The Syntax and Semantics of Demonstratives: A DP External Approach

Issue: Standard syntactic and semantic theories preclude the notion that Dems, (e.g. this and that) and Det(eminers) (e.g. the and a) can co-occur in the same noun phrase, since they are traditionally classified as the same category (Wiltschko 2009). However, Classical Greek data is problematic for such a theory, as the data in (1) shows that Dems and Dets do in fact co-occur.

(1) a. ekeinos ho anthropos
    that the man
    'that man'  
(Morwood 2001: 145)

Where are Dem(onstratives) located in syntactic and semantic structures and what information and features do they express?

Syntax: Using Classical Greek data, I show that Dems are neither Dets (contra Wiltschko 2009), nor adjectives (contra Leu 2008). The primary evidence to support this claim is due to the behaviour of Dems in definiteness spreading constructions (Alexiadou et al. 2007). Giusti (1994), Rosen (2003), Guardiano (2012), and Roberts (2011) claim that Dems are DP internal (below Dº) and that they are located in a low position above nP. I suggest that Dems are in their own phrase projection above the DP, which I base on empirical evidence from Greek, Latin, Michif, Irish, and Basque. I show that this alternative solution accounts for all the data, without movement violations (Chomsky 1995), which is found in DP internal accounts. Also, I show that this alternative solution is optimal, since it can handle all the data in the literature, including Dem extraction data, where a Dem can appear in a final position with the rest of the DP extracted into a higher position such as in Latin (Iovino 2011), or as shown in the Basque surface order data in (2).

(2) lau sagar eder hauek
    four apple beautiful these
    'these four beautiful apples'
(Artiagoitia 2013: 74)

Semantics: I further show that co-occurrence is problematic for semantic reasons as well, since Dets are standardly analyzed as the type <<e,t>e> (Heim & Kratzer 1998). If Dems and Dets are understood to have the same semantic function, one would not be able to take the other as an argument. I suggest that Dems would need to be of the type <e,e>, which takes an obligatory Det, even if it is unpronounced. I base this on the presence/absence of features, such as definiteness, since Dems can, but do not need to be definite, as shown in (3), where the Dem is comparable to the indefinite article in English.

(3) a. so this guy bumped into me at the pub and spilt my drink!
    b. so a/*the guy bumped into me at the pub...

Features: Additionally, Dems appear to show temporal features in Languages like Blackfoot (Algonquian) and Aleut (Bergsland 1997). Certain Dems exhibit a situational time (time relative to the main verb) reading (Elbourne 2008), where only the change in Dem alters the tense interpretation of the entire clause. For instance, in Blackfoot “that man kicks the rock” is interpreted as past time, while “this man kicks the rock” would be interpreted as present time. Furthermore, by keeping the Dems external to the DP, temporal features can easily be read by the verb to provide situational time interpretations.

References: