

# Agree and Minimality in the DP

## The challenge of the *Cazzo-of-N* construction in Italian

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This paper discusses a previously unnoticed binominal construction from Italian, termed the *Cazzo-of-N* construction (CoN), consisting of an expressive noun ( $N_1$ ), prepositional *di* ‘of’, and a noun contributing the descriptive content ( $N_2$ ). Unexpectedly,  $\phi$ -agreement of the determiner heading the complex DP obligatorily goes with the structurally lower  $N_2$  in apparent violation of Minimality, presenting a challenge for versions of minimalist grammar (Chomsky 1995, 2000) where  $\phi$ -feature co-variation is uniformly the result of Agree. This paper identifies core features of the construction on which it bases two alternative accounts to resolve the Minimality-disobeying agreement pattern, the first arguing for incorporation of the  $N_1$  due to deficiency, the second for a functional layer hiding the  $N_1$ .

### 1. Introduction

The goal of this paper is to investigate a previously undescribed binominal construction of Italian. I term this construction the *Cazzo-of-N* construction (CoN). In linear order, the CoN is formed by a determiner, an expressive noun, the preposition *di* ‘of’ and the noun contributing the descriptive content. This is shown in (1), where *una* is the determiner, *cazzo* is the expressive noun  $N_1$ , *di* is prepositional *di* ‘of’, and *banana* is the descriptive noun  $N_2$ .<sup>1</sup>

- (1) Una cazzo di banana.  
a dick of banana  
‘A fucking banana.’

The overall meaning added by *cazzo di* in (1) can be equated to English *fucking* or *damn*. What is of primary interest in this paper, is the pattern of nominal concord (to which I will henceforth

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<sup>1</sup>Italian and German data are my own unless otherwise indicated. I am a native speaker of both. My Italian is what can be called the Southern Standard of the Tuscan dialect. The general patterns were checked with other native speakers.

refer to as *agreement* in line with the theoretical assumption that it is driven by the operation Agree). The regular pattern of concord in Italian has the determiner and adjectives co-vary in  $\phi$ -features with the noun. This is shown for a simple noun phrase in (2).

- (2) I            saporit-i    fungh-i            porc-in-i            maremman-i.  
 the.M.PL tasty-M.PL mushroom-M.PL edible.boletus-M.PL Maremman-M.PL  
 ‘The tasty Maremman porcini mushrooms.’

In the case of a simple binominal, such as ‘teacher of math’, all elements which linearly precede the prepositional element co-vary with the  $N_1$ , *insegnante* ‘teacher’ in (3).

- (3) Il/\*La            bellissim-o/\*-a            insegnante    di matematic-a.  
 the.M.SG/\*F.SG handsome.SUP-M.SG/\*-F.SG teacher.M.SG of maths-F.SG  
 ‘The very handsome teacher of maths.’

The CoN, however, exhibits a different and unexpected pattern: the determiner obligatorily co-varies in  $\phi$ -features with the descriptive noun ( $N_2$ ). This is further shown in (4), where the  $N_1$  *cazzo* ‘dick’ remains masculine singular and the determiner is feminine plural as the  $N_2$  *banana* ‘banana’.

- (4) Dell-e        cazz-o        di banan-e.  
 PART-F.PL dick-M.SG of banana-F.PL  
 ‘Some fucking bananas.’

Furthermore, this is true through all permutations of gender and number and irrespective of the  $\phi$ -features of the various  $N_1$ s that can be chosen, cf. (5a) for a feminine singular  $N_1$  and (5b) for a masculine plural noun.

- (5) a. Un        minchi-a di fake.  
 a.M.SG dick-F.SG of fake.M.SG  
 ‘A fucking fake.’  
 b. Un’        accident-i di banan-a  
 a.F.SG curse-M.PL of banana-F.SG  
 ‘A fucking banana.’

The theoretical challenge of this pattern consists in the fact that application of the coordination test indicates that the preposition and the  $N_2$  form a constituent to the exclusion of the  $N_1$ . In most cases the preposition *di* is repeated, and in some cases, as in (6), even obligatorily so.<sup>2</sup>

- (6) Mi        hanno    proprio rotto    [ste cazzo di mosche e \*(di) zanzare]!  
 me.DAT have.3PL really    annoyed these dick of flies    and of    mosquitoes  
 ‘They have really got on my nerves these fucking flies and mosquitoes!’

<sup>2</sup>Non-repetition of the preposition is rather restricted and seems to be limited to cases where there is a unitary reading of the two conjoined elements, as two people being late together, rather than being late independently of one another. An example that may fit to such a scenario is given in (i).

- (i) Ma sti        cazzo di Doliana e    (di) Aderucci ’ndo stanno?!  
 but those dick    of Doliana and    of Aderucci where be.3PL  
 ‘Where are those fucking Doliana and Aderucci?’

Based on this fact, it is plausible to attribute the CoN the preliminary structure given in (7).

- (7) [ D[ $\phi$ :ab] [ N<sub>1</sub>[ $\phi$ :cd] [ of N<sub>2</sub>[ $\phi$ :ab] ] ] ]

Taking the minimalist view that all systematic co-variation of morpho-syntactic features is the result of the operation Agree, and given that Agree is subject to Minimality (e.g. in terms of closest c-command, see below), the CoN is problematic. To see why precisely we must look at the definition of Agree, given in (8) (cf. Chomsky 2000:122–123) (cf. Zeijlstra 2012).

