Magahi Determiner Spreading

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Determiner Spreading

- Essentially, DS is a phenomenon where multiple determiners occur in the syntax of modification
- Greek is the most studied language wrt DS, but it occurs in many others as well

(1) *to kokino to vivlio*
the red the book

'the red book' **Greek** (Alexiadou 2014: 40)

(2) *den ny-a bok-en*
the new-WEAK book-the

'the new book' **Swedish** (Alexiadou 2014: 2)

(3) *ha smalot ha yapot*
the dresses the nice

'the nice dresses' **Hebrew** (Alexiadou 2014: 2)

Determiner Spreading

- Most of the DS literature is focused on definite articles
- But, DS also occurs with indefinite articles

(4) *ei stor ei fin ei seng*
a big a fine a bed

'a big nice bed' **Senja Norwegian** (Anderssen et al. 2019: 14)

(5) *en stor en kar*
a big a man

'a big man' **Northern Swedish** (Delsing 1993: 143)

- Whether these indefinite patterns can have a similar analysis to their definite counterparts is an open question
- Today, I'll argue that Magahi shows us they can

Language Background

- The focus of this talk: adjectival modification in Magahi
- Magahi is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language, primarily spoken in Bihar, India
- Data comes from elicitations with 5 native speakers

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magahi_language

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- Magahi is a numeral classifier language
- Two classifiers in free variation
- Num-CLF-NP phrases are always indefinite

(6) a. *ek tho kutta*
one CLF dog

'a/one dog'

b. *e-go kutta*
one-CLF dog

'a/one dog'

(7) a. *pããc tho kitaab*
five CLF book

'five books'

b. *pããc-go kitaab*
five-CLF book

'five books'

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- There is a familiarity marker *-waa* with the following allomorphs: *-waa, -aa, -(i)yaa, -(i)yãã, -maa*
- *-waa* requires a definite interpretation and is incompatible with indefinites, generics, and kinds

(8) *(ek tho) bilai-(#yaa)*
one CLF cat-#WAA

'a/one cat'

(9) *chiṛai-(#waa) uṛa hai*
bird-#WAA fly AUX

'Birds fly.'

(10) *dainasor-(#waa) bilupt ho gelai*
dinosaur-#WAA extinct be went

'Dinosaurs are extinct.'

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- *-waa* is called a familiarity marker (Alok 2012, 2022; Kumar 2020; Sharma 2025) because it requires nouns it attaches to to be familiar in the discourse
- Seems to be subject to weak familiarity (Roberts 2003)

(11)

kal	*ham*	*ek*	*tho*	*kutta*	*dekhaliai.*	*(uu)*	*kutt-#(waa)*	*baṛii*	*sundar*
yesterday	1SG	one	CLF	dog	saw	DEM	dog-CLF.DEF	very	beautiful

halai
was

'Yesterday I saw a dog. The/that dog was very beautiful.'

(12) **Context:** Ram and John are from the same town which has a single hospital that everyone knows about. Ram is not feeling well, so John tells him:

jaa	*aspatal-iyaa*	*me*	*dekhwaala*
go	hospital-CLF.DEF	in	examine

'Go and get check up in the hospital.' (Alok 2022: 5)

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- In addition to encoding familiarity, *-waa* also appears to resist unique uses

(13) *suuraj-(#waa) puurab me uugo hai*
sun-#CLF.DEF east in rise AUX

'The sun rises in the east.'

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- *-waa* is argued to occupy the classifier position (Kumar 2020; Sharma 2025)
- primary motivation is typological

(14) **Bangla**

a. ɛk ʈa boi
one CLF book

'a/one book'

b. boi ʈa
book CLF

'the book' (Dayal 2012: 204)

(15) **Odia**

a. *go-te* *ghoṛa*
one-CLF horse

'a/one horse'

b. *ghoṛa-ta*
horse-CLF

'the horse' (Das 2022: 18)

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- *-waa* appears to occupy the same position of the classifier in definites in other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages

(16) **Asamiya**

a. ɛ-zɒn manuh
one-CLF man

'a/one man'

b. manuh-zɒn
man-CLF

'the man' (Goswami & Tamuli 2003: 456,475)

(17) **Magahi**

a. *ek tho kutta*
one CLF dog

'a/one dog'

b. *kutt-waa*
dog-CLF.DEF

'the dog'

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- Besides typological motivation, there is an alternation between *-waa* and the classifier on adjectives with *-kaa*

(18) a. *hamra ek tho baṛa-kaa-{go / *waa} kutta chahi*
1SG.OBL one CLF big-D-{CLF / *CLF.DEF} dog want

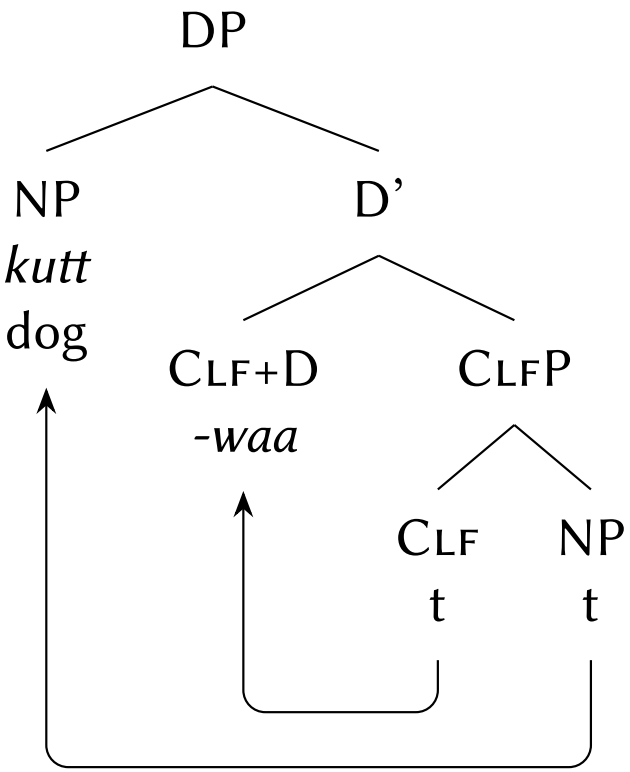
'I want a big dog.'

b. *baṛa-ka-{waa / *go} kutt-waa hamra par bhãũk gelai*
big-D-{CLF.DEF / *CLF} dog-CLF.DEF 1SG.OBL on bark went

'The big dog barked at me.'

Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- So, I am assuming the following structure for *-waa* definites
- NP raising is also proposed for Bangla (Bhattacharya 1999a,b; Dayal 2012)
- CLF to D movement Simpson (2005)



Overview of the Magahi Noun Phrase

- For the semantics, I assume *-waa* is similar to the German strong article, with additional presupposition of non-uniqueness (Owusu 2022) and non-honorificity

(19) $[\![\text{-}waa]\!] = \lambda s_r \lambda P_{<e,st>} \lambda y : \exists! x\, [P(x)(s) \wedge x = y] \wedge \underline{\exists s'[s \leq s' \wedge |\{x \mid P(x)(s')\}| > 1]} \wedge \underline{\underline{\text{NHON}(x)}}.\iota x[P(x)(s) \wedge x = y]$

Adjectives in Magahi

- Magahi adjectives generally look like Hindi adjectives

(20) **Hindi**

baṛaa	*moṭaa*	*kutta*
big	fat	dog

'a big fat dog'

(21) **Magahi**

baṛaa	*moṭaa*	*kutta*
big	fat	dog

'a big fat dog'

Adjectives in Magahi

- However, unlike Hindi, Magahi has a definite marker *-waa*
- Additionally, there is a suffix *-kaa* that must appear on each adjective modifying an NP suffixed with *-waa* (Alok 2012; Kumar 2020, 2022)

(22) **Hindi**

baṛaa *moṭaa* *kutta*
big fat dog

'the big fat dog'

(23) **Magahi**

baṛa-(kaa)* *moṭa-*(kaa)* *kutt-waa*
big-D fat-D dog-CLF.DEF

'the big fat dog'

Adjectives in Magahi

- *-kaa* shows gender agreement, with fem. allomorph: *-kii*
- I will refer to both as *-kaa*

(24) a. *lam-kaa laṛak-waa*
tall-D boy-CLF.DEF

'the tall boy'

b. *lam-kii laṛki-yaa*
tall-D girl-CLF.DEF

'the tall girl'

Back to Magahi Adjectives

- The fact that multiple classifiers/determiners can occur with modification motivates a structure with multiple DPs

(25) *e-go* *baṛa-kaa-go* *kutta*
one-CLF big-D-CLF dog

'a/one big dog'

(26) *baṛa-ka-waa* *kutt-waa*
big-D-CLF.DEF dog-CLF.DEF

'the big dog'

Proposal

- Rather than agreement, these Magahi phrases are instances of determiner spreading (DS) involving multiple DPs
- In particular, Magahi exhibits "Greek-type" DS
- *-kaa* is a determiner that introduces reduced relative clauses (RRCs) (Alexiadou 2014; Alexiadou & Wilder 1998)

Determiner Spreading

- Recall the following examples of DS

(27) *to kokino to vivlio*
the red the book

'the red book' **Greek** (Alexiadou 2014: 40)

(28) *den ny-a bok-en*
the new-WEAK book-the

'the new book' **Swedish** (Alexiadou 2014: 2)

(29) *ha smalot ha yapot*
the dresses the nice

'the nice dresses' **Hebrew** (Alexiadou 2014: 2)

Determiner Spreading

- The Greek, Swedish, and Hebrew patterns seem very similar initially
- However, they pattern differently wrt recursivity, adjective type, and interpretation (Alexiadou 2014)
- This leads to different proposals for these three languages

Determiner Spreading: Recursivity

- In Greek and Hebrew, but not Swedish, DS is recursive

(30) *to megalo to kokino to vivlio*
the big the red the book

'the big red book' **Greek** (Alexiadou & Wilder 1998: 303)

(31) *den gamle (*den) snälle mann-en*
the old *the kind man-the

'the kind old man' **Swedish** (Alexiadou 2014: 66)

(32) *ha-šulxan ha-šaxor ha-arox šeli*
the-table the-long the-black my

'my long black table' **Hebrew** (Sichel 2008: 300)

Determiner Spreading: Recursivity

- Like Greek and Hebrew, the Magahi pattern is recursive

(33) **Magahi**

baṛa-(kaa)*	*moṭa-*(kaa)*	*kutt-waa*
big-D	fat-D	dog-CLF.DEF

'the big fat dog'

Determiner Spreading: Adjective Type

- Swedish and Hebrew DS, but not Greek, do allow for non-predicative adjectives such as 'only' or 'former'

(34) **O monos tu o erotas ine i dulja tu.*
the only his the love is the work his

Intended: 'His only love is his work.' **Greek** (Alexiadou 2014: 57)

(35) *den förre president-en*
the former president-the

'the former president' **Swedish** (Alexiadou 2014: 66)

(36) *ha-xaver ha-yaxid šel rina*
the-friend the-single of Rina

'the only friend of Rina' **Hebrew** (Alexiadou 2014: 81)

Determiner Spreading: Adjective Type

- Like Greek, the Magahi pattern does not allow for non-predicative adjectives

(37) a. * *ii* *masṭar-waa* *barthamaan* *hai*
DEM teacher-CLF.DEF present is

Intended: 'This teacher is current.'

b. *hamar* *barthaman-(*kaa)* *masṭar-waa* *amerika* *se* *hai*
1SG.GEN present-*D teacher-CLF.DEF America from is

'My current teacher is from America.'

(38) a. * *apradhi-yaa* *kathit* *hai*
criminal-CLF.DEF so.called is

Intended: 'The criminal is alleged.'

b. *kathit-(*kaa)* *apradhi-yaa*
so.called-*D criminal-CLF.DEF

'the alleged criminal'

Determiner Spreading: Interpretation

- In Greek, but not Swedish or Greek, DS requires a restrictive interpretation
- In the following sentence with DS, the phrase 'the competent researchers' must be interpreted restrictively.

