NPN structures and cross-linguistic variation: case and modification

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This paper is concerned with both expected and unexpected variation in NPN structures, focusing on English (e.g. *day after day*) and Polish (e.g. *dzień po dniu*) data. The NPN construction exhibits a number of (apparently) idiosyncratic properties that have been investigated from various perspectives (cf. Pi 1995; Travis 2001, 2003; Jackendoff 2008; Pskit 2012, 2015; Haïk 2013).

The expected variation involves, among others, the categorial status of the nominals in the NPN structures and the presence of morphological case markers on the nouns in NPNs in Polish and the absence thereof in English. As for the (potential) variation in categorial labels of the nominals, this has to do with the long-standing debate on the universality of the DP-layer (cf. e.g. Bošković 2005).

Following Travis (2001) we assume that NPNs are derived by the mechanism of syntactic reduplication, where a reduplicative head (Q), which merges with the PP, copies the complement of the preposition. The copied material moves to spec-Q. Given earlier proposals we assume that NPNs have a cross-linguistically uniform structure as follows:

(1) $[_{QP} [_{nP}$ day $[_{NP} …]] [Q [_{PP}$ after $[_{nP}$ day $[_{NP} …]]]]]$

In Polish, while the case-form of the right-hand noun (N2) is governed by the preposition, the case-form of the left-hand noun (N1) is determined by the verb, as in (2):

(2) Nasza drużyna wygrywała mecz za meczem.

   Our team won match-ACC after match-INSTR

If NPNs are derived via syntactic reduplication, the morpho-phonological realization of case on N2 must be post-syntactic, in the spirit of realizational approaches to morphology such as Distributed Morphology or Nanosyntax.

A less expected aspect of variation has to do with modification of the nouns. At least some English prepositions allow premodification and postmodification of N2 or both N1 and N2, while in Polish this seems far less acceptable:

(3) a. day after rainy day, day after day of rain

    b. ???dzień za deszczowym dniem, ???dzień za dniem deszczu

The differences between English and Polish with respect to the potential for modification of N1 and N2 can be attributed to the defective character of the nominals in NPNs and cross-linguistic differences in the area of inflectional morphology. If the nominals in NPNs are nPs, their defective character can be accounted for by the lack of further functional projections occupying the area between *n* and D heads and headed by elements associated with particular phi-features (Number, Gender). Since premodifiers and postmodifiers in English are not overtly marked for number and gender, the absence of the relevant Number or Gender heads does not prevent the adjunction of such modifiers. On the other hand, in Polish and other languages with rich inflectional morphology modifiers are overtly marked for number and gender via Agree with the head noun. Given the absence of Number and Gender heads, the mechanism for establishing the relation of agreement between the noun and its premodifiers and/or postmodifiers does not work.

Obviously, the findings based on NPN data from English and Polish should be confronted with corresponding structures in other languages.

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