idea by Chomsky (2007), that is much simpler than Cartographic approaches to the DP layer.

2 The Data

2.1 Turkish

"Dem DP Gen NP" and "DP Gen Dem NP" are valid combos in Turkish. In other words, you can say *this my dog* and *my this dog* in Turkish, also contradicting Abney’s work.

You can do this in declarative and exclamatory sentences. You can do it in questions as well.¹

(5) Şu ben-im kope-ği sev-dim
   This I.gen dog.ACC love.1SG
   ‘I loved my dog.’

(6) Şu ben-im kope-ği sev!
   This I.gen dog.ACC love
   ‘Love my dog!’

(7) Şu ben-im kope-ği sevdin mi?
   This I.gen dog.ACC love.1SG Q
   ‘Have you loved my dog?’

(8) Ben-im şu kope-ği sev-dim
   I.gen this dog.ACC love.1SG
   ‘I loved my dog.’

(9) Ben-im şu kope-ği sev!
   I.gen this dog.ACC love
   ‘Love my dog!’

(10) Ben-im şu kope-ği sevdin mi?
    I.gen this dog.ACC love.1SG Q
    ‘Have you loved my dog?’

¹The data involving this can become quite a bit more complicated when you add in numerals and adjectives. I have omitted this data for the sake of saving time.
The latter combination, *my this dog*, seems to be preferable but is subject to native speaker intuitions. Usually, the demonstrative is completely meaningless. However, Kornfilt (p.c.) points out certain contexts in which the demonstrative might be meaningful. Suppose I want to eat a dog, and there are multiple dogs around. Someone says there is a particular dog I want. The demonstrative can be used to pick out the dog I want to eat.

(11) Deniz sen-in şu kope-ğī PRO yeme-yi
Deniz you-gen this dog.ACC PRO eat.INF
isti-yor want.PRES
‘Deniz wants to eat *this* dog of yours.’

2.2 Other Languages

Just like in Turkish, one can obtain *this my cat* in Portuguese.

(12) este meu gato
This my cat
Portuguese

Definite articles can also precede possessors in Portuguese and Hungarian respectively (from Szabolcsi (1984)):

(13) O meu gato
The my cat
Portuguese

(14) a Mari-∅ vendeg-e-∅
the Mary.NOM guest.POSS.3SG
Hungarian

(15) ez a haz
This the house
Hungarian

(16) ika n anak
This the baby
Javanese

(17) afto to vivlio
This the book
Greek

(18) este el hombre
This the man
Spanish

Alexiadou et al. (2007) points out that in Greek and Span-
ish, the demonstrative may follow the noun, suggesting that
the demonstrative starts lower in the structure and raises to
Spec,DP:

(19) to vivlio afto
The book this
Greek

(20) el hombre este
the man this
Spanish

None of this is a counterargument to any modern version of
the DP hypothesis. But as I’ll show in the next section, some
problems arise when coming up with a structure for these
sentences.
3 The Problem

This my dog is a particularly troubling construction to derive. As noted just earlier, demonstratives may raise to Spec,DP. But this is also the position that genitives occupy in the well-known bimorphemic approach to pronouns like my, as seen below\(^2\).

Both the bimorphemic approach to genitives and Alexiadou and co.’s approach to demonstratives claim that these two objects can both move into the same position. This is a more modern way of coming to the same conclusion as Abney (1987): they are once again competing for the same syntactic slot. But the fact remains that these are possible structures in some languages. How do we deal with this?

Suppose one went for the easiest possible solution, in which the demonstrative took the genitive phrase as a complement, as follows.

\(^2\)I am unaware who was the first to come up with it, but I will cite Carnie (2013) for this idea.

This should not be allowed even in Turkish since the genitive D head and the demonstrative are competing for the same syntactic slot (Ds don’t c-select DPs).

