

# Adjectives as Reduced Relative Clauses: The View from Language Contact

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## Abstract

In Standard Greek, *determiner spreading*, i.e., the phenomenon where an overt article may precede adjectival modifiers, has been taken as evidence to support an analysis of adjectives as predicates within relative clauses. Certain Greek contact varieties, however, lack *determiner spreading*. I argue that these varieties preserve the syntax of relative clauses for modifiers, but lack extra determiners, as they develop a zero D layer, like their Romance counterparts. I also discuss this specific change in light of recent debates concerning restructuring and stability vs. vulnerability in language contact.

## 1. Introduction

Fanselow (1986) proposed that prenominal adjectives in German have a dual nature: while prenominal predicative adjectives are non-finite adjectival relative clauses, as in earlier generative analyses, e.g., Chomsky (1957) and others, this analysis is not generalizable to non-predicative adjectives. Fanselow's arguments include the availability of internal complements for German prenominal adjectives as in (1):

- (1) die dem Mann treue Frau  
the the.DAT man.DAT faithful woman  
'the woman faithful to the man'

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Since adjectives may take complements, they must have a phrasal nature, according to Fanselow. Moreover, as shown in (2), reflexives are licensed within prenominal adjectives:

- (2) die sich treue Frau  
 the REFL faithful woman  
 ‘the woman faithful to herself’

Fanselow then shows that the distribution of anaphors in relative clauses is very similar to what is observed for anaphors in prenominal adjectival phrases. Thus, he concludes that prenominal predicative adjectives are structurally parallel to relative clauses and that they contain a PRO subject. Non-predicative adjectives, however, cannot be analyzed as relative clauses.

The relative clause analysis is adopted for predicative adjectives by e.g., Cinque (1994, 2010), Alexiadou and Wilder (1998), Alexiadou (2001, 2014) and many others, building on Kayne (1994). In this paper, I will investigate a particular aspect of this analysis related to *determiner spreading* in Greek, a property that is seen as further morphological evidence for the relative clause nature of adjectives. Specifically, I will ask whether this may be affected, and, if so, to which extent this is due to interference from contact with languages lacking such morphology.

The contribution is structured as follows: in section 2, I will review certain morphological arguments that have been put forth in support of the relative clause analysis of predicative adjectives. In section 3, I will discuss *determiner spreading* in certain Greek contact varieties. In section 4, I will present an analysis thereof. Finally, I will conclude in section 5 and link my results to the question of stability vs. vulnerability of functional categories and nominal morphology and their potential restructuring in language contact and change.

## 2. Morphological Evidence for a Relative Clause Source for Adjectives

In Mandarin Chinese, as discussed in Sproat and Shih (1987), we find two types of modifiers: in the unmarked case adjectives modifying nouns must appear in strict hierarchical order, see (3a-b). It is possible for multiple APs to violate this strict hierarchy requirement, but only when accompanied by the particle *de*, (3c, d). Sproat and Shih refer to the former pattern as direct modification, while to the latter as indirect modification. In direct modification,

the adjectives modify the noun directly, while in indirect modification, the adjective indirectly modifies the nouns, being part of a relative clause.

- (3) a. xiǎo lǜ huāping  
small green vase  
b. \*lǜ xiǎo huāping  
green small vase  
c. xiǎo-de lǜ-de huāping  
small-DE green-DE vase  
small green vase  
d. lǜ-de xiǎo-de huāping  
green-DE small-DE vase

Importantly, the particle *de* is also a relative clause marker, (4). This, Sproat and Shih argue, is evidence that indirect modification is modification by relative clauses:

- (4) fēi-de niǎo  
fly-DE bird  
'the birds which are flying'

*De*-modifiers are constrained in that they may only contain predicative adjectives (Sproat and Shih 1987: 476-477). From this perspective then, direct modification applies to attributive modifiers, while indirect modification to predicative ones, in a manner that parallels Fanselow's partition of German adjectives.