(39) a. *O diefthindis dilose oti i kali erevnites tha eprepe*
the director declared that the competent researchers be should
na apolithun.
PRT fired

'The director declared that the competent researchers would be fired.'

b. *O diefthindis dilose oti i kali i erevnites tha*
the director declared that the competent the researchers be
eprepe na apolithun.
should PRT fired

'The director declared that the competent researchers would be fired.'
Greek (Kolliakou 2004: 270)

Determiner Spreading: Interpretation

- Like Greek, the Magahi pattern requires a restrictive interpretation

(40) a. *kal ham ek tho kutta dekhaliai. *Baṛa-kaa kut-waa baṛii*
yesterday 1SG one CLF dog saw big-D dog-CLF.DEF very
sundar halai
beautiful was

Intended: 'Yesterday I saw a dog. The big dog was very beautiful.'

b. *kal ham du tho kutta dekhaliai. Baṛa-*(kaa) kut-waa*
yesterday 1SG two CLF big dog saw big-D
baṛii sundar halai
dog-CLF.DEF very beautiful

'Yesterday I saw two dogs. The big dog was very beautiful.'

Determiner Spreading: A Basic Typology

	Recursive	Non-predicative Adjectives	Restrictive
Greek	✓	✗	✓
Swedish	✗	✓	✗
Hebrew	✓	✓	✗
Magahi	✓	✗	✓

- Based on this, I will analyze the Magahi pattern as "Greek-type" DS
- In particular, I will treat *-kaa* as category D
- Besides its occurrence above CLF, evidence comes from the fact that it can function referentially, licensing nominal ellipsis (cf. Asiimwe et al. 2023 for Rukiga)

(41) *baṛa-*(kaa) (kutt-waa)*
big-KAA dog-WAA

'the big one'/'the big dog'

Magahi DS

- I will adopt the RRC analysis for Magahi
- Consider the full RCs here

(42) a. *kutt-waa* *je* *baṛa* *h-ai* *uu/se* *(kutt-waa)* *sundar* *hai*
dog-CLF.DEF REL big is-ALLOC 3SG/CORR dog-CLF.DEF beautiful is

'The dog that is big is beautiful.'

b. *je* *laṛakii* *kal* *ay-al-ai* *ha-l* *uu* *bahoot* *sundar*
REL girl yesterday come-PTCP-ALLOC AUX-PST 3SG very beautiful
hai
is

'The girl who came yesterday is very beautiful.' (Chandra 2013: 17)

(43) *ham* *kitab-aa* *je* *raam* *likh-al-k-ai* *paṛhaliai*
I book-CLF.DEF REL Ram write-PST-TRANS-ALLOC read

'I read the book that Ram wrote.'

Magahi DS

- Magahi RRCs can also occur with *-kaa*
- The RRCs must be big enough to include subjects, objects, and adverbs

(44) a. *tut-al-kaa gilaas-waa jamin par bikharal hal*
break-PTCP-KAA glass-WAA floor on scattered was

'The broken glass was scattered on the floor.'

b. *abhi bol rah-al-kaa laṛak-waa moorkh hai*
now talk AUX-PTCP-KAA boy-WAA idiot is

'The boy talking right now is an idiot.'

Magahi DS

- The RRCs must be smaller than full relative clauses, however, since they cannot include allocutive agreement
- Alok (2020, 2021) argues that allocutive agreement is realized in FinP

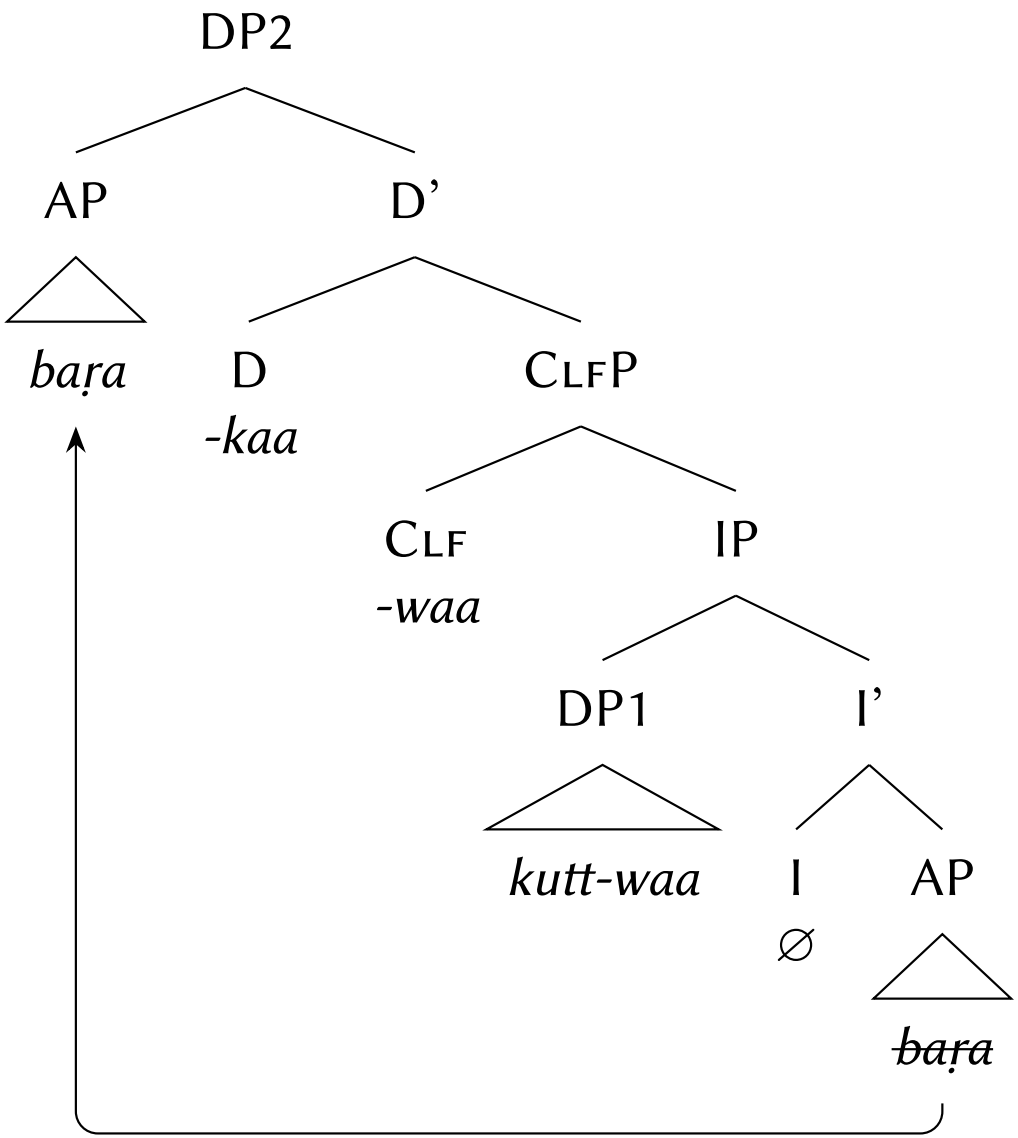
(45) a. *ham raam ke dwaara likh-al-(*ai)-kaa kitab-waa paṛhaliai*
1SG Ram GEN by write-PTCP-*ALLOC-KAA book-WAA read

'I read the book written by Ram.'

b. *aam khaa rah-al-(*ai)-kii laṛki-yaa lambii hai*
mango eat AUX-PTCP-*ALLOC-KAA girl-WAA tall is

'The girl eating a mango is tall.'

