The nominal phrase in Korean: the role of D in a “determiner-less” language

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This paper examines the structure of the nominal phrase in Korean, a language without definite or indefinite articles. In particular, I focus on the issue of whether these nominal phrases can be analyzed as being dominated by DPs despite the lack of overt “Determiners” in Korean. This paper reanalyzes the evidence put forth for the presence of the DP in English and its role, and in an examination of prenominal functional elements in Korean, such as Demonstratives, Quantifiers, and the Genitive clitic, I conclude that there are no Determiners in the sense of those which appear in languages such as English. Rather, the DP, if it exists at all, has a very limited role in the phrasal structure of Korean.

1. Introduction: The issue

Since the reanalysis of syntactic structures sparked by Abney (1987), it has been the trend to analyze projections headed by functional categories as “closing off” lexical projections. For example, whereas nominal phrases within a GB framework would have been analyzed as being structures headed by nouns, with optional Determiners in their Specifiers, the tradition since Abney (1987) has been to analyze the Determiner, rather than the Noun, as being the head of the nominal phrase, with the NP as its complement.

In Korean, a head-final language, this yields a straightforward analysis for postnominal particles such as Case markers and plural markers. However, the class of functional elements which have traditionally been labelled as Determiners (e.g., Demonstratives, Genitive Case marker, Quantifiers, etc.) regularly appear prenominally. If these functional elements are taken to be the head of a projection containing the nominal phrase in particular, there appears to be an apparent violation of the Directionality Parameter dictating that phrases in Korean be head-final, as illustrated in (1) below.

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The above data suggests that the DP in Korean must be allowed to have a head-initial structure, in exception to the Directionality Parameter, or a reanalysis of these structures must be undertaken. This reanalysis will prove that these functional elements in Korean do not act in the same way as the Determiners in English.

We will be working within a Minimalist (Chomsky 1995) framework, which assumes strictly binary branching structures and that specifiers and complements are phrasal in nature. Feature checking relations occur between a head and its specifier, and all movement must be properly motivated by features. In addition, Minimalism purports the existence of a language-specific Directionality Parameter which determines the position of the head within a phrase. All phrases are then assumed to follow this parameter setting.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 contrasts and compares Determiners in English with potential Determiners in Korean and proposes an analysis, and Section 3 concludes the paper.

2. What are Determiners?

Adger (2003) identifies Determiners in English as elements occurring in complementary distribution with the definite article *the*, and thus assumed to have a [D] category feature. This set of elements includes the Definite and Indefinite articles, Demonstratives, the genitive clitic ‘s, and Quantifiers.

In terms of semantic functions, Determiners appear to pinpoint or narrow down the range of possible referents of their complement NPs (e.g. Demonstratives and Definite articles), or to quantify over sets of entities denoted by the subject and the predicate (e.g., Quantifiers). This latter function is illustrated with the example below (Adger’s 28).

(2) No vampire slept.

Within set theory, it would be assumed that the determiner *no* indicates that the set of things that are vampires does not intersect with the set of things that slept (i.e., their intersection consists of the null set).

The above description holds for Determiners in English, but is not necessarily true of Determiners cross-linguistically. Thus, in the following section we will apply the tests for Determiners (i.e., in complementary distribution with *the* and anchoring the referent to the discourse or quantifying over the predicate and subject) to prenominal functional elements in Korean in order to determine if these functional elements can be considered to be proper Determiners.

Our first test for Determiners must be modified for Korean, since there are no Definite, or Indefinite, articles in Korean. Instead, we must test to see whether the elements which
have been labelled as Determiners still occur in complementary distribution with one another in Korean.

In English, in addition to Articles, Demonstratives, and Quantifiers, the Genitive clitic ‘s has been reanalyzed as the head of a DP. This is because the clitic is in complementary distribution with all of the other generally accepted Determiners, as illustrated below.

(3) a. *the woman’s the hat (definite article)
b. *the woman’s her hat (possessive pronoun)
c. *the woman’s this hat (demonstrative)
d. *the woman’s some hats (quantifier)

The above sentences are assumed to be ungrammatical because the head D is doubly filled. The corresponding (ungrammatical) tree is given in (4) below.

