

## Little [n] and the structure of adjectives

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This paper analyzes the construction *the rich* as a probe into the constituency of adjectives. Strong evidence speaks for a structure [<sub>DP</sub> *the* [<sub>NP</sub> [<sub>ADJ</sub> *rich*  $\emptyset$ ]]] (cf. Baker 2003), with an empty noun head and a generic plural reading. It has never been clear why the determiner must be the definite article, nor why the interpretation obligatorily ranges over humans. Moreover, many adjectives disallow this construction on the relevant reading: *the French* but *\*the American*, *the poor* but *\*the racist*, *the greedy* but *\*the red*. These adjectives systematically double up as nouns: *two Americans*, *racists*, *reds* (unlike *\*poors*). Yet they are unambiguously adjectives in *these cars are American / red*, or *these remarks are racist*. If they can be adjectives in some structures, why not in *\*the American*?

The explanation I propose hinges on the idea that some adjectives have the same morphological structure as nouns: [ROOT-n].

Firstly, *the rich* has the structure [<sub>DP</sub> *the* [<sub>NumberP</sub> Number<sup>o</sup> *rich* ]], where *rich* is an adjective made up of [ROOT] alone or [ROOT-adj], but not [ROOT-n]. The empty category is not an abstract N or [n], which should also be available in *\*the American  $\emptyset$* , or even *\*the  $\emptyset$* . It is instead [Number], interpreted as a function yielding a quantity from a division of the reference domain (Borer 2005). Normally the division is provided by [n] on the head noun; in *the rich*, it is the adjective that provides a semantic criterion of granularity, but only if interpreted as ranging over humans. Since no syntactically represented element denotes the atoms of this domain, no quantification is possible and the only available interpretation corresponds to 'the class of rich people' generically (cf. *\*the rich went out one by one*). This is a kind and requires the definite article.

Secondly, adjectives like *American*, *red* or *racist* (but not *rich* or *French*) have instead the structure [ROOT-n]. This makes precise the intuition that they are more noun-like than other adjectives; but they still can remain adjectives in the appropriate structure. Crucially, what defines adjectives as a syntactic class is the property of lacking an independently valued [Number], or lacking [Number] altogether as in English. A [ROOT-n] complex may still be plugged into an adjectival context, as in *these cars are American*.

Thirdly, English realizes plural as /s/ in the context of [n]: [Number:Plural]  $\leftrightarrow$  -s / [n] \_\_\_\_\_. This enforces *the Americans* over *the American*, if [Number] is plural. As a result, all and only the adjectives that cannot occur in the *the rich* construction are those which can appear as nouns and get the -s of the plural, namely those with structure [ROOT-n].

The main theoretical conclusion, then, is that category-assigning heads like [n] have independent morphological justification and do not simply replicate in structural terms the traditional lexical categories N, V, P, Adj. While [n] and [adj] both exist, nouns and adjectives are syntactic concepts that are not coextensive with [ROOT-n] and [ROOT-adj].

## References

- Baker, M. (2003). *Lexical Categories: Verbs, Nouns and Adjectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Borer, H. (2005). *In Name Only*. Vol. 1 of *Structuring Sense*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.