



1-1-2005

# Something invisible in English

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## 1 Introduction

The present paper investigates words like *something* and their relation to adjectival modifiers on the basis of English, French and Swiss German. The conclusion reached is that a phrase like *something nice* involves two empty headed nominal projections, one hosting two overt functional heads *some* and *thing* and another one hosting the modifier *nice*.

## 2 The Basic Facts

Indefinite pronouns (IPR) in English are transparently bi-morphemic, whereby one morpheme looks like a determiner (e.g. *some*) and the other looks sometimes like a noun (e.g. *thing*), sometimes like a wh-word (cf. Katz and Postal, 1964 for some discussion). A partial paradigm is given in (1).

- (1) a. someone  
      no one  
      b. something / #somewhat  
          nothing / \*nowhat  
      c. somewhere / someplace  
          nowhere / noplac  
      d. sometime  
          \*notime  
      e. somehow  
          \*nohow

Properties of these IPRs include the following:

- the two morphemes are inseparable
- the formation of IPRs is not productive (2):

- (2) a. \*someman tall                      b. #somewhat cold

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\*For comments and discussions at earlier as well as more recent stages in this work I'm grateful to Michal Starke, Richard Kayne, Lanko Marušič, Richard Larson, Oana Ciucivara, Lisa Levinson, the audience at a presentation at NYU in Feb 2004, and the audience at the PLC 28.

As shown in (2) the combination of *some* with a common noun is not generally available to form an IPR. On the contrary, the combination is totally unproductive. Example (2) illustrates that the choice between noun and wh-word is not free contrary to what might be suggested by (1c).<sup>1</sup> While *somewhat* is a possible combination in English, it does not have the meaning that would be expected by analogy with (1c).

IPRs in French are morphologically less regular than in English.

- |        |               |                  |
|--------|---------------|------------------|
| (3) a. | quelqu'un     | <i>someone</i>   |
|        | (ne) personne | <i>no one</i>    |
| b.     | quelque chose | <i>something</i> |
|        | (ne) rien     | <i>nothing</i>   |
| c.     | quelque part  | <i>somewhere</i> |
|        | nulle part    | <i>nowhere</i>   |

Properties of these IPRs include the following (as above for English):

- the morphemes are inseparable (disregarding *ne*)
- the formation of IPRs is unproductive (4):

- |        |   |                                   |
|--------|---|-----------------------------------|
| (4) a. | *quelqu'une   | <i>someone<sub>feminine</sub></i> |
| b.     | there is no IPR-way of saying <i>somehow</i> => lexical gap |                                   |

In Swiss German there is no transparent relation between the morphemes in IPRs and determiners and/or nouns whatsoever.

- |        |                    |                  |
|--------|--------------------|------------------|
| (5) a. | öper               | <i>someone</i>   |
|        | niämer             | <i>no one</i>    |
| b.     | öpis               | <i>something</i> |
|        | nüd                | <i>nothing</i>   |
| c.     | nöimä <sup>2</sup> | <i>somewhere</i> |
|        | niänä              | <i>nowhere</i>   |

Again, the formation of IPRs is entirely unproductive. It is noteworthy that with regard to Case morphology IPRs in Swiss German behave like determiners. Case morphology is overt on the determiner but not on the head noun in ordinary DPs (6). The IPR belongs to the class of elements onto which Case morphology is suffixed (7).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Richard Kayne (p.c.) points out that these are not fully equivalent:

i. John has somewhere / \*someplace between 30 and 35 books.

<sup>2</sup>Some dialects lack an IPR variant for *somewhere*.

<sup>3</sup>I will ignore the curious fact that the Case morphology on IPRs has the form found on definite determiners rather than the one on indefinite ones.

- (6) a.  $dr_{Nom/Acc}$  Ma (the man)  
 b.  $am_{Dat}$  Ma (the man)
- (7) a.  $\ddot{o}per_{Nom/Acc}$  (someone)  
 b.  $\ddot{o}perem_{Dat}$  (someone)

A second set of facts concerns the adjectival modification of IPRs.

In English, the notable property of the relation between IPR and adjective is that the adjective follows the IPR. This is not surprising, given that the morphemes that make up the IPR are inseparable and one of the morphemes is a determiner.

