

# The structure of definite complex nominals (in Danish)

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## 1 Introduction

Definite complex nominals (DCNs; Abney 1987:62–64, 76, Grimshaw 1990:94–101):

- (1) the idea that ginger aids digestion [DEF N CP]

Two realizations of DCNs in Danish:

- (2) a. **den** ide at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen [DEF N CP] = Bare DCN  
DEF idea that ginger aids digestion.DEF  
b. **ide-en om** at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen [N-DEF P CP] = Prepositional DCN  
ide-DEF about that ginger aids digestion.DEF

**Question 1** Why are there two realizations of DCNs in Danish?

Because there are two syntactic structures available (with different meanings).

**Question 2** Could (3) have been the attested pattern?<sup>1</sup>

- (3) a. \***den** ide **om** at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen [DEF N P CP]  
DEF idea about that ginger aids digestion.DEF  
b. \***ide-en** at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen [N-DEF CP]  
ide-DEF that ginger aids digestion.DEF

No. (Or, at least, it would be surprising.)

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<sup>1</sup>(3a) is grammatical if *den* is stressed, but then *den* is unambiguously a demonstrative D, not a definite article. The same is true of (4b), (6b), (11b), (12b), and (13b).

## 1.1 Danish definiteness markers

- *-en* and *den*
- never cooccur
- complementary and fixed distribution:

(4) Unmodified DPs require suffix:

- a. film-en  
     film-DEF  
     *the film*
- b. \*den film  
     DEF film

(5) APs require article:

- a. \*belgiske film-en  
     Belgian film-DEF
- b. den belgiske film  
     DEF Belgian film  
     *the Belgian film*

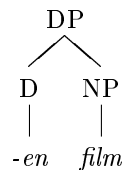
(6) PPs license suffix:

- a. film-en fra Belgien  
     film-DEF from Belgium
- b. \*den film fra Belgien  
     DEF film from Belgium

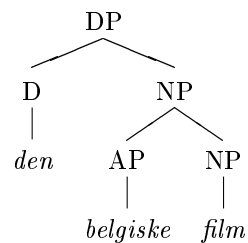
**Analysis** Distribution of definiteness marker is governed by syntactic structure:

- *-en* is found when D[DEF] is sister of a minimal NP (i.e. NP consisting solely of N)
- *den* is found elsewhere (Hankamer and Mikkelsen 2005, 2008)

(7) Unmodified DPs:

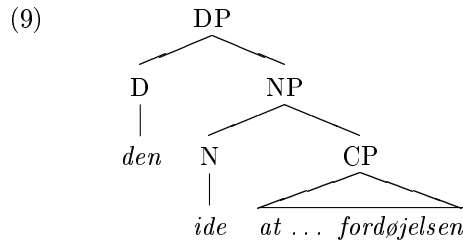


(8) DP containing AP:

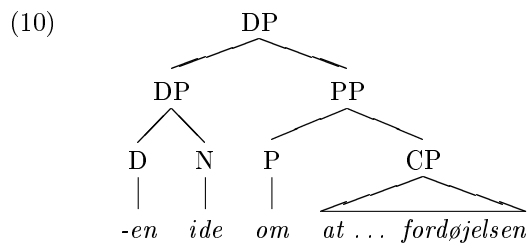


## 2 Two structures for DCNs

**Bare DCN:** CP is sister to N → sister of D[DEF] is not a minimal NP → definite article:



**Prepositional DCN:** PP is adjoined to DP → sister of D[DEF] is a minimal NP → definite suffix:



### 2.1 PPs attach to DP

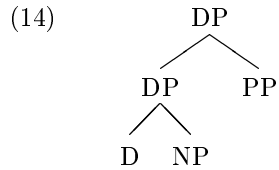
PPs uniformly trigger the definite suffix:

- (11) Modifier PPs
- a. mad-en fra igår  
 food-DEF from yesterday  
*the food from yesterday*
  - b. \*den mad fra igår  
 DEF food from yesterday

- (12) Complement PPs
- a. søster-en til Per  
 sister-DEF to Per  
*the sister of Per*
  - b. \*den søster til Per  
 DEF sister to Per