Magahi DS



- Thus, the structure I'm proposing for Magahi is based on Alexiadou (2014); Alexiadou & Wilder (1998)
- This approach to DS is also adopted for Maltese (Winchester 2019), Kipsigis (Kouneli 2019), and Rukiga (Asiimwe et al. 2023)
- The possibility for a classifier to introduce a relative clause has also been proposed for Nuosu Yi (Jiang & Hu 2016) and Cantonese (Matthews & Yip 2013)

Determiner Spreading: Indefinites

- Greek, Swedish, and Hebrew all have definite DS, but not indefinite DS
- Recall that some northern Scandinavian dialects have indefinite DS

(46) **Norwegian, Senja Dialect**
ei stor ei fin ei seng
a big a fine a bed

'a big nice bed' (Anderssen et al. 2019: 14)

- Indefinite DS in the Senja dialect shows similarities to Greek DS
- This example shows it is recursive

Determiner Spreading: Indefinites

- Indefinite DS is also restricted to predicative adjectives

(47) * *en tidligere en skuespiller*
a former a actor

Intended: 'a former actor'

- However, Anderssen et al. (2019) propose that the "extra" indefinite articles are nominal proforms
- Though the data is similar, Alexiadou (2006, 2014) generally argues for separating definite and indefinite DS

Magahi Indefinite DS

- Despite this, Magahi indefinite DS looks identical to definite DS
- Indefinite DS is recursive

(48) *hamra* *choṭ-kaa* *moṭ-kaa* *kutta* *chahi*
1SG.OBL small-D fat-D dog want

'I want a small fat dog.'

Magahi Indefinite DS

- Non-predicative adjectives are still disallowed

(49) *ek tho barthamaan-(*kaa) masṭar uhãã hotai*
one CLF present-KAA teacher there will.be

A current teacher will be there.'

Magahi Indefinite DS

- The restrictive interpretation is still required
- Consider the following two kinds of snakes – cobras, which are always poisonous, and kraits, which may or may not be poisonous

(50) a. *ham ek tho jaharil-(*kaa) gehũũa sããp dekhaliai*
1SG one CLF poisonous-*D wheat snake saw

'I saw a poisonous cobra.'

b. *ham ek tho jaharil-kaa krait dekhaliai*
1SG one CLF poisonous-D krait saw

'I saw a poisonous krait.'

Magahi Indefinite DS

- The connection to RRCs is still maintained in indefinites

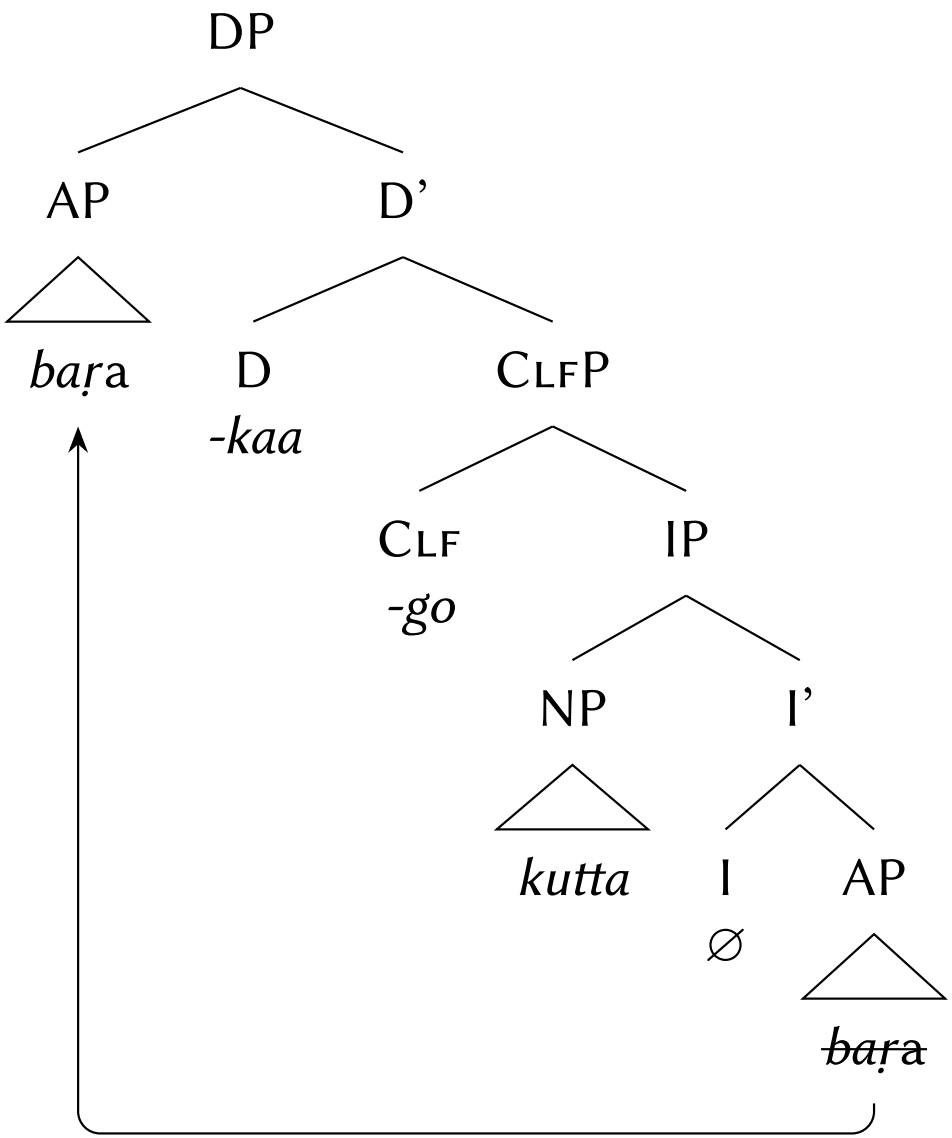
(51) *thoṛa tatka ban-ail-kaa aam ke ras*
little fresh make-PTCP-D mango GEN juice

'a little freshly made mango juice'

(52) *ham du tho tagor ke dwara likh-al-kaa kitaab paṛhaliai*
1SG two CLF Tagore GEN by write-PTCP-D book read

'I read two books written by Tagore.'

