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****So weird a baffling construction***

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Although English determiners typically precede adjectives, as in (1), the determiner may follow the sequence ‘degree-word + adjective,’ as in (2).

- (1) a. a (less) fancy car
b. a (less) shabby house
c. a (less) beautiful day
- (2) a. so fancy a car
b. too shabby a house
c. as beautiful a day

Kennedy and Merchant (2000) offer an analysis of this unusual word order in which the degree word and adjective form a degree phrase adjoined to NP, which raises to a projection above the DP.

- (3) [FP [DegP so fancy]_i (of) [DP a [NP t_i [NP car]]]]

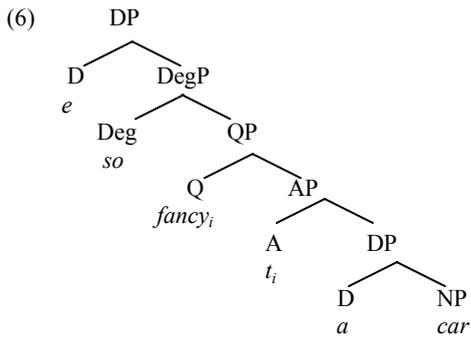
Adjective phrases can be iterative, all being individually adjoined to NP:

- (4) a. a (less) fancy American car
b. a (less) shabby expensive house
c. a (less) beautiful sunny day

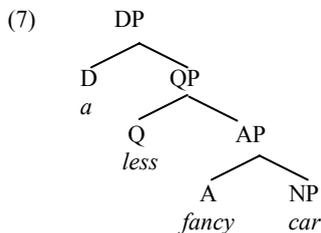
Without any additional assumptions, the ungrammaticality of (5), with a second adjective, is unexpected under this analysis.

- (5) a. * so fancy an American car
b. * too shabby an expensive house
c. * as beautiful a sunny day

Lilley 2001 proposes an analysis which, at first, seems to account for these data. Lilley assigns to the phrase *so fancy a car* the structure in (6), which he attributes to Delsing 1993, and Bresnan’s (1973) and Corver’s (1997) insight concerning the distinction between the categories Deg and Q.



Lilley requires, based on Higginbotham 1985, that every N be theta-bound by a D and every D theta-bind an N. According to his analysis, Deg, but not Q, blocks this theta-binding. So in (6), A can take a DP complement to house *a* in a position from which it can theta-bind *car*. In a DP without Deg, like (1a), the determiner appears in the higher DP, and the lower one is not projected, as shown in (7).



Taken at face value, the analysis seems to correctly predict the ungrammaticality of (5), since the only positions for D are above all modifiers and below all modifiers, but not between modifiers. But, given that A can take a DP complement, as in (6), and D can take an AP complement, as in (7), nothing prevents the structure in (8).

(8) [DP e [DegP so [AP fancy [DP an [AP American [NP car]]]]]]]

Furthermore, as we have seen in (4), adjective phrases can be iterative. Besides general issues of scope of Deg and Q in (6) (Julien 2002: 269), nothing syntactic can prevent the iteration of a second adjective phrase above the lower DP in (8), which is ungrammatical in English:

(9) * so fancy American a car

Although the first type of analysis can account for the ungrammaticality of (9), neither of the two analyses we have seen for the constructions in (2) correctly accounts for the ungrammaticality of (5).

Reference

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