Abstract

*Gender and \( N \)-movement in West Flemish*

The variation in word order between English (1a) and Italian (1b) has been interpreted in terms of DP-internal head-movement.

(1) a. English  a white cat  
   b. Italian  un gatto bianco
      *a cat white  
      *un bianco gatto

Based on work by Harris (1991), Bernstein (1993) argues that the trigger for leftward \( N \)-movement rests in the presence or absence of the terminal vowel on \( N \), which marks gender or noun-class. Typically, Italian masculine nouns end in \(-o\) and feminine nouns end in \(-a\). For languages with overt gender marking of this kind she postulates a DP-internal functional head WM (word marker). The availability of WM correlates with (i) indefinite \( N \) ellipsis and (ii) \( N \)-movement. She postulates that Romance languages have the head WM, while Germanic languages lack WM.

WF data show that the correlation between the availability of a terminal vowel, i.e. the functional head WM, and lower \( N \)-movement cannot be maintained. The language lacks lower \( N \)-movement:

(2) a. een zwarte katte  
      a black cat
   b. *een katte zwart(e)  
      a cat black

In Bernstein’s approach, absence of \( N \)-movement in WF, as displayed in (2a,b), would correlate with absence of the WM/terminal vowel. However, in WF there is a systematic correlation between the final schwa and feminine gender. Indeed, the WF evidence for a WM head is more robust than that provided by Bernstein in support of the WM in French. (3) illustrates a minimal pair, where terminal \(-e\) is pronounced [ə].

(3) a. *bom  
      masc  ‘bottom’
   b. *bomme  
      fem  ‘bomb’

My conclusion is that presence of terminal vowels as such cannot be the trigger for \( N \)-movement.