Magahi Indefinite DS



- Thus, I propose the same structure for the indefinites

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Two main questions:
- How can multiple determiners be compatible with one referent?
- Where does the restrictive interpretation come from?

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Etxeberria & Giannakidou (2019) answer the first question by looking at non-saturating uses of D

(53) a. *mutil bakoitz-a*
boy each-DET.SG

'each student' [Basque]

b. *o kathe fittis*
DET.SG every student

'each student' [Greek]

- They propose that here the determiner performs a domain restricting function

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Magahi *-waa*, like the Greek and Basque determiners, also performs a domain restricting function in quantification

(54) *har* *laṛak-waa* *aam* *khailkai*
every boy-CLF.DEF mango ate

'Each boy ate a mango.'

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Etxeberria & Giannakidou (2019) propose the following types for D:

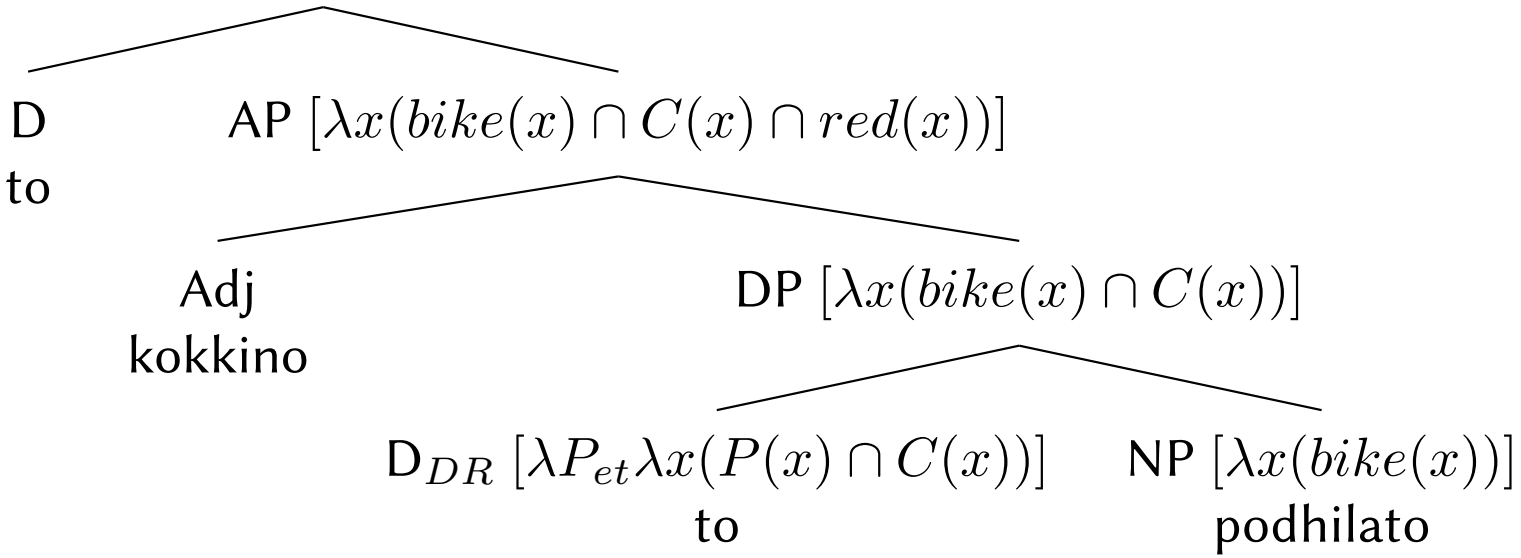
(55) **Types for D**
Saturating: $et \rightarrow e$ (iota)
Non-saturating: $et, ett \rightarrow et, ett$ (D_{DR} on Q); $et \rightarrow et$ (D_{DR} on NP or AP)

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

(56) Greek

a. *to* *kokkino* *to* *podhilato*
the red the bike

b. DP $[\iota(\lambda x(bike(x)) \cap C(x) \cap red(x))]$



- C is an anaphoric variable, and Etxeberria & Giannakidou (2019) propose that a non-singleton requirement on C derives the restrictive reading associated with DS

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- I will take a different route to deriving the restrictive interpretation by using focus alternatives (Rooth 1992)
- The connection between DS and focus has been highlighted before (Kolliakou 2004; Tsakali 2008)
- The syntax proposed here involves the AP moving to SpecDP, which I will argue is a focus position

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- SpecDP is also argued to be a focus position in other EIA langauges (Bangla Syed 2015; Maithili Kumaran et al. 2025)
- The standard word order in Magahi is #-CLF-AP-NP (tiin tho naya kitaab)
- The following examples show that the adjective can move to the DP-initial (but not clause initial) position to be focused

(57) a.

hamra	*naya*	*tiin*	*tho*	*kitaab*	*chahi*
1SG.OBL	new	three	CLF	book	want

'I want three NEW$_{FOC}$ books.'

b.

* *naya*	*hamra*	*tiin*	*tho*	*kitaab*	*chahi*
new	1SG.OBL	three	CLF	book	want

Intended: 'I want three NEW$_{FOC}$ books.'

