

Title: Definiteness marking and the structure of Danish partitive constructions

Area: Syntax: DP structure

20-minute paper

Like many Germanic languages, Danish has a partitive-like construction in which two nouns are juxtaposed without any intervening preposition or special case marking (the Direct Partitive Construction (DPC), van Riemsdijk 1998): *en gruppe turister* ‘a group of tourists’ (lit. a group tourists), *et antal biler* ‘a number of cars’ (lit. a number cars). There is also an indirect partitive construction (IPC) where a preposition intervenes between the two nouns (henceforth N1 and N2): *en gruppe af turister* ‘a group of tourists’ (lit. a group of tourists), *et antal af bilerne* ‘a number of the cars’ (lit. a number of cars-DEF). These pseudo-partitive constructions differ from the regular partitive construction (RPC), in which N1 is missing: *to af turisterne/bilerne* ‘two of the tourists/cars’.

A striking difference between DPC and IPC is that only the IPC allows postnominal definiteness marking on N1 (an interesting twist which we will account for in the analysis is that prenominal definiteness marking in the DPC requires a restrictive modifier, such as a restrictive relative clause, to follow N2):

- (1) {den gruppe / *gruppen} turister som netop ankom
 the group / group-DEF tourists that just arrived
- (2) {det antal / *antallet} biler som kørte over broen i 1997
 the number / number-DEF cars that drove across bridge-DEF in 1997
- (3) gruppen af turister
 group-DEF of tourists
- (4) antallet af biler
 number-DEF of cars

Our purpose in this paper is to explore the structures of the two pseudo-partitive constructions. Like other Scandinavian languages, Danish has two ways of marking definiteness in a DP: by a suffix (*-en/-et*) on the head noun or by a prenominal article (*den/det*). In Danish the two definiteness markers are in complementary distribution and Hankamer and Mikkelsen (2005) have argued that the definite suffix is possible only when the head N is in direct construction with (sister of) the definite D. Everywhere else the prenominal article is used. If this is correct, we can use definiteness marking on N1 as a probe into the structure of the DPC and IPC.

Our proposal is that while N1 of the IPC is an N which takes a PP complement, the N1 of the DPC is in fact not an N, but a semi-lexical category (cf. van Riemsdijk 1998) (which we will call *n* (little *n*)), which takes an NP complement. We argue that *n* cannot combine with the definite suffix because definite D only surfaces as a suffix when it is in direct composition with the true lexical head of the nominal phrase, which is N2 in the DPC, and the *n* intervenes.

Word count: 420