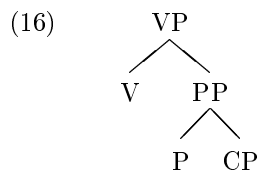
- (13) PPs in pseudopartitives
- a. grupp-en af turister  
 group-DEF of tourists  
*the group of tourists*
  - b. \*den gruppe af turister  
 DEF group of tourists

PPs uniformly attach outside of NP (Hankamer and Mikkelsen 2005:111-113, 118; 2008: 326–327, Julien 2005:67–69):

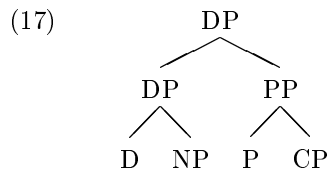


Ps generally allow CP complements:

(15) Jeg tror på at mine sange opbygger modet i folk.  
 I believe on that my songs up-build courage-DEF in people  
*I believe that my songs build courage in people.*



These two patterns intersect to produce Prepositional DCN:



Could things have been the other way around, i.e. [N-DEF CP] and [DEF N P CP]?

- no prejudice against [N-DEF CP]: no independent evidence that CP cannot adjoin to DP
- generalizing from (11)–(13), [DEF N P CP] is unexpected, **unless** category of sister of P could determine attachment site of PP
  - Unexpected if PP is complement: c-selection is limited to category of complement and properties of head of complement
  - Unexpected if PP modifier: head of modifier may restrict the range of possible hosts, but non-head elements may not

**Upshot** Attested realizations of DCNs are consistent with general properties of the language and conservative view of selection and modification.

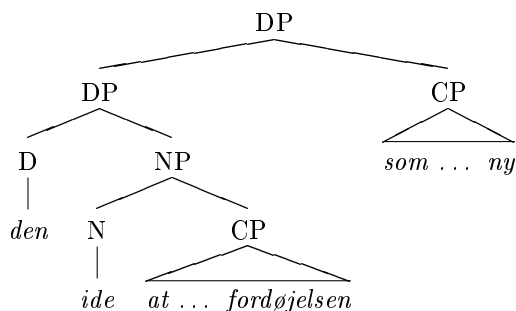
## 2.2 Intervening relative clauses

Both DCNs allow a non-restrictive relative clause to follow CP:<sup>2</sup>

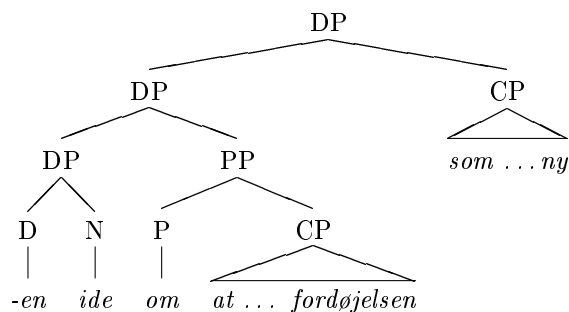
- (18) **den** ide [at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen], som forøvrigt ikke er ny  
 DEF idea that ginger aids digestion which incidentally not is new  
*the idea that ginger aids digestions, which incidentally isn't new*
- (19) **ideen om** [at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen], som forøvrigt ikke er ny  
 idea.DEF about that ginger aids digestion which incidentally not is new

This is consistent with our proposal, under the standard assumption that such relative clauses adjoin to DP (*inter alia* Toribio 1992 with antecedents in Jackendoff 1977 (chapter 7) and Smits 1988):

- (20) Bare DCN



- (21) Prepositional DCN



Relative clauses may intervene between N and P in Prepositional DCN by attaching to lower DP in (21):

- (22) ide-**en**, som forøvrigt ikke er ny, **om** [at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen]  
 idea-DEF which incidentally not is new about that ginger aids digestion

but not between N and C in Bare DCN; no lower attachment site in (20):

- (23) \***den** ide, som forøvrigt ikke er ny, [at ingefær gavner fordøjelsen]  
 DEF idea which incidentally not is new that ginger aids digestion

