The Syntax of Germanic Post-Adjectival Articles

In the Germanic languages, the canonical ordering of determiner, adjective, and noun within the DP is Det-Adj-Noun, but sometimes the determiner may or must appear after the adjective. Specifically, in English and some dialects of other Germanic languages, the determiner must appear after the adjective in the presence of certain degree elements, as shown in (1a) for English and (1c) for Danish. However, as shown by (1b), other degree elements do not necessarily trigger this word order.

Most previous researchers, such as Kennedy and Merchant (2000), have argued for a movement analysis of the "inverted" word order (1a), proposing structures such as (2). Central to these analyses is the assumption that the adjective and degree element form a constituent (DegP) to the exclusion of the noun. However, the so-anaphora data in (3) and (4) suggest that this is not the case. (3a) shows that the proform so may have an AP antecedent. In (3b), however, we see that so may only take the predicate successful man as its antecedent, giving the anomalous reading that Jane is a successful man. If successful alone is an AP, why can't this AP serve as the antecedent of so? In addition, if both more successful and more so are DegP's, why may the former but not the latter serve as an attributive modifier, as shown in (4)? These facts are mysterious under an account in which DegP is simply adjoined to NP.

As an alternative to movement analyses, Delsing (1993) argues for a syntactic structure involving two DP projections, of which only the lower projection is lexically filled, as shown in (5a). Constructions like (1b) involve just one DP projection, as shown in (5b). In these structures, the NP is part of the AP. The so-anaphora data are thus explained by assuming that so is a pro-AP that must take an AP antecedent.

Delsing's analysis, however, leaves many unanswered questions. Among them are the following: (i) What distinguishes the degree elements in (1a) from those in (1b)? (ii) Why must the higher DP projection of (5a) be left empty? (iii) How is the lower DP projection licensed? (iv) Why must the lower DP projection be filled only by the indefinite article, as shown by (6)? (v) Since Delsing's analysis predicts that a DP may take an AP complement and that an AP may select a DP, what prevents an infinite recursion of DP's, as in (7)?

In this talk, I attempt to provide answers to these questions, using data from various Germanic dialects. First, in response to question (i), I observe that the degree elements in (1a) are exactly those words which Corver (1997) calls "Degree heads", while those in (1b) correspond to his "Q heads". Thus, the data in (1) support Corver's proposition that the two sets of words comprise two distinct syntactic categories, a proposition for which Corver gives ample independent evidence in English and Dutch.

Second, I propose that the notion of thematic discharge by θ-binding, as proposed in Higginbotham (1985) and developed in Corver (1997), explains the distribution of determiners and DP's. The external θ-role of every (singular) noun must be locally θ-bound by some determiner. "Degree heads" block this θ-binding, while "Q heads" do not. Thus, the presence of a "Degree head" forces the determiner to be projected in a position immediately dominating the NP. At the same time, the constraint against vacuous binding (every binder must bind a unique variable) ensures that the higher DP shell is not lexically filled by any determiner.

Third, the indefinite article constraint (6) is due to semantic interpretability. The semantics of a gradable attributive adjective depend upon the noun it modifies. For instance, when we talk of so small a whale, we mean that it is small for a whale. Analogously, so small few whales would mean that they are small for "few whales". Since the "typical size of few whales" is semantically undefined, the phrase is uninterpretable. All determiners other than the indefinite article share this problem.

Finally, the constraint against vacuous binding also prevents the infinite recursion of DP's (7). This theory predicts that such recursion should be allowed as long as the intermediate DP projections are filled by "dummy" elements, in the sense of Corver (1997). I argue that this prediction is fulfilled in certain Northern Scandinavian dialects, as shown in (8). The fact that the "dummy" articles are compatible with plural and uncountable nouns, as shown in (9), shows that these articles are distinct from the ordinary indefinite article, which cannot co-occur with plurals and uncountables. The existence of data such as (8) and (9) is surprising under an adjunction analysis of attributive adjectives.
Examples

(1) a. X beautiful a house *a X beautiful house
   X = as, so, how(ever), this, that, too
b. ??Y beautiful a house a Y beautiful house
   Y = more, less, enough, -er
c. Det var alt **for stør en opgave** for John at håndtere. (Danish)
   *It was far too big a job for John to handle.*

(2) [fp [degp as beautiful], (of) [dp t [np house]]]

(3) a. John is successful, but Jane is more so. [=successful]
   !John is a successful man, but Jane is more so. [=a successful man!]

(4) a. Jane is a more successful lawyer.
   *John is successful, but Jane is a more so lawyer.

(5) a. [dp e [degp as [ap [a' beautiful] [dp a [np house]]]]]
   b. [dp a [degp more [ap [a' beautiful] [np house]]]]

(6) *as beautiful the/this/my/many/one/... house(s)

(7) *a big an ugly a ... man

(8) en stor en ful en kar (Northern Swedish)
   *a big an ugly a man

(9) a. Vi ha fått fint e var
   *We have got fine a weather
b. Dänn var he stor a husa
   *Over-there were there big a houses

References


