The Weak, Strong, Mixed Declension in German and Definiteness in Danish

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Data:
It is a well-known fact that German has the weak (1a), strong (1b) and mixed (1c) adjectival declension. The generalization is that the adjective and the definite article compete for the same marker. Marker *–er* can appear either on the definite article (1a) or on the adjective (1b), (1c), but cannot coexist on both (2).

It is also a well-known fact that in Danish the definiteness marker *–en* can appear either on the noun (3a) or on the head D (3b), but not on both at the same time (3c). The head N and the head D compete for the definiteness marker and if there is no modifier in the DP, the definiteness marker can appear only on the noun; compare (4) with (3a).

Proposal:
In this paper I argue that this behavior of DPs in German and Danish can be attributed to the fact that the relevant feature - the gender feature in German DPs and the definiteness feature in Danish DPs - can be spelled out only once.

Analysis:
After the narrow syntax, the weak declension *der alte Mann* (1a) looks like (5). The DP is a set of features (labels) of the elements in the DP plus the assigned case. For the competition for the marker *–er* I assume the spellout of non-terminal elements (see e.g. Weerman & Evers-Vermeul (2002), Neeleman & Szendrői (2005), Caha (2006)) because both the adjective and the article are dominated by the DP node. So, spellout begins with the DP. In the lexicon, there is no vocabulary item (VI) that can express *def, alt, Mann, MASC, SG, NOM*. Hence, spellout is going down, first to the left to the specifier, as is standardly assumed. There, the head D with features *def, MASC, SG, NOM* should be spelled out. There is *der* in the lexicon, hence it is inserted. For the fact that the determiner marker *–er* expresses case, gender and number, see (6). Then, spellout is going to NP but there is no VI for the NP in the lexicon. Thus, spellout is moving down to the adjective. Now, we get marker *–e* on the adjective *alt*, and not *–er* as on D. The reason is that the gender feature is already deleted (after spellout of D); this feature can be spelled out just once in German. This is evidenced by the mixed declension paradigm (7). Given the fact that *(k)ein* appears only in singular and only in NOM,MASC and NOM/ACC,NEUT and the fact that marker *–es* is always common for NOM and ACC in NEUT,SG, it shows that the main task of the determiner marker (*-er* or *–es*) on the adjective in NOM,MASC,SG and NOM/ACC,NEUT,SG is to differentiate the masculine gender from the neuter gender. The question is why we get marker *–e* on *alt* in (5), and not the default adjectival marker *–en*. Since *–e* prevents the default marker *–en* from appearing in adjectival singular structural case environments, it shows that the case and number feature live the whole spellout procedure; only the gender feature is deleted from the featural set after its spellout.

As to Danish example (3b), see the simplified structure (8). There is no VI in the lexicon that can spell out the DP node in (8). Therefore spellout is going down to D and it is spelled out as *den*, and the definiteness feature is deleted. Thus, this feature cannot be spelled out lower in the structure once more, see (3c). If there is no modifier in the DP (9), spellout finds *hesten* in the lexicon for the whole DP. Since there is nothing more to be spelled out, spellout does not go down in the structure and so the more complex spellout with the definite article is blocked (4).
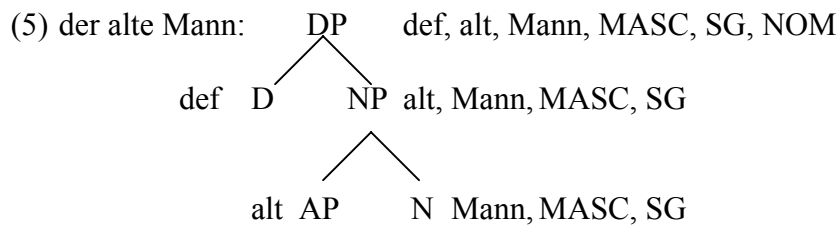
(1) a. d**er** alte Mann   b. alt**er** Mann   c. ein alt**er** Mann

the   old   man-nom   old   man-nom   an   old   man-nom

(2) * d**er** alt**er** Mann

the old   man-nom

(3) a. hest**en**   b. d**en** gamle hest   c. * d**en** gamle hest**en**

horse-the   the old   horse   the   old   horse

(from Hankamer & Mikkelsen 2005)

(4) * d**en** hest

the   horse

(5) der alte Mann: DP   def, alt, Mann, MASC, SG, NOM

def D   NP alt, Mann, MASC, SG

alt AP   N Mann, MASC, SG

(6)   (D)er hat Probleme.

(t)he has problems

(7)

	MASC		FEM		NEUT		PL	
N	kein	alt**er**	kein**e**	alte	kein	alt**es**	kein**e**	alt**en**
A	kein**en**	alt**en**	kein**e**	alte	kein	alt**es**	kein**e**	alt**en**
G	kein**es**	alt**en**	kein**er**	alt**en**	kein**es**	alt**en**	kein**er**	alt**en**
D	kein**em**	alt**en**	kein**er**	alt**en**	kein**em**	alt**en**	kein**en**	alt**en**

(8) den gamle hest: DP def, gamle, hest

def   D   NP gamle, hest

gamle AP   N hest

(9) hesten: DP def, hest

def D   NP hest

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