- (8) *Agree*  
 $\alpha$  can agree with  $\beta$  iff:
- a.  $\alpha$  carries at least one unvalued and uninterpretable feature and  $\beta$  carries a matching interpretable and valued feature.
  - b.  $\alpha$  c-commands  $\beta$
  - c.  $\beta$  is the closest goal to  $\alpha$
  - d.  $\beta$  bears an unvalued uninterpretable feature.

*Closeness* in (8c) is defined as follows (cf. Chomsky 2000:122):

- (9) A matching feature G is closest to P if there is no G' in the c-command domain of P such that G is in the c-command domain of G'.

The CoN relates in the following way.  $\alpha$  is the probe situated on the determiner.  $\beta$  is the N<sub>2</sub> as it is the noun with which the determiner co-varies. The matching condition (8a) is satisfied as D bears an uninterpretable  $\phi$ -feature [ $*\phi : *$ ],<sup>3</sup> and the N<sub>2</sub> bears a matching set of  $\phi$ -features. The c-command condition (8b) is satisfied considering, e.g., that D can embed two coordinated constituents containing an expressive noun. This suggests that in the simple case D embeds (and therefore c-commands) the constituent containing N<sub>1</sub>, *di* and N<sub>2</sub>. An example is given in (10).

- (10) Le due cazzo di banane e tre cazzo di pesche che stavano in tavola (le  
 the two dick of bananas and three dick of peaches that were on table them  
 hai mangiate te?).  
 have.2SG eaten you  
 ‘The two fucking bananas and (the) three fucking peaches that were on the table – did you eat them?’

The minimality condition (8c) is problematic. The N<sub>1</sub> is closer to D than the N<sub>2</sub>: the N<sub>1</sub> asymmetrically c-commands the N<sub>2</sub>, which is contained in the constituent also containing *di*.

What is often termed the Activity Condition, (8d), may come to our rescue here. It is not immediately clear whether the N<sub>1</sub> bears an undischarged structure-building (uninterpretable) feature at the time in the derivation when D probes for  $\phi$ -features. However, the problem holds equally for the N<sub>2</sub> and for any other noun in Italian as case, the primary suspect, is not morphologically marked on nouns throughout the language. Assuming then that Ns as well as Ds in Italian carry an unvalued syntactic case feature, even though it is realised overtly only on pronouns, we are back to the problem of violating the Minimality requirement of (8c).

<sup>3</sup>I follow the Leipzig notation for structure-building features to avoid the discussion on the interpretability of feature (cf. Heck & Müller 2007). [ $*F*$ ] is a probe feature that triggers Agree, [ $\bullet F \bullet$ ] is a feature triggering (internal or external) Merge.

In section 2, I review the general properties of the CoN. In section 3, I discuss the range of analyses that might explain why this construction seems to violate Minimality on the surface, ultimately aiming at rescue this principle of grammar. The two analyses which I focus on are the following: In the first analysis, I propose that the  $N_1$  is structurally deficient with the effect that it must incorporate into the prepositional element at a point in the derivation where incorporation will render the  $N_1$  invisible for later probing. In the second analysis, I propose that there is a designated functional layer with which the  $N_1$  must combine prior to combining with the  $N_2$ . This functional layer ensures that the  $N_1$  receives the right expressive interpretation and renders the  $N_1$  too deeply embedded to intervene in later probing. In section 4, I compare and evaluate the two competing analyses. In section 5, I conclude.

## 2. General Properties of the CoN and differences to other binominals

In this section, I discuss some of the properties I deem to be core to the *cazzo-of-N* construction. In particular, I show that the CoN differs in meaning as well as in its structural properties from other known binominal constructions such as the Qualitative Binominal NP (QBNP, also known as N-of-an-N, cf. den Dikken 2006), the kind-of-N construction (KoN, Zamparelli 1998) and the Pseudopartitive construction (PsP, cf. van Riemsdijk 1998).

### 2.1. Meaning

The semantics of the CoN differs from other constructions in that the  $N_1$  is an *expressive* in the sense of Potts (2007). Informally, the overall semantic contribution of the  $N_1$  corresponds to an emphatic attitude by the speaker towards the expression that follows it as well as towards the situation as a whole. The attitude can range from anger to amazement. The  $N_1$  of the CoN can be shown to fulfil all of Potts' formal tests for being an expressive, i.e. it exhibits the properties of *independence*, *nondisplaceability*, *perspective dependence*, *descriptive ineffability*, *immediacy* and *repeatability*. The *independence* property refers to the fact that the expressive content of the  $N_1$  does not and cannot affect the descriptive content of the  $N_2$ . This is to say that the descriptive content of (11a) and (11b) are exactly the same, namely just a fly.

- (11) a. Una cazzo di mosca.  
       a dick of fly  
       'A fucking fly.'
- b. Una mosca.  
       a fly  
       'A fly.'

The *nondisplaceability* property refers to the fact that the emphatic attitude expressed by the expressive is invariably anchored to the utterance situation. For example, in (12), the expressive content of the  $N_1$  is restricted to the moment of utterance and cannot refer to previous times the bottle was dripping as the utterer was pouring the wine. In fact, he might feel that way only now that he is saying it while being relaxed about the situations before.

- (12) Ogni volta che verso del vino, la cazzo di bottiglia gocciola.  
 every time that pour.1SG PART wine the dick of bottle drip.3SG  
 ‘Whenever I pour wine, the damn bottle drips.’

The *perspective dependence* property refers to the fact that, though in general the perspective is the speaker’s, it can sometimes also be a reflection of some other person’s perspective. In (13), for instance, *cazzo* reflects the speaker’s father’s emotionally heightened state towards the neighbour’s dogs.