The two sources for modification are illustrated in (5):

- (5) a. [DP [FP AP [NP ]]] *direct modification*  
b. [DP<sub>1</sub> [CP DP<sub>2</sub> AP]] *indirect modification*

Non-predicative adjectives such as *mere* in (6a) are introduced as specifiers of functional projections within the extended projection of the noun in (5a), see Cinque (1994). By contrast, post-nominal adjectives in English such as *visible* in (6b) are predicative and receive an intersective, restrictive, and stage-level interpretation: (6b) refers to the stars that are visible right now. These properties are consistent with indirect modification and thus such adjectives originate as predicates within relative clauses, introduced by an external determiner, as in the structure (5b), see Alexiadou and Wilder (1998),

Alexiadou (2001, 2014), Stavrou (2012), Cinque (2010), Larson (2014), among many others, following Kayne (1994). English prenominal modifiers as in (6c) are ambiguous between intersective and non-intersective readings, suggesting that similar to their German counterparts, they may have a relative clause analysis as well. In Romance, certain post-nominal adjectives show ambiguity, while prenominal ones are not ambiguous, see (7), from Cinque (2010):

- (6) a. the mere accident  
 b. the stars visible  
 c. the visible stars
- (7) a. Un buon attaccante non farebbe mai una cosa del  
 a good forward player NEG do never a thing this  
 genere.  
 kind  
 1. ‘A person good at playing forward would never do such a thing.’  
 2. ≠ ‘A good-hearted forward would never do such a thing.’
- b. Un attaccante buono non farebbe mai una cosa del  
 a forward player good NEG do never one thing this  
 genere.  
 kind  
 1. ‘A person good at playing forward would never do such a thing.’  
 2. ‘A good-hearted forward would never do such a thing.’

Kayne’s 1994 analysis, as adopted in Alexiadou and Wilder (1998), predicts that modifiers must surface with an extra determiner. Greek provides morphological support for this, and see Cinque (2010) for discussion of further languages. To begin with, as in German, in Greek, adjectives appear in prenominal position and they may take complements, (8):

- (8) o perifanos ja tin kori tu pateras  
 the proud of the daughter his father  
 ‘the father proud of his daughter’

Second, in definite NPs, adjectives may be preceded by an article. This is obligatory when the adjective is post-nominal (i.e., predicative), (9b); the Art-Adj string may also precede the Article-Noun string (9c):

- (9) a. to kokino vivlio  
       the red book  
       b. to vivlio \*(to) kokino  
           the book the red  
       c. to kokino to vivlio  
           the red the book

This is referred to as *determiner spreading*, following Androutsopoulou (1995). Note that the structure in (5b) predicts (9c), via AP movement to Spec, CP, while (9b) is derived via DP<sub>2</sub> movement to Spec, DP<sub>1</sub>, see Alexiadou and Wilder (1998) and Alexiadou (2014) for details.

Nevertheless, English and Romance lack *determiner spreading*. Alexiadou (2014), building on Kayne (2004), argues that languages that allow null D such as English and Italian lack multiple marking of definiteness. Greek doesn't allow null D (Alexopoulou and Folli 2019), i.e., in Greek, but not in English and in Italian, whenever D is projected it has to be overtly filled.

Let us now turn to *determiner spreading* in Greek varieties that have been in extensive contact with Romance and revisit the relationship between loss of morphological marking and changes in syntactic structure, a question discussed on the basis of very different phenomena also by Alexiadou and Fanselow (2002).

### 3. Determiner Spreading in Greek Contact Varieties

Guardiano and Stavrou (2021) note that the Greek varieties in Salento and Bovesia do not behave alike when it comes to *determiner spreading*, reflecting differences in the intensity of contact with Italian. In Salento Greek (10), unlike in Calabria Greek (11), no article precedes post-nominal adjectives:

- (10) meletisa ton libro rodino.  
       studied.1SG the book red  
       'I studied the red book.'
- (11) ta cerata ta makria  
       the horns the long  
       'the long horns'

Adjectival post-nominal position in the absence of *determiner spreading* is also observed in Argentina Greek, as shown in (12), (Zombolou 2011):

- (12) i zoi mu ine o horos elinikos.  
 the life my is the dance Greek  
 ‘Greek dance is my life.’

Greek migration to Argentina began in the late 1880s, i.e., it is relatively recent. According to Zombolou (2011), Argentina Greeks of the second and third generation do not speak Greek with each other, although they are able to. Most children younger than 10 years old in fact do not speak Greek at all. For most of them, Spanish is the dominant language, suggesting a rather intense contact with Spanish.

#### 4. Towards an Analysis

I propose that certain Greek varieties in contact with Romance lack *determiner spreading* because of changes affecting their DP layer. Specifically, while in Standard Modern Greek, there is no null D, the contact varieties develop null D. Crucially, the contact varieties maintain the relative clause structure for adjectives, but allow the D head to be zero, as in Romance.