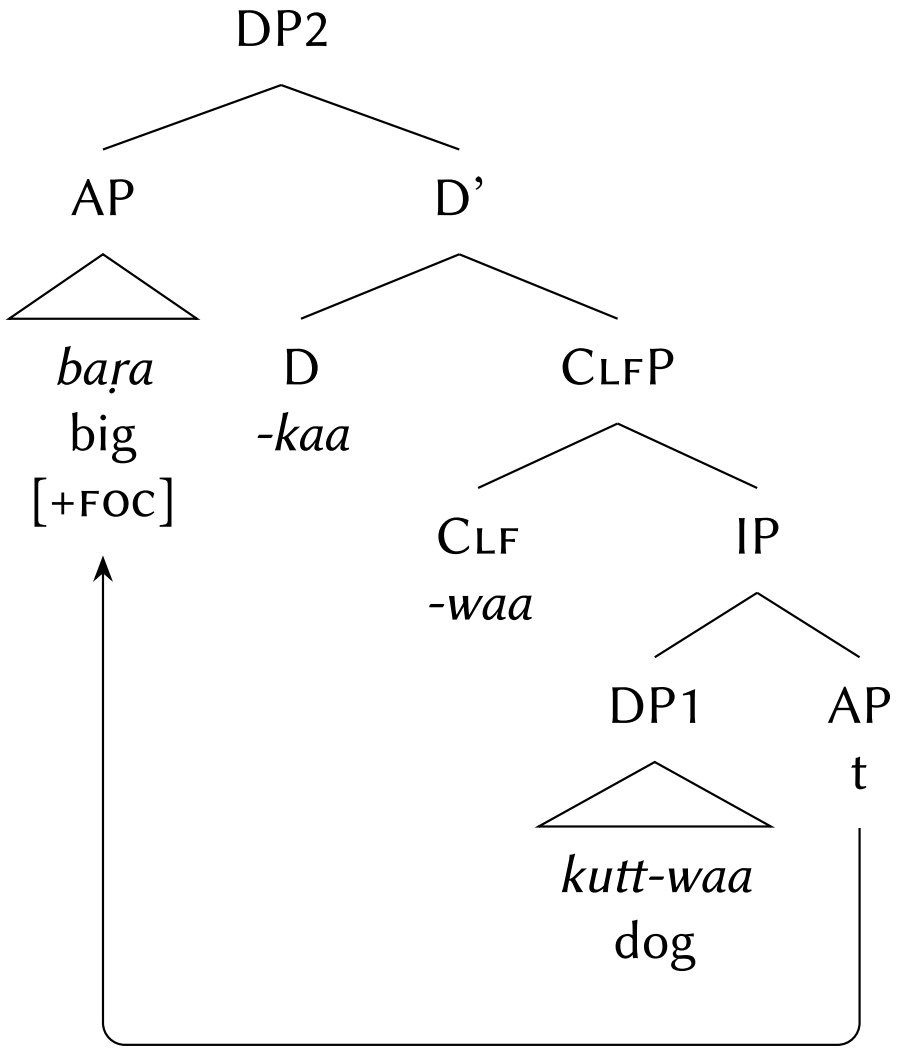
Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Focus is sensitive to alternatives
- For a focused element ϕ with antecedent k:

(58) **Alternative Licensing** (Rooth 2014)
$\phi \sim k$ requires that the semantic element k is either:
(i) an element of $[\![\phi]\!]^f$ that is distinct from $[\![\phi]\!]^o$, or
(ii) a subset of $[\![\phi]\!]^f$ of cardinality at least two that includes $[\![\phi]\!]^o$.

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

(59)



Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- This gives the following semantic values:

Ordinary semantic values:
$[\![DP1]\!]^o = \lambda x.dog(x) \wedge C(x)$
$[\![AP]\!]^o = \lambda x.big(x)$
$[\![DP2]\!]^o = \iota x.big(x) \wedge dog(x) \wedge C(x)$

Focus values:
$[\![DP1]\!]^f = \{\lambda x.dog(x) \wedge C(x)\}$
$[\![AP]\!]^f = \{\lambda x.P(x) \mid P : E \rightarrow propositions\}$
$[\![DP2]\!]^f = \{\iota x.P(x) \wedge dog(x) \wedge C(x) \mid P : E \rightarrow propositions\}$

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Then, Rooth's licensing condition tells us that this instance of DS is acceptable if k is a subset of $[\![DP2]\!]^f$ of cardinality at least two that includes $[\![DP2]\!]^o$.
- $[\![DP2]\!]^f = \{\iota x.P(x) \wedge dog(x) \wedge C(x) \mid P : E \rightarrow propositions\}$

(60) a. *#Ham e-go kutta dekhaliai. baṛa-kaa kutt-waa bhag gelai.*
I one-CLF dog saw big-D dog-CLF.DEF ran went

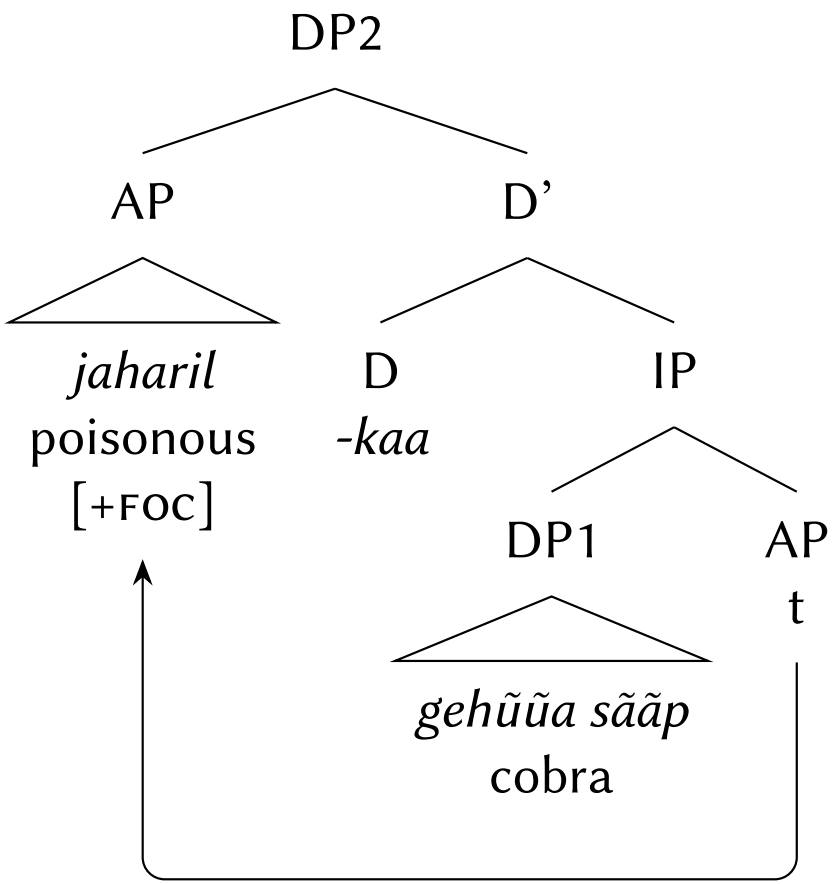
Intended: 'I saw a/one dog. The big dog ran away.'

b. *Ham du-go kutta dekhaliai. baṛa-kaa kutt-waa bhag gelai.*
I two-CLF dog saw big-D dog-CLF.DEF ran went

'I saw two dogs. The big dog ran away.'