- (13) Il mi babbo m’ ha detto di non giocare=ci più con quei cazzo di canacci  
 the my dad me has told C not play=with anymore with those dick of dogs.PEJ  
 del vicino.  
 of.the neighbour  
 ‘My dad has told me not to play with the neighbour’s fucking dogs anymore.’

The *descriptive ineffability* property refers to the fact that speakers are never fully satisfied with the paraphrases that they can give to expressive terms by using descriptive terms. The *immediacy* property further refers to the fact that the expressive content is delivered by the expressive term the moment it is uttered and that this cannot be cancelled by negating it. This can be seen in (14).

- (14) Il tuo cazzo di cane mi ha morso ieri. (# Ma oggi non è un cazzo di cane  
 the your dick of dog me has bitten yesterday but today not is a EXPR of dog  
 perché è stato bravo oggi.)  
 because is been good today  
 ‘Your damn dog bit me yesterday. (# But he’s no damn dog today because he behaved today.)

Finally, the *repeatability* property refers to the fact that repeating an expressive term is not redundant but rather strengthens the emotive content, cf. (15a). Repeating a phrase such as *sono furioso* ‘I’m mad’ in (15b) feels redundant even though it adds arguably the same overall meaning as *cazzo* in (15a).

- (15) a. Cazzo, mi sono dimenticato le cazzo di chiavi nella mia cazzo di  
 dick me.DAT be.1SG forgotten the dick of keys in.the my dick of  
 macchina!  
 car  
 ‘Fuck, I forgot my fucking keys in my fucking car.’  
 b. #Sono furioso! Mi sono dimenticato le chiavi. Sono furioso! Sono  
 be.1SG furious me.DAT be.1SG forgotten the keys be.1SG furious be.3PL  
 nella mia macchina. Sono furioso!  
 in.the car be.1SG furious  
 ‘# I’m mad! I forgot my keys. I’m mad! They’re in the car. I’m mad!’

The property of repeatability is an especially distinguishing feature of the expressives that are discussed in this paper. Potts treats the English expressives *damn* and *bastard* alike. For the purposes of this paper, it is important, however, to differentiate between two types: expressive nouns of the type of Italian *cazzo* and *cavolo*, and expressive nouns of the type of Italian *bas-*

*tardo* ‘bastard’ and *merda* ‘shit’. As shown above, the former can function as the  $N_1$  of the CoN and exhibit the property of repeatability. The latter, on the other hand, do not exhibit the property of repeatability and do not occur as the  $N_1$  of the CoN. Rather, they occur as the  $N_1$  of den Dikken’s QBNP (see below). The repeatability of an expressive noun therefore seems to be a necessary condition for occurring as the  $N_1$  of the CoN.

Turning to the comparison to other binominals, one can immediately see how the KoN and the PsP differ from the CoN. The  $N_1$  of the KoN is a *kind*-denoting noun, while the  $N_1$  of the PsP denotes a quantity or a measure. Examples are given in (16a) and (16b), respectively.

- (16) a. Un tipo di ragazza. *Kind-of-N*  
         a type of girl  
         ‘A type of girl.’  
       b. Un monte di ragazze. *Pseudopartitive*  
         a mountain of girls  
         ‘A lot of girls.’

The semantics of the  $N_1$  of the QBNP shares some of the expressive properties of the CoN (cf. e.g. *that bastard Kresge* in Potts 2007). An example is provided in (17).

- (17) Un fiore di ragazza. *Attributive Qualitative Binominal NP*  
         a flower of girl  
         ‘A flower of a girl.’

It fails, however, to fulfil at least the test of *repeatability*, as *fiore* ‘flower’ in (17a) cannot be repeated indefinitely, and the test of *descriptive ineffability*, as there is a describable and intelligible contrast between using e.g. ‘flower’ vs. ‘jewel’, even if only subtly so. Finally, there is a predicational relationship between the  $N_1$  and the  $N_2$  of the QBNP, which is missing in the CoN. The example in (17) can be expressed by a sentence involving a copula, while this is generally impossible for the CoN. The contrast is given in (18), where (18a,c) display sentential versions of the QBNP, and (18b,d) the impossible parallel for the CoN (I do not give a translation as the examples are only understandable in the literal meaning but completely unintelligible with the intended expressive reading).

- (18) a. La ragazza è un fiore.  
         the girl is a flower  
         ‘The girl is a flower.’  
       b. #La mosca è un cazzo.  
         the fly is a dick  
         ‘(Intended) The fly is annoying.’  
       c. È proprio un fiore questa ragazza.  
         is really a flower this girl  
         ‘This girl really is a flower.’  
       d. #È proprio un cazzo questa mosca.  
         is really a dick this fly  
         ‘(Intended) The fly really is annoying.’

## 2.2. Agreement

The difference that is of primary interest in this paper is the pattern exhibited by  $\phi$ -agreement. In the CoN, the determiner agrees in  $\phi$ -features with the  $N_2$  rather than with the  $N_1$ , leaving the  $N_1$  unchanged. This is shown in (19), where the determiner is F.PL as the  $N_2$ , while the  $N_1$  remains M.SG.

- (19) dell-e cazz-o/\*-i di banan-e.  
 PART-F.PL dick-M.SG/\*-M.PL of banana-F.PL  
 ‘Some fucking bananas.’

