Alessandra Giorgi and Giuseppe Longobardi’s important study of the argument structure of lexical projections, in particular of Noun Phrases, makes substantial advances in this relatively neglected area. Working within a Government and Binding framework, the authors present strong new arguments in favour of the existence of empty categories, and evidence for the correct understanding of word order parameters and of Chomsky’s Projection Principle. In particular, they elaborate and discuss a number of tests intended to define under which lexical and syntactic conditions an empty pronominal subject may or must occur in a Noun Phrase. The levels of structural attachment of the arguments of a head noun are carefully established by supporting assumptions made in this domain with independent evidence.

As well as its theoretical advances, this book provides a descriptive analysis of nominal structure in Romance, and compares it with corresponding structure in Germanic languages. It offers a valuable introduction to Italian phrase structure.
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THE SYNTAX OF NOUN PHRASES

Configuration, parameters and empty categories

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Foreword by Guglielmo Cinque
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Foreword

Alessandra Giorgi’s and Giuseppe Longobardi’s articles collected here are not merely a contribution to the syntax of the N(oun) P(hrase). They provide a general and clear introduction to many areas of Romance syntax and of the theory of empty categories in the ‘principles and parameters’ framework. They should thus be appreciated by both researchers and advanced students interested in these topics.

The specific merits of their contribution are many. For one thing, it is in part as a consequence of these articles, which have been circulating in prepublication form for some years, that the syntax of the NP has become again a central topic of enquiry. In the two decades following Chomsky’s fundamental ‘Remarks on Nominalizations’, the NP had received surprisingly little attention in the literature, despite its centrality and complexity, inferior only to that of the clause itself.

Another important outcome of their work is the unprecedented variety of aspects of the internal structure of NPs which have been brought under analysis and illuminated, often for the first time.

Third and foremost is the quantity of genuine contributions to linguistic theory which emerge from this in-depth analysis of the NP.

In this brief presentation, I will limit myself to mentioning the particular theoretical contributions which, to my mind, are among the most significant results of their detailed work on NP structure. As will become clear, they are quite exceptional in number and quality.

The first concerns the internal articulation of the NP. On the basis of systematic subject/object asymmetries in the domains of Binding Theory and pronominal binding (by a quantifier), Giorgi constructs a solid case for hypothesizing a fully hierarchical structure within the NP.

From these asymmetries she also draws decisive evidence that the notion of c-command relevant to Binding Theory is the one making reference to ‘the first branching category’ (Reinhart 1976) rather than ‘the
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first maximal projection’ (Aoun and Sportiche 1982); an important confirmation of Chomsky’s (1986b, 8) conjecture.

Besides motivating the transparency for c-command of NP-internal Case-marking prepositions (in Italian) and the existence of ergative Ns, chapter 1 contains another important theoretical contribution: an empirical argument to favour the ‘least Complete Functional Complex’ of Chomsky (1986a) as the local domain for the Binding principles A and B over previous definitions of that domain.

Longobardi’s analysis of extraction from NP in chapter 2 also contains a number of non-trivial implications for linguistic theory. The obligatory movement through Spec in extraction from NP in Romance, motivated on ample empirical grounds, is shown to follow naturally from a fundamental difference in the government properties of Ns and Vs. The analysis also provides a persuasive argument for the conclusion, recently adopted by many investigators, that head government must be satisfied ‘over and above antecedent government’ for any non-pronominal empty category (cf. Chomsky 1986b, 83).

Longobardi also shows that the Spec of VP-adjoined maximal projections must not be taken to be properly governed (head-governed) although the maximal projections themselves are properly governed.

Two new treatments with wide-range typological implications of Ross’s Left Branch Condition and Emonds’s and Williams’s principles blocking further canonical recursion on the non-recursive side conclude the chapter.

In chapter 3, Giorgi and Longobardi lay out a parametric theory of word-order differences between the Romance and Germanic NP. They show how various apparently unrelated differences can be traced to a single abstract directionality parameter: the different underlying position of the subject (on a left branch under Spec, in Germanic, and on a right branch in Romance). Their analysis opens up the possibility that the directionality parameter extends to the other maximal projections, with very important typological consequences for the analysis of the two language families.

At the end of the chapter, Giorgi and Longobardi single out some further, minor, parameters across Germanic and Romance which concern the categorial status of the possessive.

In this chapter, and more systematically in chapter 4, ample and fine-grained evidence is discussed for another theoretically relevant question: the presence of a PRO subject within NPs; a question often and
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inconclusively debated in the previous literature. They manage to show that a PRO subject can at least be present within the NP, and, for a particular class of Ns, even that it must be present.

As this cursory review of only its most important contributions suggests, Alessandra Giorgi and Giuseppe Longobardi’s volume will constitute a mandatory reading for anyone interested in the properties of NP structure. But it is also not hazardous to forecast that it will influence many aspects of our current conception of linguistic theory.

Guglielmo Cinque
Venice, 20 April 1989
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