

On the structure of NPs: A local account for German and Mandarin Chinese

Antonio Machicao y Priemer
<https://hu.berlin/aMyP>
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

In this talk, we will compare current analyses of nominal complexes (NPs or DPs) in German – normally based on a DP analysis following Abney (1987) – with a local NP analysis (Machicao y Priemer & Müller 2021), focusing on the realisation of arguments within the nominal complex.

While in DP analyses, postnominal arguments can get case and theta-role locally, i.e. inside the nominal complex, prenominal arguments are normally assumed to be in either D or SpecDP. This, however, presents difficulties for the locality of theta-role and case assignment (cf. Olsen 1991; Hartmann & Zimmermann 2003; Sternefeld 2015; Chomsky et al. 2019). We propose an NP analysis in accordance with Strict Locality (Sag 2012) in the framework of HPSG (Pollard & Sag 1994; Müller & Machicao y Priemer 2019) in which a prenominal genitive is realised as specifier of the head noun, hence, showing its dependency from the noun and getting theta-role and case assigned by it.

This talk aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- Which case (morphosyntactic genitive, semantic genitive, ...) is licensed for the arguments of nouns?
- What are the regularities w.r.t. the distribution of arguments within nominal complexes?
- What is the syntactic position of a prenominal genitive?
- What does the assumption of (strict) locality mean for the structure of nominal complexes?
- Are there other German structures supporting the new analysis?

This approach deals (i) with the pre- and postnominal asymmetries within German nominal complexes (cf. (1)), taking also into account possessive determiners; and (ii) with controversially discussed complex and recursive prenominal arguments (cf. (2)). Furthermore, it contributes to the NP vs. DP debate, providing more evidence and a theoretical reasoning in favour of an NP analysis (cf. too Chomsky 2007; Bruening 2009, 2020; Georgi & Müller 2010; Van Eynde 2006, 2020).

- (1) a. {des Patienten / des Arztes} Behandlung
 ‘the patient’s / the doctor’s treatment’
 b. # des Patienten Behandlung des Arztes
 Intended: ‘the doctor’s treatment of the patient’
 c. des Arztes Behandlung des Patienten
 Intended: ‘the doctor’s treatment of the patient’
- (2) des Vaters Bruders Witwe
 ‘the father’s brother’s widow’

On a further step, we discuss and provide a tentative NP analysis for Mandarin Chinese (MC). Besides other difficulties, nominal complexes in MC show a wide range of flexibility w.r.t. distribution and interpretation of nominal modifiers (cf. (3)). We will show how the distribution of NP-modifiers gives us some clues about the constituent structure of nominal complexes. In contrast to other approaches (Cheng & Sybesma 1999, 2012), we propose that the Classifier Phrase is inside of the NP and acts as a functor to the head noun, in a similar way as modifiers do (following Van Eynde 2021).

- (3) [guanyu yuyanxue de] [da de] san xiang [haokan de] shu
 about linguistics DE big DE three CL_m ≈ ‘box’ nice DE book
 ‘three big boxes of nice books about linguistics’

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