In the QBNP, the  $N_1$  has the same number as the  $N_2$  and the determiner agrees in all features with the  $N_1$ . In (20), for instance, the  $N_2$  *ragazze* ‘girls’ is plural so the  $N_1$  *fiori* ‘flowers’ must be plural, too. The determiner then picks up number and gender from the  $N_1$  *fiori* ‘flowers’, yielding M.PL agreement.

- (20) Que-i fior-i di ragazz-e.  
 that--M.PL flower-M.PL of girl-F.PL  
 ‘(Lit.) Those flowers of girls.’

In the KoN, the  $N_1$ ’s number is independent of that of the  $N_2$  and the determiner agrees in all features with the  $N_1$ . This is shown in (21), where the determiner has M.SG agreement reflecting the  $\phi$ -features of the  $N_1$ .

- (21) Un tip-o di ragazz-e.  
 a.M.SG type-M.SG of girl-F.PL  
 ‘A type of girls.’

Some  $N_1$ s of the PsP exhibit a slightly more interesting agreement pattern where the verb agrees in gender with the  $N_2$  rather than with the  $N_1$ . In (22), for instance, the participle agreement is F.SG rather than M.SG. This seems similar to the CoN’s agreement pattern. It is still different, however, as the determiner has to agree in full with the  $N_1$ .

- (22) C’ è venut-a/\*-o un/\*un-a sacco di gente  
 there is come-F.SG/\*-M.SG a.M.SG/a-F.SG bag.M.SG of people.F.SG  
 ‘A lot of people came.’

## 2.3. Modification

Another core difference between the CoN and the other binominal constructions is to what extent the  $N_1$  may be modified. In the KoN, the  $N_1$ s may be generally modified by appropriate adjectives. This is shown in (23).

- (23) un tip-o stran-o di macchin-a  
 a-M.SG kind-M.SG strange-M.SG of car-F.SG  
 ‘A strange kind of car.’

The QBNP behaves in the same way as the KoN. The  $N_1$  can be generally modified by appropriate adjectives, cf. (24).

- (24) que-l gioell-o prezios-o di ragazz-a  
 that-M.SG jewel-M.SG precious-M.SG of girl-F.SG  
 ‘That precious jewel of a girl.’

The range of adjectives with which the  $N_1$  of the PsP can be modified is more restricted. In particular, post-nominal adjectives can be more or less acceptable depending on the particular  $N_1$ . For instance, I believe that post-nominal modification of *sacco* ‘bag’ is only possible with its lexical container-denoting meaning, but not in its semantically bleached pseudopartitive meaning. Similarly with *monte* ‘mountain’, this becomes difficult when what is being predicated over is not often shaped like a mountain or pyramid, cf. (25a) vs. (25b).

- (25) a. un monte di gente  
 a mountain of people  
 ‘A lot of people.’  
 b. #un monte enorme di gente  
 a mountain enormous of people  
 ‘(Intended) A massive amount of people.’

What remains generally possible, however, is modification by pre-nominal adjectives, as for example in (26). In this case, the adjective always receives a degree interpretation rather than a literal one.

- (26) un bel monte di gente  
 a.M.SG nice.M.SG mountain.M.SG of people.F.SG  
 ‘(Lit.) A good lot of people.’

The  $N_1$  of the CoN again exhibits a different behaviour. It cannot be modified as a phrase, nor by phrasal adjectives in post-nominal or pre-nominal position.

- (27) a. \*dell-e cazz-o {bel, brutt-o, maledett-o, ...} di banan-e  
 PART-F.PL dick-M.SG nice.M.SG ugly-M.SG damned-M.SG of banana-F.PL  
 b. \*dell-e {bel, brutt-o, maledett-o, ...} cazz-o di banan-e  
 PART-F.PL nice.M.SG ugly-M.SG damned-M.SG dick-M.SG of banana-F.PL

The only way in which the  $N_1$  of the CoN can be modified is by elements that attach derivationally, as e.g. the pejorative *-accio*, and compounding (or incorporating) elements such as *super-* ‘super’, *mega-* ‘mega’ and *gran-* ‘big’.

- (28) dell-e {stra-, super-, mega-, gran-} cazz- {-acci-} -o di banan-e  
 PART-F.PL extra- super- mega- grand- dick- -PEJ- M.SG of banana-F.PL  
 ‘Some (!)-fucking-(!) bananas.’

### 3. Delineating the space of analyses

In the following, the range of possible analyses will be restricted.<sup>4</sup> They will all assume a derivational model of syntax with realisational morphology and adopt the machinery in the literature following Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001). In particular, I will assume (i) that structure is built derivationally and bottom-up by the operations Merge and Agree in order to satisfy featural requirements of (lexical or functional) syntactic material, (ii) that Minimality is an unviolable principle of grammar, and (iii) that all systematic feature co-occurrences are reflexes of the operation Agree.<sup>5</sup> Finally, I will divide the analyses in two camps, one which assumes direct locality between D and the N<sub>2</sub>, and one which assumes that the locality between D and the N<sub>2</sub> is only indirectly warranted as a result of the N<sub>1</sub>'s invisibility for probing.

#### 3.1. D and N<sub>2</sub> are local

One way of accounting for the non-local agreement pattern is by assuming that the determiner and the N<sub>2</sub> actually are local at a given point of the derivation and that Agree applies at exactly that moment. A priori, this scenario may occur either early or late in the derivation.

