The Dual Source of the adjective-plus-indefinite-pronoun construction

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Recently, two proposals explaining the way adjectives combine with indefinite pronouns [=IPs] have been put forward based on contradicting evidence. Arguing against Abney (1987) and Kishimoto (2000), Larson & Marušič (2004) show that English adjectives combining with IPs, (1), are always postnominal and that the Abney/Kishimoto light N-raising analysis is not tenable. Roehrs (2006), on the other hand, convincingly shows that German (and Germanic) IPs take only prenominal adjectives and concludes, concerning one of Larson & Marušič’s arguments, that these constructions involve adjectives that are prenominal to a null noun in a postnominal position (cf. Leu 2003 for a similar treatment of French cases). However, prenominal adjectives in postnominal positions still behave as prenominal As so that Roehr’s analysis cannot be used to explain the English facts presented in Larson & Marušič (2004).

(1) Something new vs. some new thing
Someplace nice vs. some nice place
Everyone tall vs. every tall one

In this paper, we argue that the conflicting evidence showing that adjectives combining with IPs are both postnominal and prenominal in effect shows that languages employ (at least) two different constructions for combining IPs with adjectives. Some languages, as we will show for Slovenian, allow both constructions.

Unlike in the above-mentioned languages, where IPs like ‘something’ and ‘someone’ appear to behave in the same way, the Slovenian IP nekaj ‘something’ differs from the IP nekdo ‘someone’ in several ways. The first difference one can observe between the two types of IPs concerns the case of the adjectival complement. While nekdo, when nominative-marked, does not require any special case for its adjectival complement, nekaj, when nominative-marked, requires the adjective to be in the genitive, (2) (in non-nominative cases, the adjectival complement agrees with the IP in both types of IPs). Moreover, the pronoun nekaj is homophonous with the quantifier ‘some’, which also requires a complement in the genitive, e.g. nekaj snega\textsubscript{GEN}/snežinka\textsubscript{GEN} ‘some snow/snowflakes’. If one assumes that the two nekaj’s are the same element, then it is natural to posit a null N in its complement for the IP use in (2a). On the other hand, nekdo only has an IP use but no quantifier use (*nekdo ljudi [intended ‘some men’]), offering no evidence for a null N in its complement in (2b).

(2) a. nekaj\textsubscript{NOM} velikega /*veliko\textsubscript{GEN} b. nekdo * velikega / velik\textsubscript{NOM} big\textsubscript{GEN} big\textsubscript{NOM} someone\textsubscript{NOM} big\textsubscript{GEN} big\textsubscript{NOM} ‘something big’ ‘someone tall’

Further, Slovenian has an alternation comparable to German where the relative order of the adjective and its complement differs between prenominal and postnominal position, (3)-(4). When the whole AP (in bold) is prenominal, the adjective (sloneč) follows its complement (na mizo), (3), when it is postnominal, the adjective precedes its complement, (4).

(3) a. na mizo sloneč\textsubscript{NOM} fant on table leaning boy ‘a boy leaning against the table’
b. * sloneč\textsubscript{NOM} na mizo\textsubscript{NOM} fant leaning on table boy

(4) a. *fant na mizo sloneč\textsubscript{NOM} on table leaning boy ‘a boy leaning against the table’
b. fant sloneč\textsubscript{NOM} na mizo\textsubscript{NOM} boy leaning on table

The relative order of the adjective and its complement can thus be used as a diagnostic to determine the pre- vs. postnominal status of the adjective phrase as a whole. As shown in (5) and (6), the test yields conflicting results when applied to the two kinds of Slovenian IPs. Nekaj allows both orders, (5), while nekdo allows only the postnominal order (on neutral intonation), (6) (like in English, APs cannot appear in front of any of the two IPs). This suggests that the whole AP combining with nekdo, but not with nekaj, is postnominal, and that
a null N approach (Roehrs 2006, Leu 2003) could work only for one but not for the other.

A further difference manifests itself with superlatives. While nekaj allows superlatives in their complement, nekdo doesn’t, (7). If superlatives are always prenominal (Matushansky 2004), this again suggests that adjectives combining with nekdo, but not with nekaj, are always postnominal. The only way to get a superlative as the complement of nekdo-type IPs is inside a PP in a construction parallel to the English someone from among the best ones, (8).

Finally, nekaj and nekdo also behave differently with respect to relativization. With nekdo, one can only form an ordinary relative clause with the complementizer used with ordinary relativization, while with nekaj, relativization is only possible with the complementizer/wh-word used in free relatives, (9).

If we assume that an ordinary relative clause needs a nominal head, something that raises out of it, then (9b) suggests that nekoga is indeed a noun. Free relatives, on the other hand, do not combine with a noun but rather with a DP (cf. Groos & van Riemsdijk 1981, Hirschbühler & Rivero 1981, 1983), and so (9a) actually suggests that the relativization occurs at the higher DP level. (An obvious question to be answered, if nekaj also has a null N, is why it cannot also participate in the ordinary relativization.)

In sum, Slovenian IPs nekaj ‘something’ and nekdo ‘someone’ behave differently in several respects. Like German IPs, nekaj combines with an adjective that behaves as if it is prenominal, and like English IPs, nekdo combines with an adjective that behaves as if it is postnominal. We account for this split by proposing two mechanisms with which Slovenian adjectives combine with IPs, thereby making sense of the opposing claims advanced in the literature in the debate about the structure of IPs.

Matushansky, O. 2004. The DP and the deepest. Ms. Université Paris 8/CNRS.