Latin as an articleless DP-language
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(hierarchy, modifiers, left periphery)

From Longobardi (1994) onwards, the DP layer is taken to be the syntactic counterpart of argumenthood, definiteness and referentiality. In this respect, the existence of articleless languages like Latin poses the problem of whether the same syntax – semantics mapping can be maintained assuming a null article. An obvious alternative, complying with more minimalist requirements is a parameterized theory of functional structure which considers lack of articles as the result of lack of the upper functional DP layer. In such a theory the syntax – semantic mapping of given categories is parameterized: some languages have NP-arguments others have DP-arguments. This is the path taken by Chierchia (1998) and more recently Bošković (2005, 2010 inter alia).

Bošković’s proposal is of particular interest for the numerous facts it derives from the presence or absence of the DP projection in a given language. In this paper, we focus on four properties predicted of articleless languages which can be easily checked in Latin:

1. a. Left-branch extraction (LBE)
   b. Adjectival morphology of determiners
   c. Relatively NP-internal free adjectival order
   d. Transitive nominals with only one genitive.

As for (1a), LBE is notably a property distinguishing Latin (Bolkenstein 2001) from Romance languages, as in (2):

(2)  a. maximam habet opinionem virtutis (Caes. Gall. 7,83)
    b. *massima ha la considerazione della virtù
greatest.ACC.SG has (the) consideration.ACC.SG. virtue.GEN.SG.
    c. Ha la più grande opinione della virtù (Italian)
       “He has the greatest consideration of the Virtue”

Bošković (2008) derives the LBE assuming a blocking effect exercised by DP derived by three assumptions:

(3)  a. DP is a phase, while NP is not.
    b. For an element to be extracted out of a phase, it needs to move through the left edge of the phase.
       (Phase Impenetrability Condition (PIC))
    c. Movement out of SpecDP is excluded by anti-locality (movement cannot be too short).

In DP-languages, PIC forces movement out of DP to take the intermediate step in SpecDP, which is however banned (4a) by anti-locality. This is not the case in NP-languages (4b), where absence of DP allows extraction of nominal modifiers:

(4)  a. …. [DP [DP D [NP [XP] N]]]
     b. …. [NP [XP] N]

It is therefore crucial in Bošković’s proposal that languages that allow LBE do not have a DP.

As for (1b), lack of DP forces a language to categorize elements that are usually taken to be occupants of DP as APs therefore having adjectival morpho-syntactic properties. And this is clearly the case of Latin demonstratives and possessives, which not only share the inflectional morphology of adjectives, but can cooccur (5a), and at least as regards the possessives, can be predicates (5b):

(5)  a. illam meam cladem
    that.ACC.SG my.ACC.SG misfortune.ACC.SG
    “that my misfortune” (Cic. Sext. 31)
    b. suam esse hereditatem defendit
    his.ACC.SG. to-be the inheritance.ACC.SG. claim.3SG.PRES.
    “[he] claims that the inheritance belongs to him” (Cic. Inv. 2,23)
As for (1c), lack of functional structure above NP also implies that adjectives are adjoined to NP, leading to a certain degree of freedom in relative order. Latin is usually considered a champion of flexibility of word order including the adjectival order (cf. Marouzeau 1922, De Sutter 1986, Devine & Stephens 2006). As for (1d), it derives from the fact that subject genitives are assigned at the DP-level. But, contrary to what the NP-parameter would predict, Latin displays a clear tendency for prenominal subject genitives and postnominal object genitives (Gianollo 2007, Devine and Stephens 2006). Furthermore it is possible to find two genitives in transitive eventive nouns (Giusti and Oniga 2007):

(6) omnium expectatio visendi Alcibiadis
everybody.Gen.PL expectatio,NOM.SG to see.GER.GEN. Alcibiadis.Gen.SG
“everybody’s expectation to see Alcibiadis” (Nep. 7, 6,1)

In this paper, we start from this observation and provide more evidence to claim that even in Bošković’s system, Latin must be considered as an articleless DP language. We argue that Latin has a split DP, which provides a single position to the left of the demonstrative, allowing for the well-known Latin freedom of modifier order, which goes beyond the semantic hierarchy assumed by Bošković, but is nonetheless not at all unconstrained.

The following generalizations support a fixed position for a demonstrative (DEM) in a fine-grained DP layer:

(7) a. When present, DEM is the highest modifier in the unmarked case but not in all cases, contrary to what a bare NP structure constrained by the semantic approach would predict.
   b. When DEM is in second position, we can find any class of modifier preceding it. This is captured by the assumption that the left periphery hosts discourse features and is a sort of A-bar position.
   c. Only one element at a time can precede DEM. This supports the proposal that we are dealing with a syntactic and not phonological rearrangement of the elements.
   d. N precedes DEM only if no other modifier is present.

A split DP-layer, not only straightforwardly derives the “second” position of DEM with A-bar movement of XP to its left, but can also directly motivate LBE, if the left peripheral position is an escape hatch for XP, thereby obeying the PIC without violating anti-locality:

(8) …. [DP XP [DP [D D [NP [XP] N]]]]

This analysis provides a promising path towards an explanation of the fact that all Romance languages, despite their geographic distance and the different substrata and superstrata all developed definite and indefinite articles. This is due to the fact that the mother language already had the DP structure. Development of the article and consequent loss of LBE and DEM-second orders can be imputed to the simplification of the split-DP into a simple DP layer, in turn related to morphological impoverishment.

No change affected the adjectival nature of possessives, while in some languages (Ibero-Romance and Daco-Romance) the demonstrative is still ambiguous between and adjectival modifier and a determiner (Guardiano 2012).

References


