

On the ' Head ' of the Noun Phrase in Grammatical Theory

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- 1. Introduction :
- - During the last four decades there has been a considerable
- debate on the ' headedness' of the Noun Phrase(NP), i.e.,
- whether in a pattern like : Determiner + Noun (D+N),e.g.,
- The book , D is the syntactic head or N .
- - In traditional and structural syntax ' Head ' refers to
- a constituent, which in some sense dominates the whole
- syntactic construct.
- - Jespersen (1924: 96) states "...we always find that there is
- one word of supreme importance to which the others are
- joined as subordinates."

- - Bloomfield (1933: 195) uses the term ' head ' in
- relation to endocentric constructions , where the 'head' is
- the daughter constituent which has the same distribution as the mother.
 - Why Head? The importance of 'Head ' stems from the fact
- that it has entered the common currency of theoretical
- Linguistics and the majority of current grammatical theories
- refer explicitly to the ' Head ' of a phrasal constituent
- (Corbet et al , 2006)

' Arguments for ' Headship .2 •

A. In (1985) Arnold Zwicky published an article entitled •

Head ' , in which he presented several criteria for headship ' •

Richard Hudson (1987) debated Zwicky 's criteria and tried to •

.refuse some of them and modify others •

: Zwicky claims that 'Head ' could be - •

•

The constituent whose meaning serves as argument for .1 •

some function. This is known as the **semantic argument** •

If there is a combination X + Y , X is identified as the •

semantic head if X + Y names a sub-instance of the thing •

described by X , e.g •

The green tree by the river

This pattern names a sub-instance of **tree**, hence **tree** is the profile equivalent of the whole phrase. Zwicky assumes that a determiner meaning is a functor whose argument is the meaning of the following noun. But what about this pattern : **a tree** ? It is very hard to describe it as an instance of tree

The 'Head' could be the determinant of **concord** with which some other constituent must agree. Concord in English applies only to D + N and NP + VP. Examples
a. The student b. The students c. *This students
d. John swims. e. People swim

, The question here is : which element determines concord
 The existence of inherently plural , but morphologically
 unmarked nouns together with non existence of inherently
 ,(singular , but morphologically unmarked verbs, like (e
 .suggests that the NP is the concord determinant in English
 The ' Head 'is the **distributional equivalent** , that is , the .3
 constituent whose distribution is identical to that of the
 whole construct. However, as Zwicky himself notes ,it is
 by no means easy to decide whether **D + N** is endocentric,
 so it is also hard to decide whether it has any
 distributional equivalent at all. If we look at the examples
 ,below, it is clear that **boys** is distributionally equivalent
 : and that **the** is not

.a. I know the boys

.b. I know boys

c. * I know the

- Zwicky says the criterion of 'distributionally equivalent
- can be used to argue that **N** is the head , that neither constituent is , or that **D** is , depending on which set of
- facts we look at
- The ' Head ' is the '**morphosyntactic locus**'. Zwicky .4
- Argues that the 'Head ' is the element of the phrase

• .That is the locus of morphosyntactic marking, e.g.

• .Inflection

• Here, however, we see that this criterion does not isolate a single head, since **D** and **N** share category features

• **D** and **N** show person and number morphology, e.g.

• .–John saw many cats

• .John saw a cat _

• Both **D** and **N** show person morphology .Then, which one is the head

- (The debate between Van Langendonck(1996 +
and Hudson (2004

- - 'a. The debate here is on whether '**Determiners**' are '**Heads**

- - b. Van Langendonck adopts the traditional view that in a
• pattern like: **D + N** , **N** is the head not **D**

- - c. Hudson says the determiner and the common noun each
• depends on the other, so either (but not both) of them may
• be the 'head' of the NP. Hudson adds: some constructions
• demand a common noun as 'head' while others demand
• a determiner

- ' Evidence that ' D ' depends on ' N +

- - Van Langendock's most powerful evidence concerns **NP -**

: adjuncts such as the following •

.a. I saw him *this morning* •

b. * I saw him this •

- Semantically the noun 'morning' is relevant ,i.e., there •
'is dependency between 'saw' and ' morning •

One possible counter example is that determiners are in fact -
relevant , because some determiners are not possible in NPs •
that can be used as adjuncts. For example: 'this morning' can •
:be used as adjunct , but 'a morning' or ' the morning ' cannot •

.a. I'll do it this morning •

.b. * I'll do it the/a morning •

So it is not just **N** which decides whether or not the **NP** can be •
.used as an adjunct ; **D** counts , too

Evidence that N depends on D+ •

As Hudson states the most overwhelming evidence - •
comes

from languages other than English. For example, French •
allows a combination of a preposition and a definite article
: to fuse into a single word-form •

'a. du (* de le) village ' from the village

: Similarly in Arabic ,we find •

.'b. lil (= l+ al) tulabil athkiya' ' for the smart students •

In cases like these it is clear that two syntactic •
forms fuse into a single morphological form.
Hudson says that this fusion pattern is relevant
here because it is sensitive to syntactic structure.
It only applies if the article introduced is an NP
. which is preposition's complement

So, here we see a clear evidence of a direct •
relation between the preposition and the
determiner , which means that the determiner is
. the **head** of its **NP**

Conclusion :

- The various headship criteria sometimes pick out the **determiner** , sometimes the **noun** , and sometimes yield an indeterminate answer.
- So, it seems that the determination of the element that counts as ' **Head** ' of the NP does **not** always prove simple. This is because syntactic and semantic ideas of ' what characterizes the whole ' do not always coincide.
- The examples have shown that **D** and **N** depend on each other. This means that either of them could be the ' Head ' of the NP , i.e., there is a **mutual dependency** between them.

Thank you