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

(61)



Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- We get the following semantic values:

The ordinary semantic values:
$[\![DP1]\!]^o = \lambda x.cobra(x)$
$[\![AP]\!]^o = \lambda x.poisonous(x)$
$[\![DP2]\!]^o = \lambda x.poisonous(x) \wedge cobra(x)$

The focus values:
$[\![DP1]\!]^f = \{\lambda x.cobra(x)\}$
$[\![AP]\!]^f = \{\lambda x.P(x) \mid P : E \rightarrow propositions\}$
$[\![DP2]\!]^f = \{\lambda x.P(x) \wedge cobra(x) \mid P : E \rightarrow propositions\}$

Determiner Spreading: Semantics

- Rooth's alternative licensing condition requires that k is an element of $[\![DP2]\!]^f$ that is distinct from $[\![DP1]\!]^o$
- So, the only issue is when NP ∩ AP = NP
- For 'a poisonous cobra', we run into exactly this issue
- Since all cobras are poisonous, the licensing condition is not satisfied

Conclusion

- Magahi shows "Greek-type" DS in both definite and indefinite DPs
- A uniform syntax can account for both
- The semantic effects of DS can be achieved with domain restriction and focus alternatives

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Approaches to Greek DS

- Alexiadou (2014); Alexiadou & Wilder (1998): RRCs
- Campos & Stavrou (2004): Pred heads
- Panagiotidis & Marinis (2011): DP Predication
- Lekakou & Szendrői (2012): close apposition

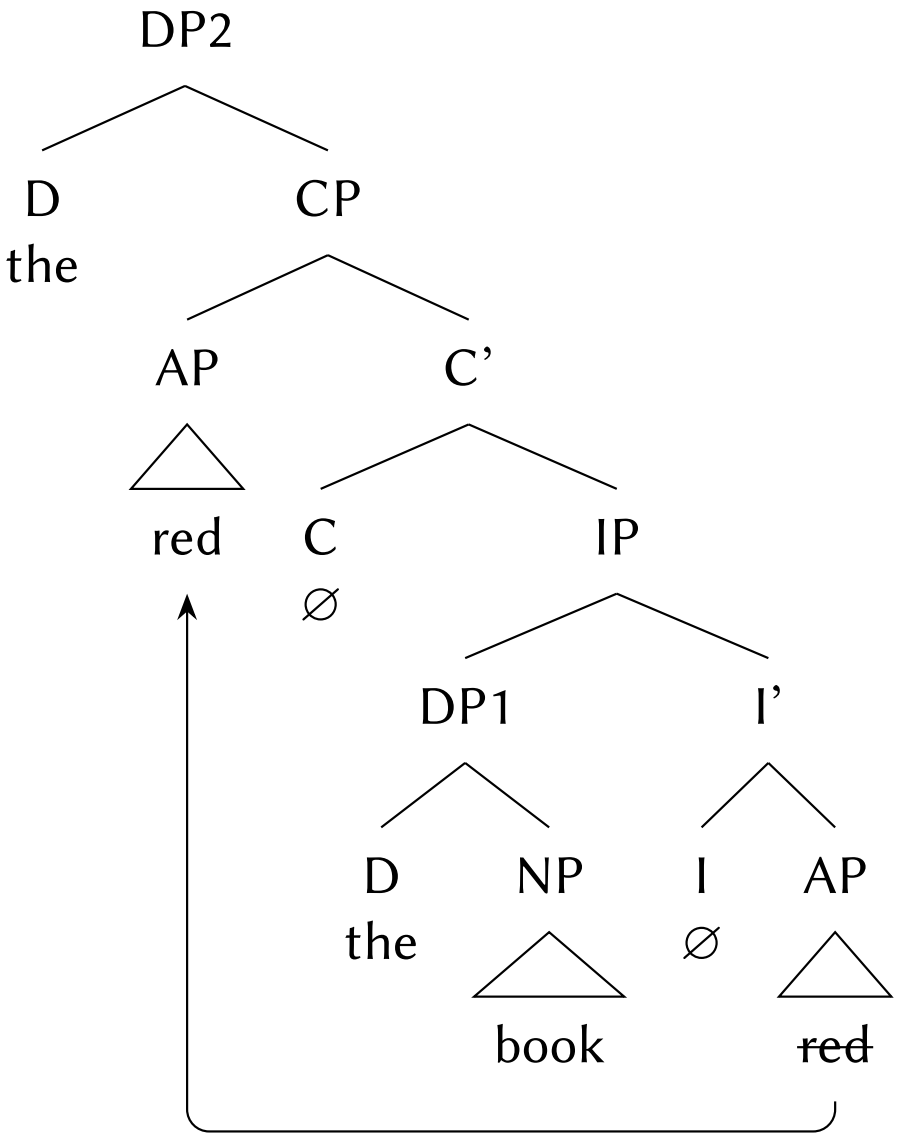
Magahi DS

- Ignoring the word order for now, Magahi *-kaa* is unlikely to realize a Pred head since the classifier occurs below it
- As for the Close Appostion and DP Predication approaches, the free word order is a central characteristic
- However, Magahi only allows for word order alternations with the noun with special intonation

