

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this book is to consider some aspects of the distribution of nominal arguments in the Germanic languages and in particular aspects of the cross-linguistic variation in this domain of the syntax. The central questions that will be addressed on the basis of the Germanic languages are: (a) What are the common underlying properties which determine the distribution of nominal arguments across languages? and (b) How can the considerable cross-linguistic variation be accounted for? With respect to these issues, two main claims will be made. First, it will be argued that the basic distributional properties of nominal arguments which hold across languages can be derived from the definition of syntactic categories and in particular from the interaction between nominal and verbal elements in this respect. And secondly, it will be proposed that several aspects of the cross-linguistic variation in the syntax of nominal arguments can be directly related to morphological properties which also differ across languages, i.e. to properties such as verbal agreement or case morphology. Both of these results will be obtained by developing certain proposals made within the Minimalist Program (cf. Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001) and in particular by trying to restrict the inventory of syntactic features in a given language to features which play a role at least at one of the two interface levels. The goal of this chapter is to provide the theoretical basis for our discussion in the later chapters.

1. SOME BASIC THEORETICAL NOTIONS

1.1. Principles and Parameters

Work within the generative framework has been guided by two fundamental questions (cf. e.g. Chomsky 1986a:3): (i) What constitutes knowledge of language? and (ii) How is knowledge of language acquired? These two questions give rise to an important tension. On the one hand, to deal with question (i) a very complex system of rules seems to be required which describes the rich tacit knowledge speakers have of their language. On the other hand, from the point of view of question (ii), we can observe that this complex system seems to be acquired easily

and quickly by language learners and furthermore on the basis of input which is deficient in many respects ("poverty of stimulus") and which differs from one learner to the other. The main tension that arises is that the system of rules describing the tacit knowledge of a speaker can easily become too rich to account for acquisition.

The framework known as Government and Binding Theory or Principles and Parameters Theory (henceforth GB; cf. e.g. Chomsky 1981, 1986a, Chomsky and Lasnik 1993) deals with issues (i) and (ii) and the tensions that arise between them by factoring out general principles that underlie different rules and by attributing them to Universal Grammar (UG), i.e. the innate, genetically determined language faculty. The idea is then that linguistic phenomena are not the result of construction-specific rules but rather the result of interactions between the different principles of UG. In order to account for cross-linguistic variation, two types of UG principles are distinguished. First, there are invariant principles which hold across languages. Standard cases of such principles are the Binding principles which determine the interpretation of nominal elements or the Empty Category Principle which defines restrictions on non-overt elements but also the Theta Criterion, the Case Filter or the Extended Projection Principle which will all be discussed in more detail in section 2.1 below. Apart from the language-invariant principles, there are principles whose content is not determined universally but which allow variation among languages. The latter components of UG are referred to as *parameters* and it is generally assumed that parameters basically provide a choice among two options. Standard examples of parameters are the *pro*-drop parameter which determines whether pronouns have to be realized overtly in a given language or not (cf. e.g. English vs. Italian) or the directionality parameter which leads to the distinction of OV and VO languages. As for the tension between the two questions in (i) and (ii), the principles and parameters conception of the grammar avoids it by reducing the task of the language learner to a large extent to the fixing of specific parameter values for a given language.

Although some aspects of the Government and Binding framework have changed considerably within the more recent generative framework referred to as the Minimalist Program (henceforth MP, cf. e.g. Chomsky 1993, 1995, 2000, 2001), the basic principles and parameters approach has still been maintained. Thus, it is still assumed that certain aspects of the grammar are fixed universally and that certain other aspects are subject to parametric variation. I will return to some illustrations from the Minimalist framework in the discussion in section 2 which focuses more specifically on the syntax of nominal arguments.

1.2. The Model of the Grammar

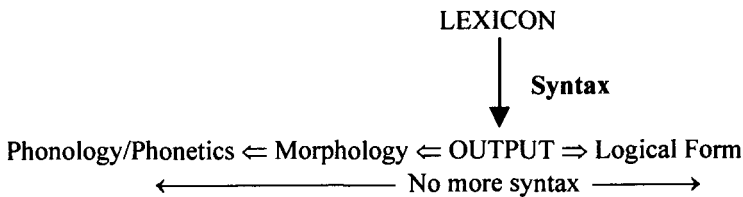
Within the generative framework, it is assumed that language has two main components, namely a lexicon and a computational system. The lexicon provides the elements on the basis of which the computational system then generates the

structural representations. Minimalist work is based on the assumption that the only conceptually necessary levels of structural representation are those which are related to "external" systems, i.e. the level which is related to the articulatory-perceptual system (PF) and the level which is related to the conceptual-intentional system (LF). As for the way in which a computation proceeds, it is assumed that the lexicon provides an initial set of elements (*lexical array, LA*). The computational system then derivationally builds up the structure by combining the elements contained in LA. The main processes in this derivational system are *Merge* which puts two elements together and *Move* which moves an element to a position which differs from the one in which it has been merged.

In the Minimalist literature, we can find different accounts of how PF and LF interface representations are derived from LA. In Chomsky's early Minimalist work (Chomsky 1993, 1995), the distinction between the PF and the LF representation is obtained under the assumption that at some point during the derivation (*Spell Out*) PF-relevant information contained in the structure built up so far is fed to the PF component. Thus, any syntactic operations that have been carried out before *Spell Out* are overtly visible. Finally, additional non-overt processes derive the structure which is fed to the LF interface. Thus, two structural representations are created in this model: A *Spell Out* representation which contains the information which is interpreted by the PF component, and a representation at the end of the derivation which contains the information which is interpreted by the LF component.