In French and Swiss German, however, we observe *a priori* unexpected morphosyntactic curiosities.

- (8) a. something nice (English)  
 b. quelque chose \*(de) beau (French)  
 c. öpis schön\*(s) (Swiss German)

In French, the adjectival modifier of an IPR is introduced by *de*. *de* does not introduce adjectival modifiers within DPs either prenominal or postnominal ones, as is shown in (9a) and (b). But instead *de* introduces nominal projections, as shown in (10). Adjectival modification of IPRs looks parallel to this latter case, (11).

- (9) a. un (\*de) beau film  
       *a* (DE) *beautiful movie*  
 b. un film (\*de) magnifique  
       *a film* (DE) *magnificent*
- (10) trois kilos de bois  
       *three kilos* DE *wood*
- (11) quelque chose de magnifique  
       *something* DE *magnificent*

I take the parallel between (10) and (11) to be more than a mere surface accident. In fact, I will argue below that (11) features two separate nominal projections, parallel to (10).

In Swiss German, adjectival modifiers of IPRs are inflected. The inflectional suffix they carry is *-s* for the nominative and accusative Cases. In predicate position, adjectives are not inflected (13), a contrast well-known from Standard German.

- (12) öper luschtigs *someone funny*  
 öpis luschtigs *something funny*  
 nöimä luschtigs *somewhere funny*
- (13) Das isch luschtig. *This is funny.*

This indicates that the adjectives in (12) actually are modifiers inside a DP, i.e. attributive modifiers rather than predicative ones.

In the dative the adjectival suffix is *-m*. This pattern, *-s* for nominative/accusative and *-m* for dative, is the one exhibited also by modifiers of (neuter) bare nouns. Consider the following paradigm.

Neuter definite DPs:

- (14) a. ts<sub>Nom/Acc</sub> chaltä Wasser *the cold water*  
 b. mit em<sub>Dat</sub> chaltä Wasser *with the cold water*

Neuter indefinite DPs:

- (15) a. es<sub>Nom/Acc</sub> chalts Bad *a cold bath*  
 b. nach emenä<sub>Dat</sub> chaltä Bad *after a cold bath*

Neuter bare NPs:

- (16) a. chalts<sub>Nom/Acc</sub> Wasser *cold water*  
 b. mit chalem<sub>Dat</sub> Wasser *with cold water*

IPRs:

- (17) a. öpis chalts<sub>Nom/Acc</sub> *something cold*  
 b. mit öpis chalem<sub>Dat</sub><sup>4</sup> *with something cold*

The inflection on the adjective with IPRs in (17) is the same as on adjectives with bare noun phrases (16), but different from the inflection on adjectives that modify non-bare DPs. On the assumption (supported by the fact that the IPR combines with Case morphology parallel to determiners, cf. (6), (7)) that pronominal DPs are not bare, the morphological parallel between (16) and (17) suggests that the adjective in (17) does not directly modify the IPR but instead modifies an (unpronounced) bare noun. In other words it is an attributive adjective in a separate DP.

This is exactly what we have concluded for French above and is here independently evidenced in Swiss German. In the next section I will briefly address three proposals made in the literature regarding IPRs and their modi-

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<sup>4</sup>Case morphology is preferably expressed only on the adjective if one is present. If no adjective is present it is obligatorily expressed on the IPR.

fiers, and mention problems which they face in the light of the data presented in this paper.

### 3 Previous proposals

In this section I briefly sketch some existing proposals and point out problems they face in light of the data presented. In the interest of brevity I will not attempt to do justice to the virtues of the proposal mentioned but refer the reader to the original texts.

#### 3.1 N-raising analyses (cf. Abney, 1987; Kishimoto, 2000)

A prominent proposal (based on English) derives IPRs from an ordinary indefinite DP structure by movement of the “light noun” across the adjective to a position adjacent to the determiner.

(18)a. something nice

b. [DP[D some]                      [AP nice]                      [N thing]]



The diagram shows a curved arrow pointing from the rightmost element, [N thing], to the position between [DP[D some] and [AP nice].

##### 3.1.1 Problems

This proposal does not extend to the French and Swiss German data in any straightforward way. Specifically, it leaves the appearance of *de* in French and the bare noun modifier morphology in Swiss German mysterious.

