

Proper Names and the Structure of DP in English: When Lakes Don't Move

Introduction: Nearly all proper names in English for geographic entities like rivers (as in *Hudson River*) consist of a proper name (e.g., *Hudson*), and a common noun (e.g., *river*). In English lake names, the two elements of the name can appear in either order: the proper name can either precede the common noun, as in *Moosehead Lake*, *Squam Lake*, and *Ossipee Lake*; or the proper name can follow the common noun, as in *Lake Winnepesaukee*, *Lake Sunapee*, and *Lake Champlain*. Although the order of these two elements appears to be idiomatic and lexical, this paper shows that in at least one case, the names of lakes, the phenomenon is syntactic.

The Problem: Drawing on Longobardi (1994), Kayne (2005: 250) suggests that we can analyze *Lake Ontario* in terms of N-to-D raising:

(1) $D^0 \text{ Lake}_i F^0 \text{ Ontario } t_i$.

Longobardi (1994) argues that proper names in Italian and other Romance languages raise from N to D when a determiner is not present; when the determiner position in a proper name in Italian is not filled, the proper name obligatorily raises to fill the empty D head:

(2) $[_{DP} \text{ Gianni}_i [_{NP} \text{ mio } t_i]]$.

A naïve application of Longobardi suggests that in the case of *Lake Winnepesaukee*, we have raising from N to an empty D head:

(3) $[_{DP} [_D \text{ Lake}_i [_{XP} [_X \text{ Winnepesaukee}]] [_{NP} [_N t_i]]]$

This analysis appears to work, and it even predicts why we can't say **the Lake Winnepesaukee*. But Longobardi (1994) also suggests that N-to-D movement is overt in Romance and covert in Germanic. In other words, the D head in Romance is strong, so it must be filled, and this is why we see obligatory N-to-D in Italian; in Germanic, D is weak, so N-to-D is not obligatory. The lack of raising to D in English might explain cases like *Moosehead Lake*:

(4) $[_{DP} [_D \emptyset [_{XP} [_X \text{ Moosehead}]] [_{NP} [_N \text{ Lake}]]]$

The problem here is that we now have two analyses, one for each word order. The non-movement analysis works for cases like *Moosehead Lake* and *Squam Lake*, and the N-to-D analysis works for cases like *Lake Winnepesaukee* and *Lake Sunapee*. Why would *lake* raise in some cases but stay in situ in other cases? If Longobardi's generalization about the nature of D in Romance and Germanic is correct, then we would have to modify it to allow that English D is sometimes strong and sometimes weak.

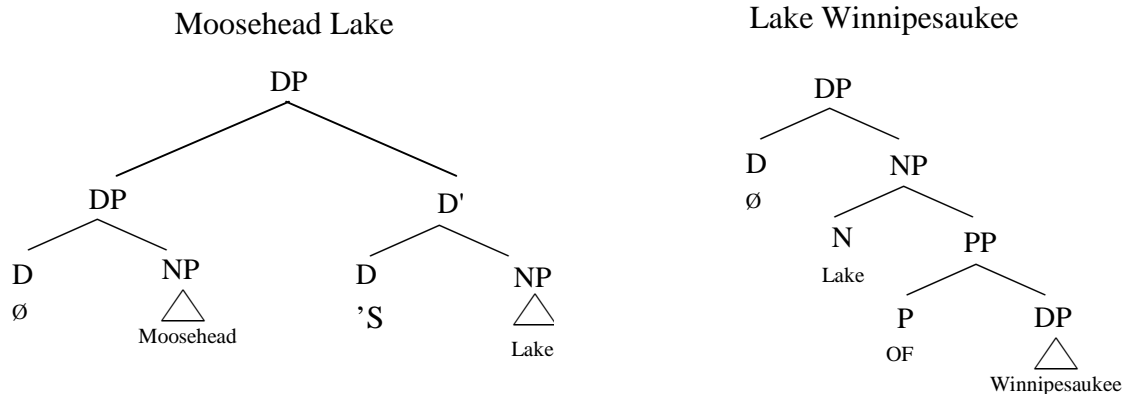
The Solution: I argue that the answer to this puzzle comes from the structure of possessives in English and does not involve N-to-D raising at all. Observe that in Italian, names of lakes are formed by the word for lake (*lago*), followed by a possessive and (what I have been calling) a proper name: *Lago d'Iseo*. (Secondarily, lake names in Italian are formed with *lago* followed by an adjective.) If we assume that N-raising happens in these names as it does with names of individuals in Italian, the structure of *Lago d'Iseo* would look like the following:

(5) $[_{DP} [_D \text{ Lago}_i [_{PP} [_P d'] [_{NP} [_N t_i]]] [_{XP} [_X \text{ Iseo}]]]$

Lake names in English show variation in word order because there are two different ways to express possession in English. In Italian, possessives can be expressed in only one word order. In Italian lake names, when the proper name is not an adjective, there is no variation in the order of the constituents: the lake name always has the form of a possessive. Because English can express

possession using two different constructions—using a preposition or the “Saxon genitive”—I argue that the names of lakes in English derive from the two word order possibilities for showing possession in English. This analysis relies crucially on unpronounced possessive elements in the DP structure of these names. The following examples show these structures, with silent elements indicated by all-caps.

(6)



One question that arises regarding these derivations is why we cannot use the definite article with either *Moosehead Lake* or *Lake Winnepesaukee*.

(7) *the Lake Winnepesaukee

(8) *the Moosehead Lake

The answer lies in the fact that D is weak in English, and, as Longobardi puts it, “the licensing restrictions for null Ds ... are apparently relaxed in English” (Longobardi 1994: 630). One of the nice side-effects of the non-movement analysis of lake names in English is that it allows us to keep Longobardi’s generalization that D is strong in Italian and weak in Germanic.

Conclusion: Variation in the order of proper name and common noun in English lake names is due to the two different possessive structures available in English. A non-movement analysis of lake names in English is superior to the movement analysis based on Longobardi (1994) suggested by Kayne (2005), though the current analysis supports Longobardi’s (1994) insight that D is strong in Romance and weak in Germanic. This analysis has implications both for parametric analyses other types of proper names, as well as for the uses of possessive structures in Universal Grammar.

References

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