

Parallel Nominal and Verbal Projections

Current research on nominal elements has argued that the structure of the noun phrase should reflect the structure of the verbal domain. These conclusions have led to the introduction of several functional projections within the noun phrase providing a decomposed structure in which the various nominal elements are represented in distinct syntactic nodes (Abney 1987, Valois 1991, Ritter 1992). In addition, it has been shown that there is a direct correlation between the functional elements in the noun phrase and verb phrase structures, such as Number and Aspect (Travis 1992, Verkuyl 1993, Borer 1994). Despite arguments that noun phrases are parallel to verbal clauses in many respects, nouns have generally been treated as less complex than verbal projections, and the functional categories within the noun phrase itself have not played a significant role in establishing relations such as case and agreement between the nominal and verbal predicates.

In this paper, I investigate the correlation between the noun phrase and the verb phrase by studying morphological and semantic properties of case and agreement in several languages, and argue that the correspondence between the two phrase types can be captured by establishing a direct relation between the functional categories within two parallel nominal and verbal projections. Following ideas developed in Vergnaud (2000), I suggest a framework in which the verbal predicate and nominal phrase each project their own domain in syntax, and case and agreement are realized when a nominal node enters into a specifier relation with its verbal counterpart. I argue that the two parallel domains can enter into a checking relation at various points in the computation, giving rise to corresponding semantic interpretations as well as case and agreement morphology. The parallel architecture proposed for nominal and verbal projections straightforwardly captures the direct correspondence between meaning and structure and provides a new perspective on the notion of specifier.