Furthermore, it leads to the incorrect expectation that this process should be productive. This seems especially severe with respect to the lexical gaps in the paradigms observed in (1).<sup>5</sup> In addition, it leaves mysterious the occurrence of *wh*-words in place of the noun as in *somewhere*.<sup>6</sup>

#### 3.2 AP-base-generation-analyses (cf. Larson & Marušič, in press)

Larson & Marušič (in press) make a rather strong case against the N-raising analysis drawing on data from English (partly due to Bolinger, 1967) and Slovenian.

<sup>5</sup>Also *\*everyhow*, *\*everywhat*.

<sup>6</sup>A different set of interesting semantic arguments against an N-raising approach are put forth by Larson & Marušič (in press).

L&M point out two possible alternatives. The for us crucial characteristics of the alternatives are summarized below:

- A:
- all APs are generated post-nominally
  - some APs can/must move to a pre-nominal position
  - this movement is sometimes blocked (e.g. in the case of IPRs)
- B:
- pre-nominal APs are base-generated pre-nominally
  - post-nominal APs are generated post-nominally
  - there are restrictions on the availability of the relevant (i.e. pre-nominal) position (e.g. in the case of IPRs)

### 3.2.1 Problems

In the light of the present discussion these alternatives suffer from essentially the same problems as the N-raising approach.

They do not extend to the French and Swiss German data in any straightforward way. Specifically, they leave the appearance of *de* in French and the bare noun modifier morphology in Swiss German mysterious.

Furthermore, they leave the unproductivity of IPR unexpected, and they leave mysterious the occurrence of *wh*-words in place of the noun as in *somewhere*.

### 3.3 Clausal analysis (cf. Kayne, 1994)

Kayne (1994), drawing on French, proposes to derive modified IPRs from a relative clause structure whereby *de* introduces the relative clause, as in (19).

- (19)a.  $D^{\circ} [D/PP] \quad \uparrow \quad [de \quad [IP \ AP \ [I^{\circ} \ NP \ \dots]]$
- b. *quelqu'un*      *de célèbre*      (*someone DE famous*)

#### 3.3.1 Problems

This analysis of *de* does not extend to the Swiss German bare-noun-modifier morphology in any straightforward way. It also leaves the total unproductivity of IPRs unexpected. Furthermore, it leaves mysterious the appearance of the *wh*-words in the position of the noun as in *somewhere*.

The above proposals suffer from similar weaknesses in the light of the present considerations. The main problem is that the nominal-looking morpheme is treated as a noun, i.e. of category N, like *cat* and *dog*. In the next



section I will state my proposal in which it is treated as belonging to a functional category instead and the adjective is in a separate nominal projection. With regard to the latter point the proposed structure is not unlike Kayne's (1994) proposal.

#### 4 Present proposal<sup>7</sup>

I propose that IPRs like *something* consist of (at least) two functional categories [<sub>F</sub> *some-*] and [<sub>IPR-R</sub> *-thing*] and an empty category N. The nominal-looking element, e.g. *thing*, seems to function as the restrictor of the determiner-like element, e.g. *some*. I therefore call the class it belongs to IPR-R(estrictor).

(20) [<sub>DP</sub> [<sub>F</sub> *some*] [<sub>IPR-R</sub> *thing*] *ec*<sub>N</sub>]

Treating the nominal-looking element as a functional category rather than a lexical one (i.e. IPR-R rather than N) has a number of immediate advantages:

- i. The unproductivity observed for IPRs is typical for functional categories and thus expected on the present proposal.
- ii. The members of the set of a functional category are enumerable, as the IPR-Rs are:

(21) set of IPR-R<sub>English</sub> =  
 {*one, body, thing, where, place, how, time, what* (??...)}<sup>8</sup>

- iii. Lexical gaps and irregularities are expected (due to unproductivity).
- iv. IPR-Rs lexicalize a part of the functional field of the DP. Being a functional category they are limited in their range of meaning distinctions to grammatically active classes. So, for instance, the distinction between [+human] and [-human]<sup>8</sup>, which is grammaticalized in the languages at hand as particularly visible in the pronominal systems, is made by the IPR-Rs. In addition to items specified for [+human] entities and

<sup>7</sup>The proposal is a refinement of Leu (2002).