##### 3.1.1. Late locality

One way of achieving that the N<sub>2</sub> is local to the determiner late in the derivation is by movement. Leaving matters of linearisation aside for a moment, the N<sub>2</sub> can be thought to move to a position above the N<sub>1</sub> before D is merged. The N<sub>2</sub> would consequently be the closest goal for  $\phi$ -Agree from D. The only testable prediction that this analysis makes is that, after this movement step, the prepositional element *di* and the N<sub>2</sub> do not form a constituent to the exclusion of the N<sub>1</sub>. However, as was already shown in (6) in section 1, this is not the case. The example is

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<sup>4</sup>There are no previous accounts for the phenomenon discussed in this paper to the best of my knowledge. Accounts which deal with related problems are van Riemsdijk (1998), Español-Echevarria (1998) and den Dikken (2006). Van Riemsdijk aims at deriving the semi-functional status of the N<sub>1</sub> of certain binominal constructions by adopting an additional feature system of two binary features ([ $\pm$ G(rammatical),  $\pm$ F(unctional)]), where elements that are [+G, -F] or [-G, +F] are special and remain unaffected by certain operations such as case assignment. This approach seems promising, but within an Agree-based system, it requires either writing this feature calculus into the definition of Agree, or positing these features on the probes whenever needed. Español-Echevarria assumes the presence of a silent noun in a position closer to the determiner to account for instances of seeming gender mismatches in Spanish (e.g. *el rata* 'the.M.SG mouse.F.SG' where this refers to a male person somehow associated to mice or mouse-like features). This options can be ruled out as compounds on the bases of *cazzo* or other expressives cannot be formed in Italian, while Italian parallels to Español-Echevarria's Spanish examples are well-formed. Finally, Den Dikken does not make any explicit reference to Agree in his account of the attributive QBNP. There, the determiner agrees in number with the N<sub>2</sub> while the N<sub>1</sub> remains invariant. This strongly resembles the pattern exhibited by the CoN construction. However, den Dikken simply assumes that a Num projection belonging to the N<sub>2</sub> rather than to the N<sub>1</sub> is generated on top of the small clause comprising the two nouns. Needless to say, such an approach straight out evades the problems and questions set out to be answered in this paper.

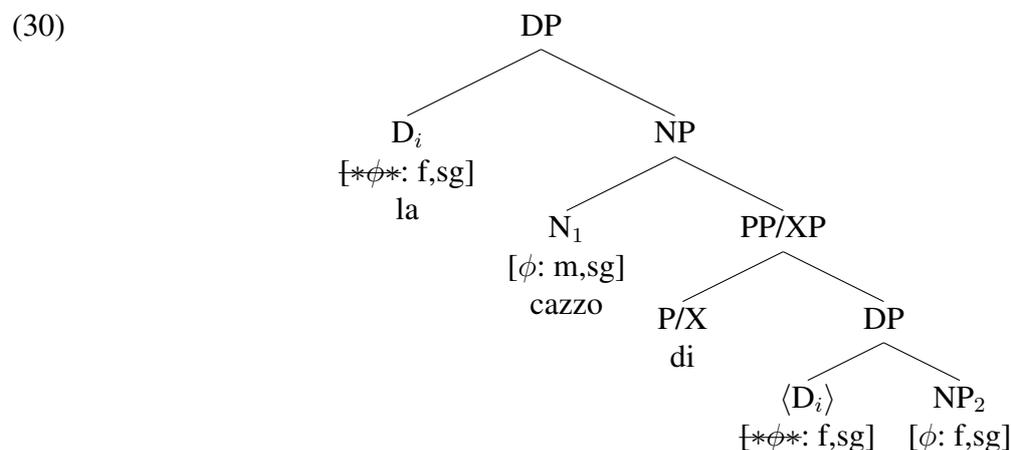
<sup>5</sup>I will specifically assume the more minimalist hypothesis that DP-internal  $\phi$ -feature co-occurrences are reflexes of the same operation responsible for verbal agreement and that therefore nominal concord is not the result of a different operation and/or a different module of grammar. I further take as empirical support for this claim the facts from Italian that (i) different inflection classes of masculine and feminine nouns respectively map to a single masculine and a single feminine marking on the determiner, and (ii) that this directly parallels the pattern in participial verb-noun agreement.

repeated in (29) and shows that the prepositional element *di* must be repeated under coordination, indicating that *di* and the N<sub>2</sub> do indeed form a constituent to the exclusion of the N<sub>1</sub>. As a consequence, I will exclude this approach.<sup>6</sup>

- (29) Mi hanno proprio rotto [ste cazzo di mosche e \*(di) zanzare]!  
 me.DAT have.3PL really annoyed these dick of flies and of mosquitoes  
 ‘They have really got on my nerves these fucking flies and mosquitoes!’

### 3.1.2. Early locality

Alternatively, the N<sub>2</sub> may be local to D early in the derivation. This can be achieved by assuming that the determiner is generated low with the N<sub>2</sub>. As a consequence, D can agree locally with the N<sub>2</sub> and only later reproject to head the whole construction. At that point, the determiners probe will be already satisfied, accounting for the opaque agreement pattern – a case of counter-feeding under this analysis. A sketch of the derivation is given in (30).



The strongest testable prediction of this analysis is that, since the determiner serves for both the construction as a whole and the N<sub>2</sub>, the N<sub>2</sub> itself should not be able have a separate determiner. Unfortunately, this prediction is not borne out. In fact, an informal survey searching for strings in Google showed that there are indeed cases where the lower nominal has its own determiner.<sup>7</sup> The results are given in table 1.<sup>8</sup> As a consequence of these findings, I will exclude this analysis.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>In her review, Rodica Ivan (p.c.) notes that if *di* is rather a kind of case marker, *di* and N<sub>2</sub> would move together so that the constituency of *di* and N<sub>2</sub> would be preserved. I discard this possibility for the following reason: if the N<sub>2</sub> can move with its supposed case marking, I see no reason why it should not be able to further move out of the DP. This, however, is not possible in the CoN; see (46) in section 3.2.2. A further weak point of this approach, whether *di* is a case marker or an independent head, is that all of the properties which define the N<sub>1</sub> of the CoN that are summarised in section 4 must be derived independently from the agreement fact.

