

# Determiner phrases

October 1, 2015

## The status of the determiner

Basic question: is the determiner internal to the NP or the other way around? The two options:

- (1) a. [NP [DP the] book]
- b. [DP the [NP book]]

While (1-a) seems more intuitive, consider what advantages accepting (1-b) might have.

First, it can explain why the determiner is always a single word, and accounts for word order phenomena.

This way, one can also explain how the determiner is responsible for the definiteness of the whole phrase.

Also, complementary distribution between pronouns and other determiners shows that they are, in fact, determiners:

- (2) a. \*the he
- b. \*some us

This way, we can argue that they are determiners that do not take an NP complement

The determiner is not the semantically most salient element. This is not really a problem as we often find that the syntactic head is not the semantically most important one.

- (3) a. be afraid
- b. to London
- c. a cup of tea

Proper nouns usually appear without any determiner, but they are always definite, then. Therefore we can assume a phonologically empty determiner:  $e_{[+def]}$ . It also has an indefinite counterpart  $e_{[-def]}$  taking plural complements.

- (4) a. \*There arrived George.
- b. There arrived students from France.

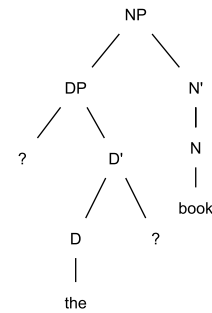
Some determiners are specified for number, while others can take either singular or plural complements:

- (5) a. this/ chair/\*chairs
- b. those \*chair/chairs
- c. the chair/chairs

## Possessives

There are two kinds of possessives to account for: possessive pronouns and the suffix 's. Other determiners are in complementary

The structure shown in (1-b) is also known as the DP-hypothesis.

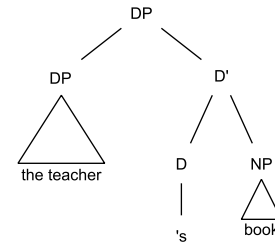


Otherwise one would have to assume an empty noun to head the NP, which is quite hard to motivate (what properties would it express?)

The *there*-construction can only appear with indefinite subjects; hence, it is a classic test for definiteness

distribution with 's, so we can assume that it is a D-head, too. The possessor then appears as its specifier. Note that the possessive 's is analysed as a determiner not as a Case marker as it follows a DP not just a head.

What to do with possessive pronouns? We either associate different structure with them (claiming the they are D heads), or leave that position empty (what could go there).



- (6) a. [DP [D' his [NP book]]]
- b. [DP [DP his] [D' ? [NP book]]]

*Multiple determiners*

We also need to account for structures where more than one determiner seems to appear:

- (7) all the many people

Traditionally, these are called pre-, central, and post-determiners. One might suggest that DPs can take other DPs as complements, but that proposal would not guarantee any order:

- (8) \*many the all people

Instead, pre- and post-determiners are dealt with differently. As post determiners can be modified by degree adverbs, they are not even of category D, but of A. Also they appear between the determiner and any adjective (adjoined to N'); therefore, must occupy the specifier of the NP.

- (9) these few interesting ideas

Pre-determiners: notice the optional *of* preposition, and the similar construction with other determiners

- (10) a. all (of) the people
- b. those of my books that I like
- c. many of her ideas

We can assume that there is a phonologically empty noun as the complement of the first determiner (as with group nouns).

- (11) a. Of wine, the guests drank ten bottles.
- b. Of her ideas, many were great.
- c. \*Of England, I know the queen.

*Reading*

Newson et al. *BESE*. Ch. 4 "The Determiner Phrase" pp. 129-148

Why can we say that all of these are determiners?

Recall from last time that post-determiners were among the categories underspecified for the [F] feature; namely [ $\pm$ F, +N, +V].