3.1 AgrP

Kornfilt (1985) posits an AgrP projection above DP in Turkish, so that we do not run into a multiple specifier problem. This works, but is very outdated. Chomsky (1995) argues that if we apply Occam’s Razor, we do not need AgrP projections by reducing Agreement to spec-head relations. So we need to come up with a projection above DP that is not ad hoc.

3.2 Multiple Specifiers?

Bare Phrase Structure allows for phrases to have multiple specifiers, so there is no problem, at least at first glance,
with the idea that the demonstrative may move to a higher Spec,DP position:

\[(23)\]

\[\text{DP} \]
\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\text{this} \\
\text{Šu} \\
\text{our} \\
\text{biz} \\
\text{gen} \\
\text{im} \\
\text{dog} \\
\text{kopek}
\end{array}\]

Kuroda (1988) argues that Japanese heads allow more than one specifier because it allows the “multiple subject construction,” as seen in the sentence below:

\[(24)\]  
Taro-ga musume-ga isya-ni natta.  
Taro.NOM daughter.NOM doctor.DAT became  
‘Taro, his daughter became a doctor.’

Two nominative cases, so two specifiers. Also, here is a sentence I came up with, which seems to also be acceptable (Kenji Oda, p.c.):

\[(25)\]  
Watashi-ga inu o tabe-ru no ga suki.  
I.NOM dog ACC eat.INF GEN NOM like  
‘I like to eat dogs.’

Maybe Turkish has multiple specifiers too? However, Turkish fails the multiple subject test as Kornfilt (1991) shows:

\[(26)\]  
*medeni ülke-ler erkek-ler ortalama hayat süre-si kisa

Turkish does not have multiple specifiers, so this solution does not work either.

3.3 Cartographic Approaches

Since Rizzi (1997)’s approach to the left periphery which posited numerous functional projections, in addition to parallels between CPs and DPs, linguists have posited the existence of many functional projections in the DP layer. In the following structure of the left periphery of the DP proposed by Alexiadou et al. (2007), the demonstrative can move into the higher DP.

\[(27)\]

\[\text{DP} \]
\[\begin{array}{c}
\text{FP} \\
\text{TopP} \\
\text{DP} \\
\text{FP}
\end{array}\]

Even the simplest Cartographic structure for nominal phrases has at least 12 functional heads independent of D or N, as in Guardiano (2009). But is the Cartographic approach really minimalist?

There are many problems that plague Cartographic approaches in syntax in general, which I will not go into detail here\(^3\). However, Chomsky (1995) argues that each

\(^3\)Cra (2009) is an excellent source on such arguments.
functional projection we posit must undergo minimalist scrutiny, as each projection comes at the cost of a less parsimonious theory, contrary to the main purpose of the minimalist program.

4 The nP Hypothesis

We need a specifier position above DP that is available for the demonstrative to move into, and it must not be ad hoc.

But first, let’s go back in time for a minute. The most important reason why linguists have mostly abandoned the NP hypothesis is that, at the time, there was reason to view clauses and phrases as structurally parallel: Chomsky (2007) reworks the structure of clauses as CP-IP-VP. I and C are functional heads, and they fit the X-bar schema. Why shouldn’t D also follow suit with these functional heads and be the head of a nominal phrase?

Chomsky (2007) draws a more modern parallel between the structures of nominal and verbal phrases, and suspects that both might be able to constitute phases. Nominal phrases can be + or - definite, which is differentiated by the property of referentiality. The element responsible for this referentiality is D.

He considers an indefinite nominal like author or many authors, where the label of the latter is not many, which is an XP and not a lexical item. In both cases, the label of the phrases must be author. If we assume a correspondence with verbal phrases, then the nominal phrase will be headed by n, which takes a DP as a complement.

nP provides us a non-extraneous specifier position for the demonstrative in this my dog to move to.\(^4\)

\[^4\]I am simplifying the structure for the bimorphemic genitive phrase here.

\[^5\]Notice in this tree that D, gen, has also moved to little n. This happens, however, after

\(^4\) A structure for my this dog might be as follows, where the demonstrative remains in a lower specifier position, following Alexiadou et al. (2007).\(^6\)

\[^6\]For the sake of simplicity, I will just keep it at Spec,NP.
this involves movement of the to n⁰, dog to Spec,DP and this stays low. In the my cat, the moves to n⁰ but my does not move at all. Differences in structures cross-linguistically can be explained by variations in the syntactic features of the functional heads.