A first analysis of the contact pattern is given in Guardiano and Stavrou (2019), who take *determiner spreading* to involve apposition, as shown in (13) using English forms:

- (13) [DP [D<sub>[+def]</sub> the ] [PredP [NP car] [Pred<sub>[+def]</sub> the ] [[+N] expensive]]]

They analyze the loss of the adjectival determiner as the result of the loss of case in Salento. In their view, the purpose of the article that precedes the adjective in *determiner spreading* is solely morphological; the adjectival article is an element with no meaning, a simple bearer of definiteness and case, which does not contribute to the interpretation. According to Guardiano and Stavrou (2019), the restructuring of the nominal declension system had as a result that case distinctions were blurred or lost on both adjectives and nouns, thus the necessity of Pred as a mediator of (case) concord was made dispensable with: morphological concord in case between the noun and the adjective is (no longer) visible systematically in those dialects. We do not have a detailed description of the nominal inflection system of Argentina Greek, but according to Zombolou simplifications of the inflectional system are also observed there.

Nevertheless, case seems not to be completely lost in these varieties. Assuming that the inflectional system of Argentina Greek is to some extent deficient, one could extend Guardiano and Stavrou's analysis to this contact variety as well.

While their idea that the loss of nominal morphology has something to do with the pattern is interesting, I will depart from their proposal in important respects. One major issue with their analysis is that it dissociates the analysis of *determiner spreading* from that of post-nominal adjectives in Romance, see Alexiadou (2001) and Cinque (2010) for discussion. Alexiadou (2001) has provided several arguments as to why certain post-nominal adjectives in Romance correspond to *determiner spreading* in Greek. For instance, as is well known, the adjective *poor* is ambiguous between two readings: 'impoverished' and 'pitiable'. In English, in the prenominal position this ambiguity is preserved, but it is absent in the predicative position:

- (14) a. the poor man ('impoverished'/'pitiable')  
 b. the man is poor ('impoverished'/\*'pitiable')

As discussed in Alexiadou and Wilder (1998) and as predicted by the structure in (5b), this reading is banned from Greek *determiner spreading* as well.

- (15) a. o anthropos o ftohos ('impoverished'/\*'pitiable')  
 the man the poor  
 b. o ftohos o anthropos ('impoverished'/\*'pitiable')  
 the poor the man  
 c. o ftohos anthropos ('impoverished'/'pitiable')  
 the poor man

In e.g., Italian, the position of the adjective correlates with its interpretation: the Italian counterpart of *poor* is interpreted as 'impoverished' in post-nominal position and 'pitiable' in prenominal position. Hence certain post-nominal adjectives in Romance align with *determiner spreading* in Greek.<sup>1</sup>

- (16) a. pover' uomo  
 poor man (pitiable)  
 b. uomo povere  
 man poor (impoverished)

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<sup>1</sup>According to Cinque (2010), postnominal adjectives in Italian may be ambiguous, as shown in (7), thus involving an additional source.

I will adopt this alternative analysis and assume that the source of both predicative post-nominal adjectives in Romance and *determiner spreading* in Greek is the structure in (5b). While in Italian, D may remain empty, for the reasons explained in Kayne (2004) and briefly addressed below, in Greek D is always realized, when present in the structure. Specifically, Kayne (2004) proposed that French and Italian post-nominal superlatives involve a reduced relative clause structure. While in French they are preceded by a determiner, predicted by (5b), this is not the case in Italian, see (17a-b):

- (17) a. le livre le plus court  
           the book the most short  
       b. il libro più corto  
           the book most short

For Kayne, Italian is only minimally different from French, in that the two languages have exactly the same base structure, namely (5b), but Italian leaves its definite D unpronounced. According to Kayne, this difference between French and Italian is related to the distinct behavior of bare plurals and bare mass nouns: Italian allows bare plurals in object position, but French does not (18-19):

- (18) \*Jean achetait livres.  
       Jean bought (was buying) books.  
       (19) Gianni comprava libri.  
           Gianni bought books.

In addition, bare mass nouns are possible in object position in Italian but not in French, (20-21):

- (20) \*Jean buvait bière  
       Jean drank beer.  
       (21) Gianni beveva birra.  
           Gianni drank beer.