<sup>8</sup>The specification [-human] seems to include insects but not animals like cats and dogs. The latter seem to fall outside the range of entities embraced by IPR-Rs, see below.

items specified for [-human] entities, the set of IPR-Rs tends to contain items specifying location, time, and manner.<sup>9</sup>

The IPR-R restricts the interpretation of the empty category nominal head. Note that the interpretive specification of the IPR-Rs is not identical to their homophonous counterparts in category N (for those which happen to have such a counterpart). There is the interesting notorious problem of referring to animals with an IPR in all three languages under investigation. On a traditional view this would be surprising for English and French, since [<sub>N</sub>one] and [<sub>N</sub>un] used as nouns are able to refer to animals.<sup>10</sup>

- (22) a. This [<sub>N</sub>one] (dog)                      b. Someone *ec<sub>N</sub>* (\*dog)  
 (23) a. L' [<sub>N</sub>un] des deux (dog)                b. Quelqu'un *ec<sub>N</sub>* (\*dog)

But IPRs formed from the IPR-Rs *one* and *un* respectively cannot refer to animals. This point generalizes to the other IPR-Rs. So for instance the IPR formed from *body* has a different range of interpretation than the English noun *body*. Similarly, French *part* ('place', 'location') is not used as a noun anymore but only in idiomatic phrases and as IPR-R in *quelque part / nulle part* ('somewhere, nowhere').<sup>11</sup>

The structure I am proposing for modified IPRs is given in (24). No modifiers are licensed in the projection of the IPR.<sup>12</sup> Adjectival modifiers are in a separate nominal projection introduced by a Case-related functional element, *de* in French, *-s/-m* in Swiss German, and  $\emptyset$  in English. In Swiss German the modifier moves into the specifier of *-s*.

<sup>9</sup>Languages may have only a subset of the IPR-specifications listed, e.g. French does not have an IPR corresponding to *sometime* (i.e. \**quelque temps*).

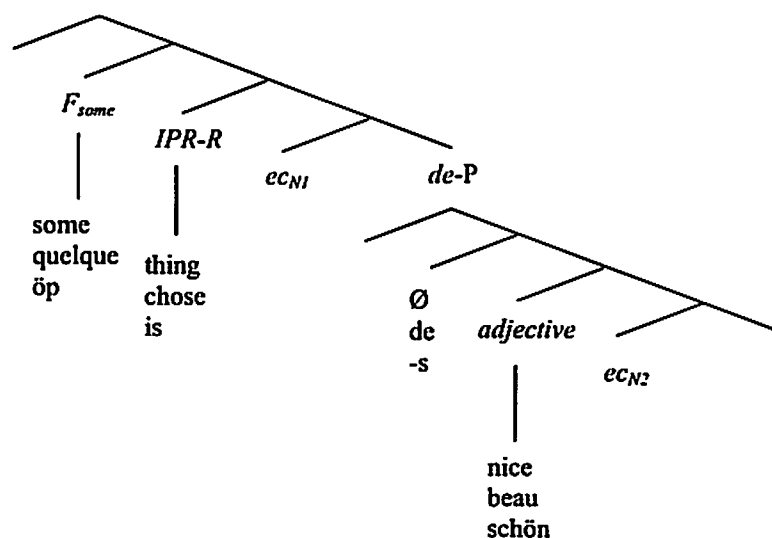
<sup>10</sup>The PLC 28 audience points out that *something* can be used to refer to animals, as in *Something is moving over there, it must be Fido*, and that even *someone* can be used to refer to animals in certain contexts. This is correct, but I submit that they are somewhat special uses. In the latter, *Someone seems to like bones* is an instance of anthropomorphosis. In the former case it seems that the use of *something* to refer to animals is rather strongly restricted. The following seem rather degraded.

- i. ?\* *Something's barking outside.*  
 ii. \* *Oops, I think I stepped on something's tail.*  
 (example due to R. Kayne, p.c.)

<sup>11</sup>Interesting is also *autre part* which corresponds to the equally interesting English *elsewhere*. At this point I have nothing to say about these.