5 Theoretical Implications

5.1 Multiple Determiners in English

Why are structures like this the dog illicit in English, then? It would be ad hoc to say that the structure in these languages should fundamentally differ from the structure of nominals in English, and we want to keep as many similarities as possible.

My answer to this is to say that nominals have identical syntactic structures in every language. That is, it is syntactically possible in English, and indeed in any language, to obtain this the dog. But this is merely a phonological restriction, similar to the Doubly-Filled COMP Filter. As noted earlier, this is in Spec,nP and the is in n⁰. I posit that two phonologically overt elements in Spec,nP and n⁰ cannot be pronounced at the same time. In the case of this my dog and my this dog, I posit another phonological restriction, which states that you cannot have two phonologically overt elements in Spec,nP and Spec,DP.

One prediction of this approach is that, since there is nothing syntactically wrong with multiple determiners in English, one might find contexts in which such structures do occur. In certain contexts, demonstratives paired with proper names are felicitous in English. ¹

However, it is worth noting that This Jon Snow may simply be a shorter version of This person named Jon Snow, which does not involve multiple determiners competing for the same slot.

5.2 The Most Central Element of a Nominal Phrase

As noted prior, Chomsky wants to make the noun the most fundamental element in all nominal phrases rather than the determiner, as linguists have done since Abney (1987). But there have been other attempts to do this; most significantly by Bruening (2009). He notes that verbs that select for clausal complements select for C, and never select for V. By contrast, verbs that select for nominal complements select for N, and never for D. We already say that the head of a clause is C, and if we want to draw a parallel as proponents of the DP hypothesis have done, it would be reasonable to say that the head of a nominal is N, and not D. He uses these examples in particular, which involve questions vs. declaratives, nonfinite vs. finite and subjunctive vs. indicative clauses:

(31) Sue thinks that/*whether the world is flat.
(32) Sue wonders *that/whether the world is flat.
(33) Bertrand wants (*that) the world to be flat.
(34) Sue asked that the answer be/*is two.
(35) Sue thinks that the answer *be/is two.

It is plausible to say that verbal complements select for C. But this is never the case for nominal complements, as seen in Bruening’s examples:

(36) I gathered the students.
(37) *I gathered the student.
(38) I gathered the scissors. (if there’s more than one pair of scissors)
(39) *I gathered the scissors. (if only one pair of scissors)
(40) The students met.
(41) *A student met.

Bruening notes that selection for number is semantic rather than syntactic, as seen by this contrast. Bruening, too, wants to eliminate potentially extraneous functional projections like NumP in favor of simpler structures like the one advocated in this presentation.

As a result, it is reasonable to assume that semantic number is a property of the noun. So, the functional elements of nominals are never selected; it is instead the noun that is selected. Therefore, if the head of CP is C, then the head of NP is N. To be more specific, adopting Chomsky (2007)’s idea, it is n.

Consider one of the original complaint against the NP hypothesis, that in a sentence such as the dog, the occupies Spec,NP position and it is a head, which is illicit in the X-bar schema. The DP hypothesis got rid of this problem because the takes NP as its complement.\(^8\) We keep the structural advantages of having a determiner take an NP as its complement in this account of the NP hypothesis.

6 Conclusion

The nP hypothesis takes the best of both worlds of the NP and DP hypotheses: it accounts for the intuition that the noun is the most fundamental element of the noun, and keeps the structural advantages of the DP hypothesis. In addition, it provides a much more minimalist approach to nominal structure than modern Cartographic approaches.

References

2009. Alternatives to cartography.