(62) *kutt-waa* **(,)* *baṛa-kaa*
dog-CLF.DEF , big-D

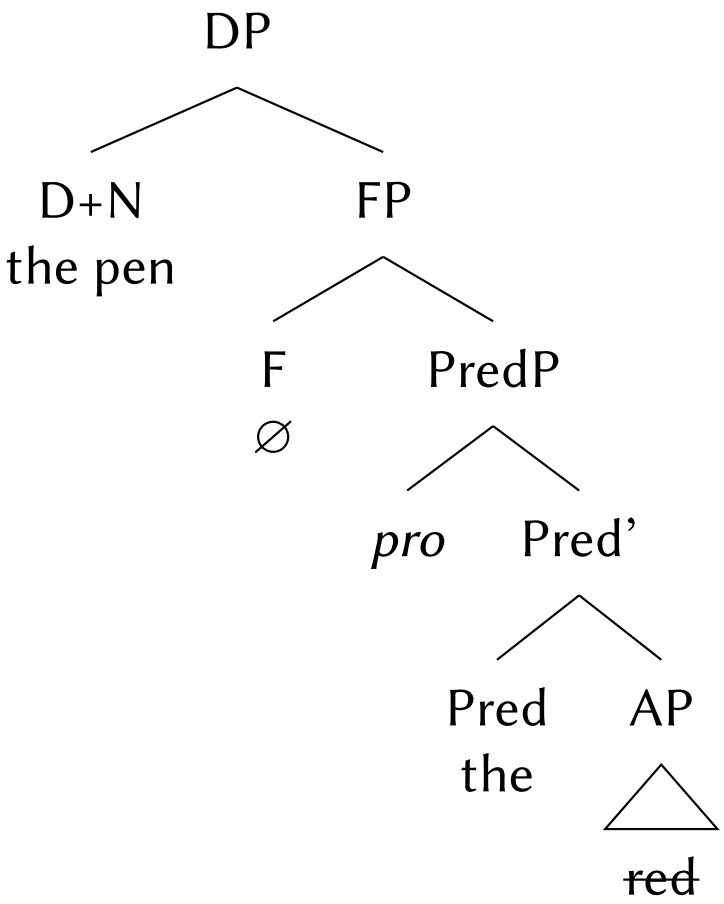
'the dog, the big one'

RRCs (Alexiadou 2014; Alexiadou & Wilder 1998)



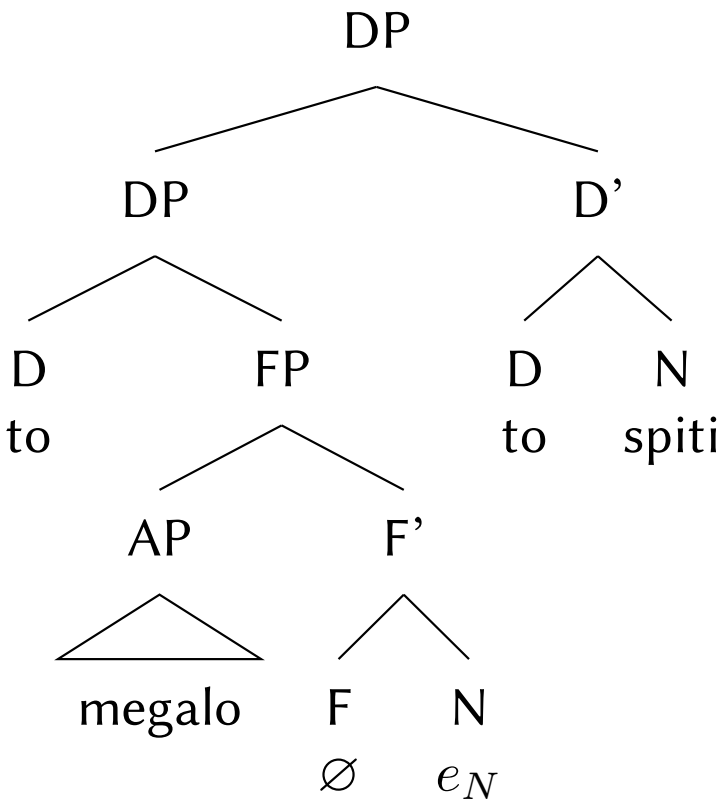
- captures recursivity
- captures predicative source of adjectives
- restrictive interpretation claimed to be a property of RRC

Predication Phrases (Campos & Stavrou 2004)



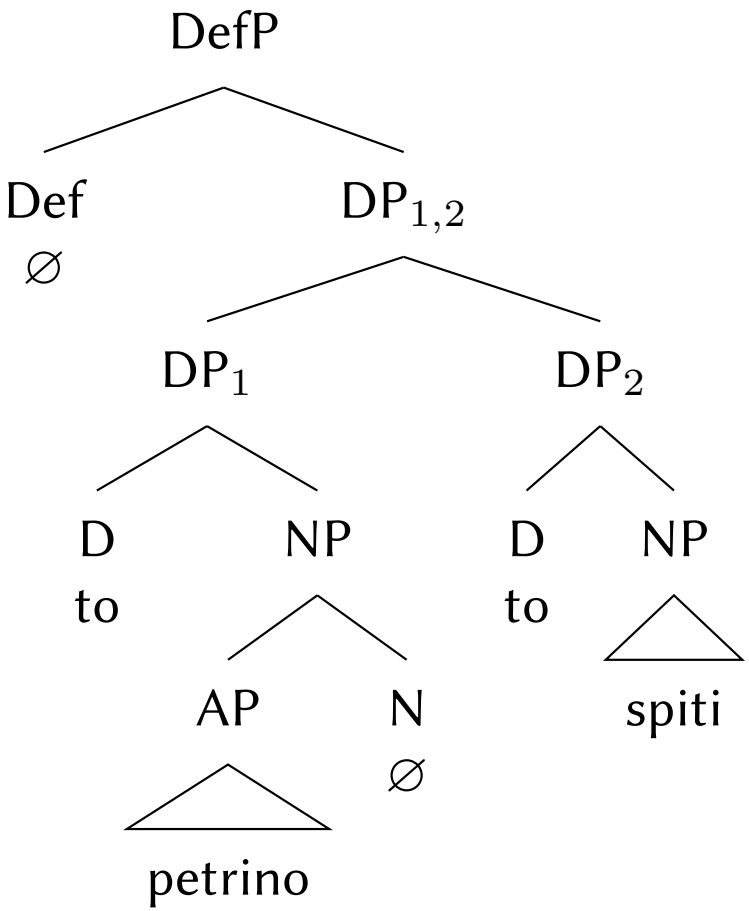
- does not capture recursivity
- captures predicative source of adjectives
- does not straightforwardly account for the restrictive interpretation

DP Predication (Panagiotidis & Marinis 2011)



- captures recursivity
- does not capture predicative source of adjectives
- does not capture restrictive interpretation
- allows for free word order

Close Apposition (Lekakou & Szendrői 2012)



- recursivity?
- does not capture predicative source of adjectives
- restrictive interpretation captures with additional semantic assumptions
- allows for free words order