Argument Ellipsis, Classifier Phrases, and the DP Parameter

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This thesis investigates two theoretical consequences of a point of typological variation, namely, the presence/lack of Determiner Phrase (DP) in a language. I argue that the availability of Argument Ellipsis (AE) is directly tied to the lack of DP in a given language, and that (numeral) Classifier Phrases (CLP) and DP cannot co-occur in the same language.

In chapter 2, building on Bošković’s (2008a, 2012) claim that languages without articles lack DP, I investigate the status of DP in Mandarin Chinese (MC). I examine previous literature and show that claims regarding the existence of DP in MC are not supported and provide evidence that the DP projection is indeed missing from the nominal structure of MC. In chapter 3, I examine the null argument paradigm in MC and argue that the phenomenon of AE, in which the argument is elided in the PF component, is independently attested in MC. In chapter 4, I propose a new theory of AE, where the licensing condition on AE is tied to the absence of DP. In other words, AE may only occur in languages without the DP projection. I propose that the lack of DP makes VP (rather than vP) a phase in these languages. As a consequence, the direct object of the verb, which is the complement of a phase head, may be elided in the PF component, resulting in the phenomenon of AE. In chapter 5, I explore the second consequence of the lack of DP: its relation with numeral classifiers. Examining various languages, I establish a correlation between the existence of a numeral Classifier (CL) system and the lack of DP, which states that numeral CLPs do not co-occur with DP in the same language. I also examine CLP systems in Japanese and MC as case studies to capture certain differences in their nominal domains.
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