

# snippets

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# A Distinctness Effect in the German Noun Phrase

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In standard German, there are two ways to express possession: with a nominal genitive modifier (1a) or with a *von*-PP (1b).

- (1) a. ein Freund [mein-es Vater-s]  
a friend [my-GEN father-GEN]  
b. ein Freund [von mein-em Vater]  
a friend [of my-DAT father]  
'a friend of my father'

A long-standing puzzle is why bare mass nouns such as *Wasser* ('water') and *Holz* ('wood') are not possible as genitive attributes (2a, 3a), but only as possessive PP complements (2b, 3b) (see Gallmann 1998; Müller 2002; Sternefeld 2004). Such genitive complements become possible if the noun is no longer bare, i.e. with a determiner or demonstrative (2c, 3c). A further complication to this picture is that bare nouns can be used as genitive attributes if they are modified by an adjective (2d, 3d).

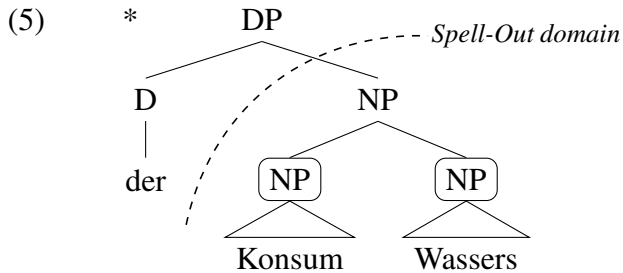
- (2) a. \*der Konsum [Wasser-s] (Kunkel-Razum and Münzberg 2009:980)  
the consumption water-GEN  
b. der Konsum [von Wasser]  
the consumption of water  
c. der Konsum [d-es / dies-es Wasser-s]  
the consumption the-GEN / this-GEN water-GEN  
d. der Konsum [frisch-en Wasser-s]  
the consumption fresh-GEN water-GEN
- (3) a. \*die Verarbeitung [Holz-es] (Gallmann 1998:155)  
the treatment wood-GEN  
b. die Verarbeitung [von Holz]  
the treatment of wood  
c. die Verarbeitung [d-es / dies-es Holz-es]  
the treatment the-GEN / this-GEN wood-GEN  
d. die Verarbeitung [tropisch-en Holz-s]  
the treatment tropical-GEN wood-GEN

The puzzle is therefore why a bare mass noun can only be the complement to a noun if it is accompanied by a preposition, determiner or adjective. I argue that this can be explained by what Richards (2010) calls *Distinctness*, as defined in (4).

(4) **Distinctness** (Richards 2010:5):

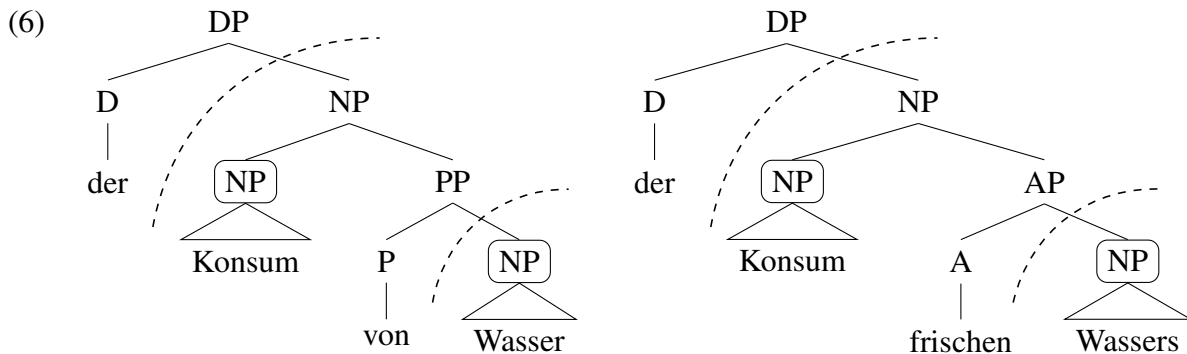
If a linearization statement  $\langle \alpha, \alpha \rangle$  is generated, the derivation crashes.

As Richards (2010:5) explains, “this condition rejects trees in which two nodes that are both of the type  $\alpha$  are to be linearized in the same Spell-Out domain”. This can now account for the ungrammaticality of (2a, 3a). Assuming that D is a phase head and that bare nouns are simply NPs (Paul 2004), then the presence of two NP nodes in the Spell-Out domain of the same D head results in the illicit linearization statement  $\langle \text{NP}, \text{NP} \rangle$  (5).



It should be noted here that Richards (2010:6) assumes that lexical material (such as nouns) is “very generally immune to Distinctness” (although this is not entirely unproblematic, see Richards 2010:210, fn. 34). This follows in Distributed Morphology if functional material is inserted late, whereas lexical material is not. However, there are numerous arguments for Late Insertion of roots as well (Haugen and Siddiqi 2013; Harley 2014; de Belder and van Craenenbroeck 2015), and I adopt this position here. Perhaps one could assume variation in the timing of insertion and Distinctness evaluation, and thus derive flexibility regarding when lexical material counts for Distinctness. The details of such a view must be left to future research, however.

Richards (2010) shows that many Distinctness violations can be repaired by the addition of another phase head into the structure. This leads to the relevant XPs occurring in different Spell-Out domains. Under this view, what makes the other examples in (2) and (3) possible is the introduction of another Spell-Out domain by a phase head. This can either be a P, D, or A head. As (6) shows, this means that the non-distinct NP nodes are consigned to different Spell-Out domains and therefore no longer violate *Distinctness*.



Furthermore, the following contrast supports the assumption that proper names differ from bare nouns in having a silent D head, thus avoiding a *Distinctness* violation (7a).

- (7) a. [DP die [NP Verschmützung [DP  $\emptyset$  [NP Rom-s ]]]] (Haider 1992:331)  
       the pollution Rome-GEN  
       ‘the pollution of Rome’
- b. \*[DP die [NP Verschmützung [NP Wasser-s ]]]  
       the pollution water-GEN  
       ‘the pollution of water’

The fact that adjectives pattern alike with prepositions and determiners provides an argument for their status as (phase) heads outside the NP, i.e. for an AP-over-NP structure (Abney 1987; Sadler and Arnold 1994; Bošković 2005). If adjectives were otherwise, they would not form a natural class with P and D heads. That said, the status of adjectives is still controversial (see e.g. Svenonius 1994) and faces some challenges of its own, e.g. regarding distributional facts (Abney 1987).

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