

The “N after N” Construction and Its Theoretical Implications Kazuya Kudo (Kwansei Gakuin University)

Issue: The English NPN construction, exemplified by *time after time*, has been analyzed as some kind of idioms due to its peculiar grammatical properties (Jackendoff 2008, Matsuyama 2004, Williams 1994). Considering its high productivity, however, the “N after N” construction must be treated differently from other less productive NPN constructions. In this paper, we demonstrate that the phrase “N after N” can be generated *syntactically* (i.e., obeying general syntactic principles), while other forms of NPN constructions may still be examples of lexical or constructional idioms.

Proposal: We propose that “N after N” is a QP headed by a null Q (semantically corresponding to *each*), which takes a PP of the form [*PP after NP*] as its complement. We assume that this null Q has a strong N-feature that needs to be checked-off in syntax (cf. Chomsky 1995). Then, the NP in Q’s complement domain will be moved up (i.e., copied and merged) into [Spec, QP] in order to satisfy the requirement (due to “last resort”). We will argue that the phonological sequence of “N after N” and all the peculiar properties of the construction result from this movement analysis.

Analysis: As is obvious, the productivity of NPN constructions varies according to the choice of prepositions (Jackendoff 2008). Productive NPN constructions have the latitude in the choice of head nouns and appear to have an internal syntactic structure, (1). This observation leads us to postulate that productive NPN constructions should be generated in syntax in compliance with general syntactic principles.

We claim that “N after N” is a QP, which has a null Q as its head and a PP as its complement, (2). The null Q in question assumably corresponds to *each*, since “N after N” behaves most similarly to “*each N*” in syntax, (3). Semantically, the null Q in “N after N” does not quantify over an NP but a PP including an NP, so that the phrase yields the sense of “succession”. Viewed in this light, it follows naturally that “N after N” is not compatible with determiners, mass nouns and plurals, (4), since these elements cannot bear appropriate relations with quantifiers like *each*.

Here, we assume that the null Q in “N after N” has a strong N-feature, since quantifiers, in general, require an NP to be quantified over. In usual cases (e.g., *each student*), the N-feature of Q can be checked-off within its minimal domain (via the head-comp relation), since Q usually takes an NP in its complement. However, in the case of “N after N”, the complement of Q is not an NP but a PP, which lacks an N-feature. Then, the NP in the complement domain of Q needs to be moved up (i.e., copied and merged) into [Spec, QP] in order to check-off Q’s strong N-feature within its minimal domain (via the spec-head relation), (5). This is how the phonological sequence of “N after N” results.

Nontrivial consequences of this analysis come from a corollary that the first N in “N after N” is a moved constituent. That is, our approach adequately explains the reasons why the first N in “N after N” can have prenominal adjectives only if the second N does, (6b, c), why those adjectives must be identical between the first N and the second N, (6d), and why the adjective *miserable* modifies not only the second N but also the first N (or, more precisely, the whole QP) in (6a). Also, the movement analysis provides a simple mechanism to the triplication of the construction (see (1d)), by allowing that syntactic operation may apply recursively. Furthermore, our approach has a syntactic solution to the fact that the first N in a triplicated version has to agree with the second N with respect to the presence or absence of prenominal adjectives, (8), from the viewpoint of CED-like constraint on movement phenomena, which is roughly sketched as (10).

Conclusion: We have demonstrated that “N after N” is a syntactic unit that is formed as a result of canonical syntactic operations. This is a desirable result in the generative study as far as we can maintain the general idea that productive expressions are created in syntax with systematic rules and principles, whereas less-productive ones have something to do with idiosyncrasies of lexical items. In this sense, this research conforms to the direction that any generative research should follow.

Examples:

- (1) a. Free choice of N: day after day, dog after dog, page after page, picture after picture, ...
(cf. hand over hand/*finger over finger)
b. Prenominal adjectives: day after miserable day (cf. *side by firm side)
c. Postnominal complements: day after day of rain (cf. *day to day of rain)
d. Triplication: week after week after week (cf. *page for page for page)
- (2) [QP **Q_{each}** [PP P NP]]
- (3) a. Page after page {is/*are} sprinkled with errors. [syntactic singularity]
b. [Student after student]_i talked about his_i attitudes. [distributivity]
c. Dog after dog bit {the others/*each other}. [*the others* in reciprocal]
d. *Almost student after student flunked. [modification by *almost*]
- (4) a. No determiners: *the man after the man, *a day after a day
b. No mass nouns: *water after water, *dust after dust
c. No plurals: *men after men, *books after books
- (5) [QP NP_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P NP_i]]] (with Copy theory)
- (6) a. day after miserable day
b. miserable day after miserable day
c. *miserable day after day
d. *awful day after miserable day
- (7) a. [QP NP_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [NP AP NP_i]]]]
b. [QP [NP AP NP]_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [NP AP NP]_i]]]
c. *[QP [NP AP NP]_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P NP_i]]]
d. *[QP [NP AP_b NP]_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [NP AP_a NP]_i]]]
- (8) a. week after week after miserable week
b. miserable week after miserable week after miserable week
c. *week after miserable week after miserable week
d. *miserable week after week after week
- (9) a. [QP NP_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [QP NP_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [NP AP NP]_i]]]]]]]
b. [QP [NP AP NP]_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [QP [NP AP NP]_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [NP AP NP]_i]]]]]]]
c. *[QP NP_j [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [QP [NP AP NP]_j [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [NP AP NP]_i]]]]]]]
d. *[QP [NP AP NP]_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P [QP NP_i [Q' **Q_{each}** [PP P NP_i]]]]]]]
- (10) *The ban on "Subextraction"*
Extraction of an item from the domain that has undergone a movement is prohibited.

References:

- Chomsky, N. (1995) *The minimalist program*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. / Jackendoff, R. (2008) "Construction after construction and its theoretical challenges," *Language* 84, 8-28. / Matsuyama, T. (2004) "The N after N construction: A constructional idiom," *English Linguistics* 21, 55-84. / Williams, E. (1994) "Remarks on lexical knowledge," *The acquisition of the lexicon*, ed. by L. Gleitman and B. Landau, 7-34. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.