HEAD-DEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP IN NOUN PHRASE IN INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

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GENERAL TOPICS

This study deals with the analysis of different agreement systems within NP in some Indo-European languages. We aim to show how a head noun imposes its syntactical properties to the other elements of the NP, which are its dependents.

The study of the relationship between a head noun and its dependent(s) took a new development since the late 80s, thank to the works by Nichols 1986, Corbett &*al.* 1993, Helmbrecht 2001. Their approach is interesting as it concerns not only the typological classification of languages, but gives also a new framework which allows considering some ancient problems of Indo-European linguistics on a new basis, particularly those concerning dependency.

Nichols stressed the fact that morphological marking is a quite homogeneous property in Indo-European languages (« Indo-European has retained its basic type dependent-marked […] for some 6,000 years, with only a recent trend toward head-marked clauses in the pronominal clisis of the Romance languages » - Nichols 1986 : 89).

This claim can be precised under several points. In fact, Indo-European languages have not the same structures and do not make use of the same strategies in agreement.

The following table shows the different models available for an agreement relationship:

DOMAIN	HEAD	DEPENDENT(S)
NP	*Possessum*	*Possessor*
	Noun	**Adjective or pronoun**
	Adposition	Noun
Sentence	Predicate	Nominal arguments
	Auxiliary	Verbal form
	Main sentence	Subordinate sentence(s)

Given the variety of domains, we chose to focus our interest on the agreement in NP.

WHY THE NOUN PHRASE?

We decided to restrain our research to NP, because it represents the field where the above mentioned meanings of *head* and *dependent* are applied more homogeneously than in a broader contex, like the sentence: if we consider as a criterium only the marking properties,in Indo-European languages the verb has an ambiguous position: it identifies its dependents, but at the same time it indexes the properties of the subject. Moreover, if the subject is inanimate, certain languages avoid agreement between subject and verb.

One language has not the same type of marking at each level: it may be e.g. dependent-marking at the NP level, but head-marking at the level of the sentence.

Among the different kinds of agreement between head and dependent(s) within a NP, we handle with the relationship between a nominal head and an adjectival or pronominal dependent.

WHICH LANGUAGES?

We will take into account the Indo-European languages, which represent a well known linguistic family: most of them are very well described and attested by documents which allow us studying their diachronical development for several centuries.

As the analysis of all Indo-European branches would take too much time for a PhD's work, we are obliged to restrict the field and to set some chronological limits to our research. Therefore we decided to fix these limits to the beginning of our era and so to investigate the linguistic branches which are the most anciently attested: **Anatolian**, **Indo-Iranian**, **Greek** and **Italic**.

Moreover these languages where spoken in a contiguous area: we will see how much linguistic contact was able to change an original model.

We analyse, for each language, the nominal morphology in order to point out their specifity, and particularly:

- how many flectional classes are to find,
- how much case syncretism plays a role in this,
- flections are differentiated per gender or they are better to be seen as formal structures? Int that case, how can gender be morphologically signaled?

THE REMAINING LANGUAGES

Some branches of Indo-European languages (e.g. Celtic, Germanic or Slavic languages) present quite interesting features on this topic, i.e. the agreement between a nominal head and an adjectival or pronominal dependent: Germanic languages, for instance, consider the adjective as a totally separate item from the noun and has its own declensions, while Indo-Iranian unifies noun and adjective in the same general category.

As for the languages we did not take into an accurate consideration, we will only indicate the points to develop in a future research. It will be in fact necessary to examine all the Indo-European branches in order to have a complete framework of the dependency rules in NP.

SOME POINTS OF THE ANALYSIS

We present here some interesting points of each of the four Indo-European branches we decided to study, but the list cannot be complete given that the research is not yet finished.

ANATOLIAN

- Two genders, animate and inanimate, are here distinguished: different flectional schemes mean that these are always differentiated.
- The subject agrees differently according to its syntactical role: the transitivity of the verb influences the agreement.
- … (work in progress)

INDO-IRANIAN

- Nominal morphology treats nouns and adjectives without differenciating the flectional structure.
- Very similar structure between Vedic and Gathic Avestan (we can consider Vedic, as it is better documented, as exemple for both languages).
- Very complex morphological structure: 8 different flectional structures are to be found in Vedic (taking into account only morphological criteria, as case syncretism).
- The situation is quite different with pronouns: in a NP formed by a pronoun + noun, only the former allows us to identify the gender of the noun.

GREEK

- Adjectives have a separate declension from nouns.
- Nominal declensions are formal schemes which show tendencies, but morphological factors indicating the grammatical gender are not to be found.
- An exception is represented by the 1st declension masculine nouns (-ās, -ēs).
- Lack of verb agreement with inanimate plural (agreement is attested with plural adjectives, in NP, but not in the sentence).
- … (work in progress)

ITALIC

- Only Latin allows an analysis through the whole nominal morphology (even if there are differences between Latin and other Italic languages).
- The situation of Latin is very close to the Greek one, but without the exception represented by Greek 1st declension: so Latin is affected by a higher degree of incertitude in the expression of gender.
- Adjectives distinguish two flectional classes: the second one goes from a separation animate vs. inanimate to a tripartition.

EXPECTED RESULTS

We expect from this research:

(a) to define as accurately as possible the variations existing in head-dependent relationship in ancient Indo-European languages (at least a first attempt of definition, starting from the languages considered in the present study);

(b) to check if there is/are one or more common patterns in developing head-dependent relationship to be postulated in the reconstruction;

(c) to compare the obtained results with the various theses in progress;

(d) to contribute to the debate on typological correlates of head-dependent relationship.