<sup>7</sup>Ideally, of course, the facts would be further tested with an acceptability-rating study.

<sup>8</sup>The Google string searches were carried out on 18th June 2015. They all had the form *det-1 cazzo di det-2*. All determiners were feminine to try to ensure through the agreement pattern that only *cazzo-of-N* constructions are found. The demonstratives used were *questa* ‘this’, *queste* ‘these’, *sta* ‘this’, *ste* ‘these’, *quella* ‘that’ and *quelle* ‘those’; the definite articles used were *la* ‘the.SG’ and *le* ‘the.PL’; the indefinite article used was *una* ‘a’.

<sup>9</sup>An attenuation of these facts is that, by far, in most cases the lower determiner is identical to the higher one. If one adopts the Copy Theory of movement (cf. Nunes 1995), such cases can be analysed as a spell-out of the lower copy of the movement/reprojection chain. Nonetheless, there are also technical difficulties with the reprojection

↓ high D / low D →	DEMONSTRATIVE	DEFINITE	INDEFINITE
DEMONSTRATIVE	*	13	3 <sup>a</sup>
DEFINITE	*	2130	*
INDEFINITE	1 <sup>b</sup>	17 <sup>b</sup>	4

<sup>a</sup>With QBNP meaning    <sup>b</sup>Mostly with NPI meaning

Table 1: Summary Google string search results for *D-cazzo-D*

### 3.2. $N_1$ is invisible for probing

One feature of the CoN construction is that the  $N_1$  remains invariably singular. This can be taken to indicate that the  $N_1$ 's  $\phi$ -features do not participate in the derivation in some relevant sense. In what follows, I will discuss three options to achieve this. The first assumes that the  $N_1$ 's  $\phi$ -features are plainly not represented in the syntax. The second assumes that the  $N_1$  is structurally deficient in the sense of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) and that it therefore must incorporate rendering it invisible for later computation. The third option assumes that there is a designated functional category, *Expr*, which merges with certain roots to create expressives. The presence of this category interrupts the nominal projection in a way that the  $N_1$  can be no longer targeted by  $\phi$ -Agree.

#### 3.2.1. $N_1$ has no $\phi$ -features

Another viable approach is to assume that the  $N_1$  of the CoN actually has no  $\phi$ -features. In this line of reasoning, it is straightforward why the  $N_1$  is not a viable goal for  $\phi$ -agreement and does not intervene when D agrees with the  $N_2$ : there simply are no  $\phi$ -features to be targeted by any probe c-commanding the  $N_1$ . There are two clear predictions that this approach makes, one syntactic and one morphological. The syntactic prediction is that other dependencies that also rely on the presence of  $\phi$ -features cannot be established with the  $N_1$ . One such example is modification, either by adjectives or by relative clauses. A set of these obligatorily agree in  $\phi$ -features. As was partly shown in section 2.3, phrasal adjectives cannot modify the  $N_1$ , cf. (31) (=27b)). The same holds for relative clauses.

- (31) \*dell-e    {bel,        brutt-o,        maledett-o,    ...} cazz-o    di banan-e  
           PART-F.PL nice.M.SG ugly-M.SG damned-M.SG        dick-M.SG of banana-F.PL  
           ‘(Intended) Some (!)-fucking bananas.’

In section 2.3, it was also shown that in contrast the  $N_1$  can be modified by adjectives that combine derivationally or by incorporation. The example is repeated in (32).

- (32) dell-e        {stra-, super-, mega-, gran-} cazz- {-acci-} -o    di banan-e  
           PART-F.PL extra- super- mega- grand- dick- -PEG- M.SG of banana-F.PL  
           ‘Some (!)-fucking-(!) bananas.’

---

approach concerning the operational status of reprojection. The only principled approach would be to treat it as movement. In that case, however, it would be difficult to define a formal trigger for this type of movement. Also, it would face serious locality issues as for instance violations of the Head Movement Constraint (Travis 1984; Baker 1988).

An alternative generalisation could be that the adjectives in (32) can modify the  $N_1$  because they do not require  $\phi$ -agreement: *stra-*, *super-*, *mega-* and *gran-* remain invariant, while the pejorative *-accio* can be analysed as just *-acci-* and attaching directly to the root.

Analysing the  $N_1$  as lacking  $\phi$ -features altogether can therefore explain the split between the kind of elements that can modify the  $N_1$ . However, in order to keep these data as evidence, it is necessary to extend the requirement to agree in  $\phi$ -features to any adjective in Italian to those adjectives which do not exhibit  $\phi$ -agreement overtly. For instance, adjectives in *-e* do not show a gender distinction and loanword or acronymic adjectives do not have  $\phi$ -morphology at all. Modification by such adjectives is impossible nonetheless, as shown in (33a-b), respectively.

- (33) a. \*una cazzo dolente di bug  
           a.F.SG dick.M.SG hurting of bug.F.SG  
           ‘(Intended) A damn fucking computer bug.’  
       b. \*una cazzo imba/gosu di bug  
           this.F.SG dick.M.SG very.strong of bug.F.SG  
           ‘(Intended) A damn fucking computer bug.’

