

Attributive constructions as subordinate DPs: On the typology of phasal heads

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Considerations of cross-categorical symmetry have a long tradition in generative syntax (cf. Abney 1987, Jackendoff 1977). While CPs and DPs are often considered structurally parallel, some distinctions from one domain were never applied to the other. I will argue that the distinction between subordinated and matrix CPs can be carried over, and sentential attributive constructions are ‘subordinated DPs’. This approach leads to an interesting typology of phase-level functional heads.

A ‘subordinated DP’ would arguably have to comprise a clause-like structure that ties into a matrix DP projection. Relative clauses seem to be natural candidates, as well as other ‘sentential’ attributive constructions in, e.g., German (cf. Fanselow 1986).

Older analyses of pre-nominal attributes assume that these comprise a TP-like structure with a PRO subject (e.g. Toman 1986). However, it never became quite clear why PRO, like a relative pronoun, had to be coreferential with the modified noun (1a): Why can PRO never be arbitrary – arguably an option in Middle High German (Thim-Mabrey 1990, 1b)?

(1) a) ein sein Kind ins Haus tragender Mann

a his child into-the house carrying man

ein Mann, der sein Kind ins Haus trägt

a man who his child into-the house carries

both: ‘the man who is carrying his child into the house’

b) daz lebende brod

the living bread

‘the bread that makes somebody (!) live’

Also, prenominal attributes look completely unlike postnominal ones structurally, despite their obvious similarities. Raising analyses assume that attributes are CPs, but the modified noun never leaves the attributive construction (Kayne 1994). This approach, however, leads to too many technical problems to be particularly revealing (cf. Borsley 1997, Aoun & Li 2003).

I will argue that attributive constructions are ‘subordinate DPs’, which are headed by an element traditionally analyzed as a case, gender and number agreement suffix (CGN):

(2) ein Mann [~~d-~~ er_{CGN} [_{TP} ~~...~~ [_{VP} ~~...~~ ~~läuft~~] läuft]]

ein [_{op} [_{TP} _{op} ... [_{VP} ~~op~~ ...lauf-] end]-er_{CGN}] Mann

Under this analysis, prenominal attributes are simply phi-defective relative clauses: CGN in both cases identifies a phrase within TP for coreference with the modified noun by the (italicized) relativizee’s case, gender and number features. Differences in the order of elements and the set of relativizable arguments follow from the presence or absence of phi-features, and the consequent licensing of the relativizee’s Case.

The analysis unifies attributive constructions, and furthermore leads to an interesting typology of functional heads: Some languages have in-situ relativization, i.e. lack an EPP for their CGN equivalent. Also, constructions are phi-complete or incomplete. As I will demonstrate, almost all types of phases that stem from these considerations are attested cross-linguistically, e.g.:

		reference to sets of indices	reference to sets of individuals
matrix	[EPP, phi]	free relative clauses,	V2-CPs
	[Phi]	Cayuga ‘nominals’	V1-CPs
	[EPP]	Possessive DPs	v*P
	[neither]	DPs	vP
subordinate	[EPP, phi]	relative clauses	Bavarian sub-clauses
	[EPP]	participial/ adjectival attributes	?
	[phi]	in-situ relative clauses	English sub-clauses
	[neither]	* (fails for Case reasons)	English for-sub-clauses

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