(4) *the woman’s the hat

However, the structure is grammatical when only the genitive clitic ‘s appears, as in (5).

(5) the woman’s hat

Unlike English, however, in Korean, this Genitive clitic/Case marker does not appear in complementary distribution with other “Determiners”. For example, in the phrase below, the Genitive Case marker appears with the Demonstrative ku ‘that’.

(6) na-uy ku chayk
   I-GEN that book
   ‘that book of mine’

Even though it is true that Korean appears to differ from English in allowing Determiners to co-occur with each other, crucially, our representation of the phrase above relies on the head-initial analysis of a DP. However, as an SOV language, Korean is best analyzed as a head-final language, with the relevant head-final setting of the Directionality Parameter. Thus, the data in (6) could be an indication that the DP in Korean is singularly the exception to the rule, and that even though the Directionality Parameter creates head-final phrases, DPs in Korean are allowed to be head-initial. The other option would be to reanalyze the Genitive marker, and this seems to be the optimal solution.

In Korean, we notice that Case marking is more widespread than in English, and that it is not Demonstratives with which the Genitive marker occurs in complementary distribution, but other Case markers, such as -i/ka ‘NOM’ and -ul/-rul ‘ACC’. This is not an unexpected result, since in a language with overt Case markers, it would be logical for the Case markers to not co-occur with one another. Thus, we can account for the data in (6) by reanalyzing the structure in terms of Case phrases (KPs), following Jo (2000), as in (7) below.
The above structure has the favourable result of being comparable to the DP with a Possessor in English, as in (8).

Rather than having a possessed DP with the possessor DP in its Specifier (as in English), the Korean Possessive phrase can be analyzed as consisting of a possessed KP with a possessor KP in the Specifier position.

This crucial difference is confirmed in the data presented by Carnie (2002), for English allows entire phrasal constituents to occur in the possessor DP, which results in the possessive ’s appearing to attach to elements other than nouns. Examples are given in (9) below (Carnie’s 14 and 15).

(9)  a. [the man standing over there]’s hat
    b. *the man’s standing over there hat

In Korean, the Genitive Case marker consistently attaches only to Nouns.

From the data above, it is clear that the Genitive Case marker in Korean -uy cannot be a Determiner in terms of its distribution. We have already proposed that it is actually the head of a KP.

Although the analysis above solves the puzzle of the distribution of the Genitive Case marker, we still need to consider the distribution of Demonstratives. If we assume that KP is the structure dominating the Korean noun, we are faced with the following problem. In Minimalist theory, it is generally assumed that every category heads its own projection. However, if this is true, we are forced to posit that the Demonstrative, which never takes anything as its complement, is a phrase which never projects. This is shown in (11) below.
These sorts of structures are no different from pre-DP analyses, since a phrase which never projects is the same as a head. Thus, the specifier of NP is not particularly phrasal in the required sense. Yet, we are stuck, because a phrase with two heads is also disallowed within X-bar theory.

Alternatively, we could posit that the DP consists of a phonologically null head housing [DEM], [PROXIMAL], [DISTAL], [DEFINITE] or [SPECIFIC] features. In order to be checked, these features would require the phrase containing the Demonstrative to merge into the specifier position of DP. Although we still have the same problem of having a phrase (DemP) which never projects, the resulting phrase structure (given in (12) below) is closer to one we would expect for a head-final language such as Korean, and the featural motivation for the merging in of the Demonstrative is a theoretically favourable solution, and it is the one we will adopt.

Another piece of evidence which suggests that Demonstratives are not necessarily Determiners is that unlike Demonstratives in English, Korean Demonstratives cannot act as pronouns (which are also considered to be Determiners in English). Rather, the Korean Demonstratives must modify dummy nouns such as kes ‘thing’ and c’ok ‘direction’, as illustrated in (13) below.