<sup>12</sup>Possibly there is a highly restricted set of modifiers that are allowed in the IPR-projection. Specifically, English *else* seems to behave differently from other modifiers in that it survives with the *wh*-variants and fronts with the *wh*-word.

(24)



## 5 Further support

The proposal is supported by subextraction facts. French (cf. Obenauer, 1994) and Swiss German allow certain complex nominals to occur in discontinuous positions under *wh*-movement:

- (25) *Combien a-t-il lu [de livres]? (combien de - split)*  
*how many has he read DE books*
- (26) *Was hesch [für Bächer] gläsä? (was für - split)*  
*what have-you for books read*

Note that the stranded material contains a noun phrase that is introduced by a Case-related functional element (i.e. a Case assigning preposition or Case suffix), *de* and *für* respectively.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup>In *was für* split the preposition *für* is superficially Case-inert (cf. den Besten, 1985; Pafel, 1996). In Leu (2004) I argue that it does assign Case though, to a nominal unpronounced in Swiss German, but sometimes overt in languages like Swedish.

Such stranding under wh-movement is not generally available for adjectives:<sup>14</sup>

- (27) a. *Quel livre intéressant as-tu lu?*  
*which book interesting have-you read*  
 b. \**Quel livre as-tu lu intéressant?*  
*which book have-you read interesting*
- (28) a. *Weles luschtigä Buäch hesch gläsä?*  
*which funny book have-you read*  
 b. \**Weles Buäch hesch luschtigä gläsä?*  
*which book have-you funny read*

With the wh-variant of IPRs, however, such stranding is available (cf. the (b) examples below).

- (29) a. *J'ai lu quelque chose de drôle.*  
*I have read something DE funny*  
 b. *Qu'est-ce que tu as lu de drôle?*  
*what (est-ce que) you have read DE funny*
- (30) a. *Ich ha öpis luschtigs gläsä.*  
*I have something funny read*  
 b. *Was hesch luschtigs gläsä?*  
*what have-you funny read*

On the present proposal the stranded phrases in (29) and (30) are of the same kind as in (25) and (26), namely, they contain nominal phrases and are introduced by a Case-related functional element (i.e. a Case assigning preposition or Case suffix). Thus the present approach to modified IPRs straightforwardly allows a unified treatment of adjective stranding and other well-known splitting phenomena.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup>There is a complication in French which is that when introducing the stranded adjective in (27) by *de* this kind of sentences becomes acceptable to some degree. I take this to suggest that the *de*-modification is also available for wh-traces.

<sup>15</sup>Interestingly, whereas such splitting/stranding as in (26) and (30) is generally taken to be unavailable in standard English, there are English speakers who marginally accept *what for* split in English as in (i). The speakers I have asked that accept *what for* split also accept adjective stranding under wh-movement, as in (ii).

i. % What did you buy for a book?  
 ii. % What did you see interesting?

It looks like speakers accept either both or neither. More empirical investigation is needed, however, to make any substantial claim.

## 6 Conclusion

From a cross-linguistic perspective on IPRs taking into account English, French, and Swiss German, approaches which treat *thing* in *something* as being of category N are argued to be inadequate. Specifically, they predict Swiss German IPRs and English IPRs to be very different things. Secondly they leave the unproductive nature of the IPR paradigm mysterious. I therefore conclude that IPRs do not involve an overt N but instead are built from two functional categories, a determiner-like element (e.g. *some*) and a restrictor (e.g. *thing*). The two elements lexicalize parts of the functional field of a DP which is the extended projection of an empty nominal category  $ec_N$ .

Regarding the modifiers of IPRs, the French and Swiss German morphosyntax constitutes compelling evidence that the modifier is part of a separate extended N-projection headed by an empty nominal category and introduced by a Case-related functional element. Therefore modified IPRs are complex structures involving two nominal projections.

### 6.1 Open issues

There are, of course, many questions left open. These include:

- i) Why can the nominal projection not be lexicalized by the IPR host adjectives?
- ii) How are the interpretive restrictions on IPR modifiers discussed in (Larson & Marušič, in press) and the literature cited therein to be accounted for?
- iii) How, if at all, should the present proposal be unified with other phenomena involving French *de*, as discussed in (Kayne, 1994) and the literature cited therein?

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