

The DP vs. NP-debate: Why previous arguments for the DP-hypothesis fail and what a good argument for it should look like

Martin Salzmann

University of Leipzig

martin.salzmann@uni-leipzig.de

I will first show that most arguments that have been offered in favor of the DP-hypothesis fail. Second, I will make a general proposal as to what a solid argument in favor of the DP-hypothesis should look like and provide a concrete example. I take the following to be a useful diagnostic for headedness:

- (1) The features of the head are present on the maximal projection

This implies that the features of the head of the NP are closer to heads/probes outside the NP than (the features of) other constituents within the NP. There is evidence from agreement switches between semantic and grammatical agreement that it is indeed D and not N that is closer to outside probes: In Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian adjectives and determiners can show different agreement in the context of hybrid nouns (nouns bearing both grammatical and biological gender). In (8), the adjective agrees in grammatical gender, while the demonstrative agrees in biological gender:

- (2) Ovi stare vladike su me juče posetili/*posetile.
these.M.PL old.F.PL bishops are me yesterday visited.M.PL/ visited.F.PL
'These old bishops visited me yesterday.' BCS

The switch between A and D can only be in this direction (grammatical → biological), not the other way around (*biological → grammatical; Agreement Hierarchy). Simplifying somewhat, this can be captured by assuming that biological gender is more complex than grammatical gender and that the probes on A, D and V can be relativized to the type of gender feature (simple vs. complex). Since it is more complex, agreement in biological gender is preferred if the probe allows it. As a consequence, D can probe across A and find the biological gender feature on N if A is not complex (=grammatical agreement), but D cannot probe the grammatical gender feature on N if A is complex. Thus, once one of the elements of the noun phrase has acquired a complex (biological) gender feature, higher probes cannot see past it (relativized minimality). The DP- and NP-hypothesis now make crucially different predictions: Under the DP-hypothesis, the demonstrative is the head of the entire phrase so that its features are closest to V. Under the NP-hypothesis, however, the features of N are closest to V. Only the DP-hypothesis makes the correct prediction: If the demonstrative shows biological gender agreement, V must also agree in biological gender. Under the NP-hypothesis, however, the features of N should be easily accessible for V so that a switch back to grammatical agreement should be possible, contrary to fact.