Bobaljik (1995) and Groat and O'Neil (1996) propose an alternative model of the grammar. Their model has been referred to as the Single Output Model because it postulates that a given input only leads to one single representation which is interpreted both by the PF component and by the LF component. This model can be represented as follows (from Bobaljik 1995:349).¹

(1) *Single Output Model*



Since the model in (1) only produces one structural representation, it eliminates syntactic processes which, within Chomsky's (1993, 1995) model, occur in a separate cycle, i.e. in the covert syntax.

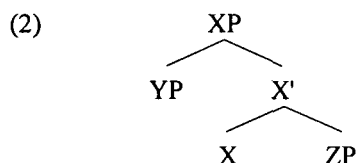
¹ Note that (1) is similar to purely representational approaches such as Brody (1995) in that only a single syntactic representation is produced. However, I will follow Bobaljik (1995) and Groat and O'Neil (1996) in assuming that this single representation is obtained through derivational processes and I will therefore continue using derivational terminology here (cf. also Chomsky 1995:222ff., 2000:98f.).

The absence of a non-overt cycle also characterizes the model of grammar proposed by Chomsky in more recent work (cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001). In this model, Spell-Out occurs at different stages in a derivation, i.e. at what Chomsky calls "phase" levels, and it is assumed that elements within a phase are to a large extent inaccessible to further syntactic processes after Spell-Out. Hence, as in (1), no derivational component for non-overt processes exists within this system.

For reasons which will be discussed in chapter 2, I will base my analyses on the Single Output Model as illustrated in (1).

1.3. Clause Structure

Within pre-Minimalist generative syntax (Government and Binding (GB) Theory), it is assumed that at the beginning of a derivation (D-structure) lexical items are inserted into a given syntactic representation which is determined by what has been referred to as the X-bar format. This syntactic structure then provides the basis for further computational processes. The main idea of the X-bar format is that the constituents that build a clause are all of the same format which can be represented as follows (X'-schema):

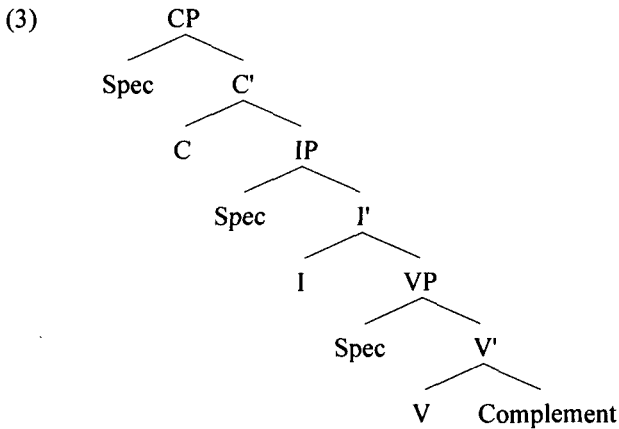


Each head X projects a larger syntactic unit (a phrase) and each phrase must be headed by one head (endocentricity). Within a given projection, the head first projects an intermediate projection (X') which allows X to be combined with a complement which is a phrase itself (ZP). X' then associates with another phrase (YP), the specifier, to form the maximal projection (XP). A standard assumption within the GB framework is that an additional phrase can sometimes be added on top of the XP through adjunction, thereby adding another XP -level in (2). Furthermore, it has generally been assumed that the order of the head and the complement is parametrised and that, as an alternative to (2), the complement ZP can also occur to the left in some languages or in some constituents (head-initial vs. head-final). However, both of these assumptions (XP -adjunction, variation in head-complement orders) have been challenged in the recent literature (cf. in particular Kayne 1994). Here, I will not pursue the issue of head-complement orders in any detail. For simplicity's sake, I will generally adopt the traditional approach according to which directionality variation is possible (but cf. chapter 3.4 for a brief discussion of issues that arise with approaches in which only one order for heads and complements is available cross-linguistically). As for XP -adjunction however, I will

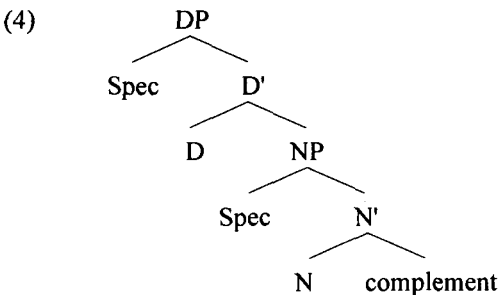
adopt more recent analyses which propose that the occurrence of such a structural configuration is restricted (cf. chapter 4 for discussion of this point).

The main structural configurations that have been used to express relations between elements in the structure in (2) are dominance and c-command. Dominance refers to a relation in which an element is higher in the structure than another one. Thus, XP in (2) dominates all other nodes (YP, X', X and ZP), X' only dominates X and ZP, whereas YP, X and ZP do not dominate any other element that is represented in (2). As for c-command, it expresses a relation between an element α and an element β in which α does not dominate β but every node that dominates α also dominates β . Thus, in (2), YP for example c-commands X, X' and ZP, or X c-commands ZP.

(2) provides a general format which is realized by different types of categories. Within the clause, three main types of heads have generally been assumed to project a structure of the type shown in (2), namely V (verb), I (inflection) and C (complementizer). Thus, we obtain the following basic structure for the clause:



As for the structure of nominal elements, it is determined by two main heads, N (noun) and D (determiner).



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