1 Some of these features have been proposed in Feature Geometric analyses of Nominals (Cowper and Hall 2003, to appear), and although they are somewhat discoursal in nature, it is not unreasonable to assume their presence within a Minimalist framework as well, since even features such as [+TOPIC] and [+FOCUS] are generally accepted.
This could suggest that these demonstratives are in fact clitics which do not happen to project, but instead simply attach to the noun they modify, but this would seem to inappropriately downplay its role, in terms of definiteness and its deictic nature, in the sentence. Thus, I will reject this option. In terms of simply closing off the lexical projection, Jo (2000) argues that Demonstratives do not perform this function in Korean, giving supporting data (morphemic glosses and boldface added are mine) from Japanese, a language similar to Korean, from Fukui (1986). (14) below is Fukui’s (24).

(14) a. ko-no hon
    this-GEN book
    ‘this book’

b. John-no ko-no hon
   John-GEN this book
   ‘this book of John’s’

c. akai John-no ko-no hon
   red-MOD John-GEN this-GEN book
   ‘this red book of John’s’ (lit. ‘red John’s this book’)

Presumably the ability to attach extra modifiers to the left periphery of the Demonstrative would suggest that the Demonstrative is not actually “closing off” the domain of the nominal phrase. It is not necessary to assume that the adjective phrase has been merged into the structure as part of a lexical phrase dominating the DP in (14c); the resulting structure could be derived via movement. Nevertheless, it is true that the Demonstrative does not close off the lexical projection, since another functional projection, namely the KP, appears to have this function. However, more importantly, Case markers do not fulfil any of the other functions normally attributed to Determiners, such as the ability to anchor the referent in the discourse. Thus rather than completely denying the existence of DPs, we will simply assume that it is only this function of closing off the lexical (nominal) domain which can be attributed to the KP.

Quantifiers raise the same sorts of issues as Demonstratives since they, like Demonstratives, are also elements which generally appear consistently prenominally. However, unlike Demonstratives, they are a bit freer in their distribution, in that certain Quantifiers may also optionally appear postnominally. In this case, they function similarly to adverbs. It is interesting that Quantifiers are of category [\text{D}], since even in English, they appear to co-occur with Definite articles, as in (15) below.

(15) All the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put Humpty together again.
    (Children’s Nursery Rhyme)

Thus, we label Quantifiers as separate QPs, as illustrated below.
As mentioned above, the Quantifier *all* can appear postnominaly, a phenomenon that has been attributed to movement of the nominal phrase, to the exclusion of the quantifier, to the specifier position of IP (Carnie 2002), as in (17).

In Korean, it is also true that Demonstratives can occur with (certain) Quantifiers. For example, we have the following data:

(18) *i motun chayk-tul-i*
    this all book-PL-NOM
    ‘all these books’

In accordance with our analysis thus far, we would predict the following structure:
However, we once again face the issue of the head of the QP occurring to the left of its complement. It would be difficult to propose an analysis similar to the one given above for the Demonstrative, where a QP would raise to the specifier of a DP to check features with a phonologically null head. The nature of the features on the head would be difficult to determine, and no features I know of have been attributed to Quantifiers. If the QP were to be dominated by a DP, the resultant structure would also be highly unusual, since the DP projection dominating the DemP would have a DP as a complement phrase. Whereas DPs have been posited in the specifier positions of other DPs (c.f. the analysis of possessor phrases in English), no analyses that I know of have posited DP structures which take DP complements.

The above incompatibility of the QP with the head-final phrase structure of Korean suggests that further research should be pursued in this area. Data below also suggests that QPs are problematic in Korean and so must be reanalyzed, so for the moment we will simply assume that the QP is a head-initial phrase.

When we examine the nature of “Quantifier float” in structures where there is no Demonstrative, the extraction of the nominal phrase, to the exclusion of the Quantifier, is not as straightforward as in English, as illustrated in (20).²

![Diagram](image)

(20)

The structure we have proposed thus far does not allow us to move the #P chayk-tul ‘book-PL’ with the NOMINATIVE Case marker -i, since the QP motun ‘all’ is intervening. When we try to perform movement from (19), we face the same problem, where extraction of all material excluding the QP occurs, as in (21) below.

