

The English Binominal NP: A Construction-Based Perspective

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As attested in naturally occurring data like *Deep lines grooved [his prune of a face]*, English Binominal NPs (BNPs) with the structure 'Det1 N1 of Det2 N2' display complex syntax and semantics. In this talk, we show that the regular and idiosyncratic properties of the BNP construction lead us to an account in the spirit of construction grammar; we specifically argue that the English BNP is a nominal juxtaposition construction linked to a special semantic relation.

In dealing with the BNP, the first puzzle is what is the head of the overall structure. The headedness issue is central in three different approaches to the preposition *of*: as a preposition selecting the following NP headed by N2 (Abney 1987, Napoli 1989), as a pragmatic marker forming a unit with the preceding N1 and following a/an (Aarts 1998, Keizer 2007), and as a prepositional complementizer F selecting a small clause (Kayne 1994, Den Dikken 2006). Each of these three approaches has its own merits, but is not fully satisfactory to capture the BNP's regular as well as idiosyncratic properties. The obligatoriness of the PP may support N1 being the head, but the semantic locus of the overall structure seems to be the second noun N2. For example, N1 can be paraphrased as an adjectival modifier as *a hellish day*, and further Det1 and a pre-N1 modifier can scope over the remote N2 as in *[that] fool of a [doctor] or that [little] bastard of a [chaplain]*. However, the N2-as-head approach is also forced to assume the string "N1-of-a" as a constituent, sacrificing the traditional constituency. The third main analysis, reflecting the subject-predicate relation between N1 and N2 as seen from the copular paraphrase of the BNP *a martinet of a mother* as *the mother is a martinet*, assumes that N1 undergoes predicate inversion within a small clause. The weakness of the analysis concerns what motivates the movement operations involved here. None of these approaches properly addresses the restriction on Det2. In addition, there are syntactic freezing effects: the *of*-tagged PP cannot be extraposed or *wh*-questioned as shown in **A monster was delivered of a machine*. Further, neither the PP nor the NP2 can be coordinated as given in **I had a hell [of a day] and [of a time]*.

These properties and others indicate that the BNP is really a fixed construction subject to high-level morpho-syntactic constraints. We propose that the BNP is a type of nominal juxtaposition construction whose syntactic form is associated with a specific semantic relation. This proposal departs from traditional analyses but captures numerous constructional properties that otherwise remain as puzzles. In particular, the present analysis views the BNP as directly having two nominals parallel in many respects including number, gender, and selectional restrictions. Once we accept the view that the English BNP construction is a type of nominal juxtaposition construction (cf. Jackendoff 2008), many distinctive properties of the construction follow in a simple and straightforward manner.

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Short bio:

Prof. Jong-Bok Kim is Professor at School of English and Director at Center for the Study of Language and Information of Kyung Hee University in Seoul. He received his Ph.D. in Linguistics from Stanford University in 1996 and has been working on syntax, semantics, and computational linguistics for Korean and English. His current research topics include noun phrases in English, comparative constructions in English and Korean, inversion phenomena in English, complex predicates in Korean, cleft constructions, focus projections in English and Korean, just to name a few. In addition to publishing numerous papers in prestigious domestic and international journals, he is the co-author of the textbook "*English syntax: an introduction*" (2008, CSLI Publications), which is now worldwide used as an undergraduate and graduate textbook. Since 2003, he has also turned his attention to computational implementation too and developed a computationally feasible grammar for Korean, Korean Resource Grammar.