While Greek behaves similarly to Italian with respect to (19) and (21), Alexopoulou and Folli (2019) argue in detail that while in Italian, the D layer is always present, rendering the NP into an argument, in Greek it is number that acts as an argumentizer and D is absent. When D is present, this has



interpretative consequences and must be overtly realized. They note that Greek and Italian differ systematically when it comes to the interpretations of indefinites in Clitic Left Dislocation (CLLD) structures. In Greek, CLLD-ed indefinites resist non-referential interpretations, (22b-c); by contrast, the corresponding Italian structures allow both referential and non-referential interpretations (23), from Alexopoulou and Folli (2019: 440-441):

- (22) a. Mia kokini fusta tin psahno edho ke meres...  
a red skirt it look.for.1SG here and days  
‘I’ve been looking for a red skirt for a few days...’
- b. ≠... ke dhe boro na vro kamia pu na  
and not can.1SG SUBJ find.1SG none that SUBJ  
m’aresi.  
me-please.3SG  
‘...and I cannot find any that I like.’
- c. ... ke dhe boro na thimitho pu tin eho  
and not can.1SG SUBJ remember.1SG where it have.1SG  
vali.  
put  
‘...and I cannot remember where I put it’
- (23) a. Una gonna rossa la cerco da un po’...  
a skirt red her.CL look.for.1SG for a while  
‘A red skirt I’ve been looking for for a while...’
- b. ...ma non ne ho trovata nessuna che mi  
but not of.them.CL have.1SG found none.FEM that me  
piaccia.  
please.3SG.SUBJ  
‘... but I have not found any that I like.’
- c. ...ma non riesco a ricordarmi dove l’ho  
but not reach.1SG to remember where her.CL-have.1SG  
messa.  
put  
‘... but I cannot remember where I put it.’

In addition, as they show, in Italian, pronominal clitics are compatible with non-referential interpretations outside of CLLD, (24), but Greek clitics resist non-referential antecedents, (25a). A non-referential interpretation is available

only when the noun appears bare (25b), Alexopoulou and Folli (2019: 470-471):

- (24) Gianni sta cercando un idraulico ma non lo trova.  
Gianni is looking.for a plumber but not him.CL find.3SG  
'Gianni is looking for a plumber but cannot find one.'
- (25) a. O Yanis psahni enan idhravliko, ala dhe ton vriski  
the Yanis look.for.3SG one plumber but not him find.3SG  
puthena.  
anywhere  
'Yanis is looking for a plumber but cannot find him anywhere.'
- b. O Yanis psahni idhravliko ala dhe (\*ton) vriski  
the Yanis look.for.3SG plumber but not (\*him) find.3SG  
puthena.  
anywhere  
'Yanis is looking for a plumber but cannot find one anywhere.'

Alexopoulou and Folli (2019: 480) speculate that this behavior relates to the fact that Greek argumental noun phrases are NumberPs, while Italian ones are DPs. Specifically, they relate this behavior to certain morphological differences between the two languages: Greek nominals are systematically marked for number and case (in addition to gender). By contrast, in Italian, nominals lack case. From their perspective in Greek, case, gender, and number morphology provide categorial marking crucial for the identification of nominal arguments. In Italian, on the other hand, it is D that provides both the syntactic head and the argumentizer. Thus, there is a trading relation between morphological marking on nominal elements and the involvement of D.

While I do not agree with the specifics of their analysis, I will adopt their main idea and take (26a) to represent bare nouns in Italian, while (26b) corresponds to Italian and Greek nouns with overt D. By contrast, (25c) corresponds to the structure of Standard Greek bare nouns:

- (26) a. [<sub>DP</sub>  $\emptyset$  [<sub>#P</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> ]]] *Italian N zero D*  
b. [<sub>DP</sub> Article [<sub>#P</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> ]]] *Greek/Italian N overt D*  
c. [<sub>#P</sub> [<sub>NP</sub> ]] *Greek N no D*

What I would like to propose is that the Greek contact varieties developed by

analogy the structure in (26a). This allows them to make use of the structure in (5b), by leaving D zero much like the Italian superlative examples discussed by Kayne. Two pieces of evidence seem to support this. First, in Spanish/Italian, demonstratives do not combine with articles. By contrast, in Standard Modern Greek, demonstratives co-occur with articles. Salento Greek, as reported in Guardiano et al. (2016), lacks demonstrative doubling, see (27), and Argentina Greek is similar, as discussed in Zombolou (2011). The idea here is that in languages where demonstratives do not co-occur with articles, they license an empty D, following Guardiano (2009):

- (27) *ida tuo antrepo.*  
 saw.1SG that man  
 ‘I saw that man.’

Second, we saw above that in Greek non-referential readings in object position are associated with bare nouns and the absence of clitics, cf. (22) and (28b). Salento (C. Guardiano p.c.) patterns similarly to Italian: an indefinite NP in object position must be preceded by an article unlike in Standard Greek, where it has to be bare (28b). Since there is no pronominal clitic, we must conclude that the NP in (28a) has a non-referential interpretation. Thus, in Salento as in Italian non-referential antecedents must be preceded by a D element, namely *uno*. The fact that unlike in Italian, there is no clitic carrying non-referential interpretation suggests that Salento hasn’t fully assimilated to Italian yet:

- (28) a. *Marìa ìtele n’armàsi èna vokàto ma ankòra en ìvrike kanèna.*  
 ‘Mary would like to marry a lawyer but hasn’t found anyone yet.’  
 b. *I Maria psahni dikigoro ala de den vrike kanena akoma.*  
 ‘Mary is looking for a lawyer but hasn’t found anyone yet.’