This seems to suggest that the relevant distinction is not between adjectives that agree in  $\phi$ -features and those that do not, but rather between minimal and maximal categories (cf. Chomsky 1995:section 4.3). In addition, also the predictions for the morphological component are difficult.

The morphological prediction if the  $N_1$  has an empty  $\phi$ -feature specification is that only words which lack morphology that is dependent on a  $\phi$ -feature specification can serve as the  $N_1$  in the CoN. There is in fact at least one such word, *caspita*, which is a euphemism for *cazzo*. It’s a word that is otherwise only used as an exclamation or as a negative polarity item (NPI) and it probably even lacks a word category. The other words are nouns. One of the defining properties of nouns is that they have  $\phi$ -features in syntax.<sup>10</sup> Nouns in Italian which are not recent loanwords always appear with a suffix containing gender and number (and probably 3rd person). In the case of *cazz-o*, the suffix is */-o/*. So far, the suffix was glossed as containing the categories M.SG. As I am assuming a realisational morphology, */-o/* must realise the features M.SG. From a very naive view, this is already impossible if there are no M.SG features in the syntax to be realised. As an alternative, a version of spell-out that is based on Distributed Morphology (DM; Halle & Marantz 1993) can be assumed.<sup>11</sup> There, insertion of an exponent (i.e. morphological realisation of a given syntactic context) only requires the exponent to be specified for a (non-proper) subset of the context in which it gets inserted, conforming with the *Subset Principle*.<sup>12</sup> This helps a little bit as the specification of */-o/* can now be empty, i.e. as in (34).

- (34) */-o/*  $\Leftrightarrow$  [ ]

<sup>10</sup>Whether  $\phi$ -features are stored in the lexicon, added in the numeration or very early on in the syntax – which can be recast as the question whether they are stored or computed – does not matter here (for a brief discussion see Chomsky 1995:section 4.2.2). What matters is the input to the morphological component.

<sup>11</sup>See also Harley & Noyer (1999) and references therein for a broad overview.

<sup>12</sup>The definition is as follows (Harley & Noyer 1999:5 citing Halle 1997):

“The phonological exponent of a Vocabulary Item is inserted into a morpheme. . . if the item matches all or a subset of the grammatical features specified in the terminal morpheme. Insertion does not take place if the Vocabulary Item contains features not present in the morpheme. Where several Vocabulary Items meet the conditions for insertion, the item matching the greatest number of features specified in the terminal morpheme must be chosen.”

A problem that remains nonetheless is that, even if the exponent */-o/* has an empty feature specification, it needs a syntactic environment – specifically one (or more fused) head(s) – into which it gets inserted. If the  $N_1$ 's  $\phi$ -features are not represented in syntax at all, */-o/* can simply not be inserted. We can avoid this problem temporarily by making use of inflection classes. Italian has various inflection classes spread across the two genders and the two numbers.<sup>13</sup> If we assume that inflection classes are represented at some point in syntax or post-syntax before Vocabulary Insertion applies, */-o/* may be inserted in that terminal. Similarly, the suffix */-a/* for the F.SG  $N_1$  *minchia*, a southern equivalent of *cazzo*, though it cannot also have an empty specification, it may be specified for the right inflection class feature as in (35).

(35) */-a/*  $\Leftrightarrow$  [INFL CLASS: II]

The problem arises in a new form with other expressive nouns: *accidenti* ‘curses’ and *capperi* ‘capers’. These two nouns are used in their plural form in the CoN. Since the singular was used as the default above, the plural cannot be empty too. On a standard treatment of number appearing on its own functional projection ‘Num’, we would run into a multitude of unsolvable problems as far as I can see: for the analysis to work, we need the plural feature to be present neither in the syntax nor in the exponent’s feature specification.<sup>14</sup> Pushing the idea further, I believe that the morphological problem can be solved by assuming a split in the syntactic representations of  $\phi$ . For instance, Kramer (2014) argues for a split between natural and grammatical gender and Kramer (2016) argues for a similar split for number, both on the basis of Afro-Asiatic and Amharic in particular. Assuming such a system, one can place the features that are necessary for spelling out the suffixes on different heads than the heads which host the actual  $\phi$ -features with which determiners and verbs agree. In particular, for the Italian plural expressives, as they are invariably plural, one may say that they have a grammatical plural feature on a head lower than Num(ber), e.g. on *n*. Grammatical gender, or inflection-class features in this case are hosted on *n*, too, or directly on the root. Such a split seems a reasonable assumption for Italian given that the gender features on D equal those on past participles, i.e. the output of Agree on D and participles is not affected by the inflection class of the noun goal, even if this information is reflected on the noun’s suffix. Nonetheless, accounting for other properties which will be discussed in the following sections will require the addition of more and more assumptions. As a consequence, this approach will be abandoned.

### 3.2.2. $N_1$ is structurally deficient

Another way to flesh out the idea that the  $N_1$  is deficient in some way is the following. The  $N_1$  lacks some portion of the structure: if not  $\phi$  itself then something else, so that it does not have a fully fledged nominal syntax. In terms of Cardinaletti & Starke (1999), this approach hypothesises that the  $N_1$  is structurally deficient. Cardinaletti and Starke show that weak pronouns and clitics behave differently from strong pronouns and full DPs in a number of syntactic

<sup>13</sup>For an overview, see e.g. Acquaviva (2009).

