

The morphosyntax of derived proper nouns

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Not all derived proper nouns behave equally. For instance, derived surnames seemingly “regularize” in their inflection compared to the corresponding common nouns.

(1) a. Parents enjoy taking their {children/*childs} to the park.

b. Our best friends, the {Childs/*Children}, recently moved in next door.

On the other hand, speakers’ judgments can be less rigid with other types of derived names, many of which maintain a clearer semantic connection to their common noun counterparts.

(2) a. Peter Parker’s accident dealt a tough blow to the aspiring {Spider-Mans/??Spider-Men} of the city.

b. There are displays full of Mickey {Mouses/??Mice} in every Disney Store.

The examples in 2 call to mind the dichotomy between the team names *Toronto Maple Leafs* and *Minnesota Timberwolves* (Marcus et al. 1995, Pinker 1999). What determines the availability of the irregular plural?

Assuming that DP is a phase boundary, I propose that the different plural forms are due to the attachment site of Num (Citko 2014, Radford 2004). Only a Num head that merges within the DP can access the idiosyncrasies of the root (*Timberwolves*, *Spider-Men*). If, however, Num attaches after the DP has been closed, it is realized as the regular plural (*Maple Leafs*, *Spider-Mans*). Where Num attaches depends on whether plurality precedes or follows conversion to a proper noun. *Maple Leafs* is derived from *Maple Leaf*, the national symbol of Canada, not from the common noun *maple leaf*, a fact that is reflected in the official team name: *Toronto Maple Leaf Hockey Club*. On the other hand, *Timberwolves* must be derived from the common noun *timberwolf* since *Timberwolf* as a proper noun is not independently meaningful, nor does it appear in larger compounds such as **Timberwolf Team Store*. Importantly, this proposal is compatible with multiple instances of Num. With *Maple Leafs*, the lower Num is null, while the higher Num is realized as [s]. With *Timberwolves*, the lower Num is realized as [z], while the higher Num is null since there is already a plural morpheme.

Num is one of many heads that may merge above the DP in another cycle of functional structure. For example, categorizing heads such as *v* (*FedEx it*) and *a* (*Shakespearean*) are possible, suggesting that *n* is as well. I assume, based on Ritter’s (1993) argument, that the locus of gender is *n* rather than an independent functional projection, which sheds light on the following Romance data.

(3) *la garza* ‘the heron.FEM’ → *las garzas* ‘the herons.FEM’ (Spanish)

Garza → *los Garza* ‘the Garzas’

(4) *il conte* ‘count.MASC’ → *i conti* ‘the counts.MASC’ (Italian)

Conte → *le Conte* ‘the Contes.FEM’

As proper nouns, both *Garza* and *Conte* obligatorily raise to D (Longobardi 1994, 1996). After the DP has been closed, another *n* is merged with its gender feature; if unspecified, the surname appears with the masculine article by default, whereas [feminine] on *n* is necessarily referential (*le Conte* cannot be used generically, but *i Conte* can). Next, Num merges, which is always null with surnames in Romance (**los Garzas*, **i Conti*). This phenomenon may be taken as further evidence that derived surnames behave differently from other types of derived proper nouns (including given names), perhaps due to a process of pronominalization rather than nominalization. Unlike surnames, derived given names in Romance do have overt gender and number morphology, suggesting that a different operation is at play: *Ángel*, *Ángela*, *los Ángeles*, *las Ángelas*.

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