I take this as suggestive evidence that a zero D may be present in these dialects. We can further agree with Guardiano and Stavrou that case loss is a major step towards the changes observed, and combine this insight with the idea of the trade-off put forth in Alexopoulou and Folli (2019): assuming that there is a relationship between morphological marking on nominal elements and the involvement of a D head, whenever nominal inflection decreases, the D head takes over several functions previously associated with lower heads. Interestingly enough this leads to loss of overtness in *determiner spreading*.

## 5. Conclusions

In this contribution, I showed that the morphological support for the relative clause of adjectives in Greek may get lost in language contact, *overt to null*. However, this does not affect the syntax of predicative adjectives, which seems to remain intact. The loss of nominal morphology attested independently leads to a re-organization of the D layer: while Standard Greek lacks a zero D head, the contact varieties discussed here develop such a head, which acts as an argumentizer. This zero D may be involved in structures that would have an overt D in Standard Greek, such as *determiner spreading*. Note now that a complex relationship emerges between morphology and syntax, both from a language contact and a diachronic perspective. Looking at syntax-morphology interactions in language change, in Alexiadou and Fanselow (2002) we argued that syntactic operations seem largely independent of morphological marking. And indeed, we have seen that the syntax of adjectives remains intact although morphological marking may disappear. On the other hand, we have also seen that the loss of morphology leads to the emergence of syntactic positions, presumably because of the trade-off relationship between functional heads in the noun phrase.

This raises at least two questions. First, how does this relate to the discussion of which properties remain stable and which are affected in language contact? Polinsky (2018) claims that the D layer in heritage languages constitutes a resilient domain: D is a high projection in the functional sequence, and as such it is resilient to change and restructuring. By contrast, Lohndal and van Baal (to appear) and work they cite show that properties of D do not have to be stable. In their investigation of Heritage American Norwegian, they show that in context of double definiteness, as in (30), the pre-adjectival determiner may remain zero, while it is obligatorily present in the homeland variety. Rather, the category that remains stable is the suffixed article. They further speculate that languages with multiple determiner projections will show stability of at least one of these projections. Following Julien (2005), the authors assume the structure in (29) for Norwegian, and an example such as the one in (30) involves a pre-adjectival determiner in D, while the suffixed determiner together with the head N are located in Art, after N movement to Art:

(29) [DP [aP [ArtP [NP ]]]]

(30) det store hus-et  
 the big house-DEF  
 ‘the big house’

In Alexiadou (2014), I argued in detail that Greek *determiner spreading* does not involve multiple determiner-like projections. Instead, it has a relative clause structure and if Romance post-nominal adjectives have the exact same structure, no issue of stability of structure arises. The structure remains stable, it is just that no second overt determiner appears.

Second, there are several arguments in the literature that heritage speakers dislike zero elements and prefer overt ones (Laleko and Polinsky (2017), Polinsky (2018)). In these studies, the problem that arises is that heritage speakers have difficulties with discourse silent elements and prefer the overt element (typically in the case of pro-drop). In Alexiadou (2014), I showed that *determiner spreading* in Greek signals familiarity, i.e., it is thus discourse oriented, and thus one would have expected the determiner to be preserved. However, unlike the pro-drop cases, *determiner spreading* structures are not ambiguously related to structures without *determiner spreading*, as the two differ, see (5a-b). Such an ambiguity would facilitate change, see also Alexiadou and Fanselow (2002). Nevertheless, the contact varieties employ (26a) instead of (26c), as presumably there is sufficient evidence for a D layer, which no longer has an interpretative effect, unlike the situation in Standard Greek where (26b) and (26c) are not semantically equivalent.

Rearrangements of article systems are known from other instances of language change in Romance: Carlier (2001) points out that Old French had bare nouns, but it also had number morphology. Modern French lacks nominal number morphology and has obligatory overt determiners. According to Stark (2008), the loss of declension classes, gender and number marking in Romance had as a result that articles take over the function of determination. From this perspective then, the Greek contact varieties are well-behaved: as they lose nominal morphology, D takes over some of its functions. As a result, their DP layer becomes obligatory and may, among other things, be realized as zero.

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