² There is a slight morphological variation in the Quantifier after this movement occurs, and the Quantifier is simply realized as motwu. This may mean that the [n] in motun is actually a modifying marker, but how this morphological change occurs during the derivation is a question which I will leave open.
This could suggest that the QP should be base-generated elsewhere, or that the relationship between the phrases \( i \ motun \ chayk-tul-i \) ‘all of these books’ and \( i \ chayk-tul-i \ motwu \) ‘these books all..’ is not one derived by movement. Once we solve the mystery of (20), a possible solution for (21) could lie in positing a Phonological constraint which prevents the Demonstrative from being able to be pronounced alone, without a Noun. Now that we have analyzed the Quantifier in terms of its distribution, it is necessary to examine a possible substitute for the Determiner’s function of restricting the range of referents of the nominal. For this, we examine the data from Scrambling. In our analysis above, we have seen that it is the KP in Korean which takes over the role of the DP of English in closing off the domain of the nominal phrase. This could suggest that something else in Korean also takes the place of the DP’s function of restricting the range of referents of the nominal. Data involving Scrambling appears to be a fruitful start. Consider the following data:

(22) a. \( \text{kak} \ \text{haksayng-i} \ \text{kong-ul} \ \text{cha-ss-ta}. \)
    Each student-NOM ball-ACC kick-PST-DECL
    ‘Each student kicked balls.’

    b. \( \text{kak} \ \text{haksayng-i} \ \text{ku} \ \text{kong-ul} \ \text{cha-ss-ta}. \)
    Each student-NOM that ball-ACC kick-PST-DECL
    ‘Each student kicked that ball.’ \hspace{1cm} (a > each)

    c. \( \text{kong-ul} \ \text{kak} \ \text{haksayng-i} \ \text{cha-ss-ta}. \)
    ball-ACC each student-NOM kick-PST-DECL
    ‘Each student kicked the ball.’ \hspace{1cm} (a > each)

In (22a), the bare noun has the default interpretation of being a non-specific ball. Thus, an interpretation where the plural marker has been optionally dropped is readily available. In (22b), the presence of the Demonstrative \( \text{ku} \) ‘that’ forces the reading where there is a definite and specific ball. (22c) demonstrates that scrambling of the bare nominal phrase gives it a
definite and specific interpretation. This data appears to suggest that Korean has two methods of explicitly referring to the definiteness of an object. Rather than solely relying on the insertion of Demonstratives, scrambling of the nominal is another possibility. Whether it is the case that only specific nominals have the opportunity to scramble, or that specificity is an interpretation which is only available once the nominal has been moved is an issue that will be left open. In certain analyses of Scrambling (for example, Bailyn 2001 (Russian) and Choe 1995 (Korean)), the movement of constituents to the left periphery of a clause has been reinterpreted as a properly motivated movement, and not the optional mixing around of constituents generally attributed to the term Scrambling. In particular, the movement has been connected to operations of Focus movement and Topicalization. Thus, in extending this analysis to all types of Scrambling in Korean, it may be the case that a nominal may only move in order to check a [+TOPIC] or [+FOCUS] feature. If this is the case, it is most likely true that only specific nominals may move.

3.0 Conclusion

In reanalyzing the functional elements of the Genitive clitic, Demonstratives, and Quantifiers, it has been shown that none of them form a DP per se. Not only does each category co-occur with the other, unlike the Determiners in English, but they also appear to have different functions, which suggests that they have different structural representations. Indeed, Genitive clitics are better represented as heads of KPs, Demonstratives are more likely to be located in the specifier positions of DPs (or some other plausible functional head) in order to check features relevant to its deictic or referential nature, and Quantifiers perform separate functions from the other two categories and are also unique in their ability to separate from the rest of the nominal phrase. Thus, it must be concluded that it is not the case that nominal phrases in Korean must obligatorily be dominated by DPs, but rather that it is the KP which performs the function of subordinating the noun phrase (Jo 2000), and it is the Demonstratives and Scrambling which identify nominals as being specific or definite.

References