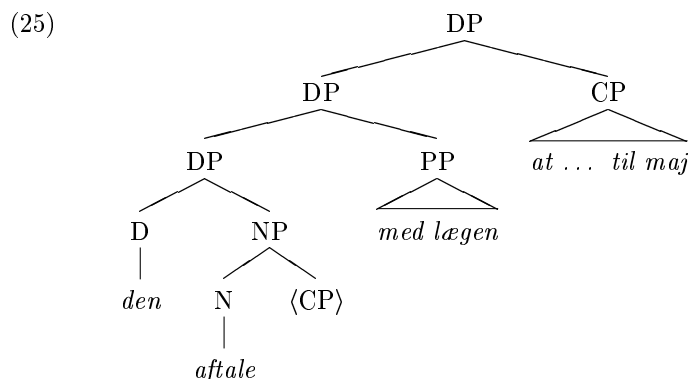
<sup>2</sup>(18) is slightly odd, possibly for semantic reasons discussed in section 3. The contrast between it and (23) is nonetheless clear.

## 2.3 Intervening PPs

Given (20), we expect that nothing can intervene between N and C in Bare DCN. In fact, a PP may intervene:

- (24) Han havde nemlig den aftale [med lægen] at han skulle undersøges igen til maj.  
 he had namely DEF agreement with doctor.DEF that he should examine.PASS again in May  
*In fact he had the agreement with his doctor that he would be examined again in May.*

One possibility:



CPs can extrapose out of DCNs:

- (26) a. De lavede [den aftale at ingen må gå derind efter lukketid] sidste forår.  
 they made the agreement that noone may enter there after close.time last spring  
*They made the agreement that noone may enter after hours last spring.*
- b. De lavede den aftale sidste forår [at ingen må gå derind efter lukketid].  
 they made the agreement last spring that noone may enter there after close.time  
*They made the agreement last spring that noone may enter after hours.*

General preference for PPs to precede CPs motivates extraposition in (24).

No motivation for extraposing CP complement across relative clause in (20), hence no derivation for (23).

## 3 Meaning and usage

**Presupposing vs. asserting** Prepositional DCNs presuppose the existence of their referent:

- (27) De har overholdt aftalen om at bibliotekerne skal finansieres via brugerbetaling.  
 they have kept agreement.DEF about that libraries.DEF shall finance.PASS via user.payment  
*They have kept the agreement that libraries must be financed by the users.*

To evaluate the truth of (27) an agreement that library users pay to use the library must have been made. If (27) is negated (*they didn't keep the agreement ...*), this is still the case.

Bare DCNs do not presuppose the existence of their referent. They assert it:

- (28) De har lavet den aftale at bibliotekerne skal finansieres via brugerbetaling.  
 they have made DEF agreement that libraries.DEF shall finance.PASS via user.payment  
*They have made the agreement that libraries must be financed via user payment.*

If there is no agreement about library user payment, (28) is false, not truth-valueless or uninterpretable. The negation of (28) does not presuppose any such agreement either, in fact it denies it (though a more felicitous way of expressing this would have an indefinite object NP).

## Environmental support

- Prepositional DCN, with N=*aftale* (agreement), occurs as
  - object of predicates like *overholde* (keep), *være uenig i* (disagree with), *opsige* (cancel), *undertegne* (sign), *være med i* (be part of)
  - subject of predicates like *være kommet i stand* (be established), *holde* (last), *få tilslutning* (get support), *blive effectueret* (be implemented), *blive aflyst* (be cancelled), *blive betegnet som* (be characterized as), *være præget af* (be characterized by), *være uantagelig* (be unacceptable).
- Corresponding Bare DCN occurs as
  - object of predicates like *have* (have), *lave* (make), *få* (get), *indgå* (enter into), *fungere med* (function with), *skilles med* (separate with), *give håndslag på* (shake hands on)
  - only one attested subject use, with the verb *indgå* (be included in)

(This pattern appears to instantiate Hawkins' (1978: 130–149) distinction between anaphoric and referent-establishing definites, with Prepositional DCNs being anaphoric and Bare DCNs being referent establishing.)

## 4 Conclusion

- Danish has two realizations of definite DCNs because general properties of the language make two structures available.
- The realization of definiteness markings in each of these (suffix vs. article) is consistent with syntactic regularities of the language (PPs attach to DP) along with a conservative view of selection and modification.
- Assuming the proposed structures we can explain the ordering possibilities of CP complements, relative clauses and PP complements in DCNs.
- The two structures are not arbitrary; they have distinct meanings and distinct usage.
- Thus we see once again that definiteness marking is a useful probe for the internal structure of nominals.

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