<sup>14</sup>For instance, one trick would be to specify */-o/* as empty and */-i/* as having just the inflection-class feature. This does not work, however, because */-i/* also spells out the plural of masculines ending in *-a* and in *-e*. It would have to be assumed that, in the plural, the inflection classes of *-a* and *-e* are impoverished in such a way to yield the inflection class of *-o*. This is not only not very illuminating, but also impossible: the Impoverishment rule requires the syntactic presence of plural, which is what we are trying to avoid here. For the operation Impoverishment see Halle & Marantz (1993); Harley & Noyer (1999).

properties. They propose that differences are linked to the structural size of the various types of pronominal elements, in particular that clitics are just  $\phi$ Ps and lack the D-layer. Building on this approach, one can make sense of the modification data repeated here as (36) and (37) in a different way. The contrast can be explained as due to the fact that *cazzo* is smaller than the category, and therefore of the wrong type of category, that the normal adjectives in (36) attach to, while the pejorative in (37) is derivational morphology and attaches to the root.<sup>15,16</sup>

(36) \*dell-e {bel, brutt-o, maledett-o, ...} cazz-o di banan-e  
 PART-F.PL nice.M.SG ugly-M.SG damned-M.SG dick-M.SG of banana-F.PL  
 ‘(Intended) Some (!)-fucking bananas.’

(37) dell-e cazz-acci-o di banan-e  
 some-F.PL dick-PEJ-M.SG of banana-F.PL  
 ‘Some fucking-(!) bananas.’

A contrast in their possibility to be modified is also mentioned by Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) for clitics and weak pronouns. While it is possible for the strong pronoun *lei* and the NP/DP *Maria* in (38b) to be modified by an adverbial, this is not possible for the weak pronoun *essa* in (38a).

(38) a. \*Anche/ solo essa è bella.  
 also only 3.SG.F.WEAK is pretty  
 b. Anche/ solo {lei, Maria} è bella.  
 also only 3.SG.F.STRONG Maria is pretty

Cardinaletti & Starke (1999) also list other tests. For instance, while it is possible to coordinate DPs, NPs and strong pronouns, it is impossible to coordinate clitics or weak pronouns.

(39) a. \*Lei ed essa sono belle.  
 3.SG.F.STRONG and 3.SG.F.WEAK are pretty  
 b. Lei<sub>i</sub> e {lei<sub>j</sub>, Maria} sono belle.  
 3.SG.F.STRONG and 3.SG.F.STRONG Maria are pretty

The same holds for the N<sub>1</sub> of the CoN. As seen before, there are a number of nouns that can occur as the N<sub>1</sub> of the construction, e.g. *cavolo* ‘cabbage’ and *cacchio* ‘poop’. However, the expressives cannot be coordinated, cf. (40).

(40) \*le cazzo e {cavolo, cacchio...} di banane  
 the dick and cabbage poop of bananas  
 ‘(Intended) The fucking and damned bananas.’

<sup>15</sup>Evidence in favour of such an analysis comes from the fact that this type of modification is also possible in V-N-compounds as in (i). For the other modifiers *stra-*, *super-*, *mega-* and *gran-*, a somewhat different analysis will be hinted at at the end of this section.

(i) Lui è proprio un {rompi-bottigli-e, rompi-bottigli-ett-e, rompi-bottigli-on-e}  
 he is really a break-bottle-F.PL break-bottle-DIM-F.PL break-bottle-AUG-F.PL  
 ‘He really is a breaker of (normal, small, large) bottles.’

<sup>16</sup>For discussion of the head vs. phrase distinction of the N<sub>1</sub> of pseudopartitives in the context of modification see Alexiadou et al. (2007:418,434–435); see also Vos (1999:chapter 6).

This behaviour contrasts once more with structures where a regular noun takes an NP complement, as in (41a,) and the QBNP construction, as in (41b). I judge the latter as a bit marked, but nonetheless grammatical.

- (41) a. Lui è un apprezzatore e amante di arte astratta  
 he is a appreciator and lover of art abstract  
 ‘He is someone who appreciates and is keen on abstract art.’  
 b. ?Lei è proprio un fiore e gioiello di ragazza  
 she is really a flower and jewel of girl  
 ‘She really is a flower and a jewel of a girl.’

Another parallel is that, just like weak pronouns and clitics (as opposed to strong pronouns), the  $N_1$  of the CoN cannot be contrastively focussed. Again, this is possible for regular binominals as in (42), and the QBNP construction, as in (43ab). The QBNP examples should be read in a context where one is contrasting metaphorical differences between being a flower-ish vs. a jewel-ish girl, for instance kind and indulging vs. radiant and exciting.

- (42) \*ste CAZZO di nuvole mi hanno proprio rotto (... le cavolo di nuvole no)  
 these EXPR of clouds me.DAT have really annoyed the EXPR of clouds not  
 (43) a. Lui è un APPREZZATORE di arte astratta (... non un amante)  
 he is an appreciator of art abstract not a lover  
 b. Lei è un FIORE di ragazza (... non un gioiello)  
 she is a flower of girl not a jewel

Overall, I take these data to suggest that the  $N_1$  of the CoN is indeed structurally deficient. The question is, how this can help with the non-minimal agreement pattern. We saw in the preceding section that the conclusion that the  $N_1$  lacks the  $\phi$ -projection is problematic. An alternative conclusion is that, due to its structural deficiency, the  $N_1$  must incorporate somewhere. The desired result that the  $N_1$  cannot intervene in the Agree relation between D and the  $N_2$  can now be achieved with two additional assumptions: (i) that the incorporation happens before D probes for  $\phi$ -features, and (ii) that incorporation makes elements invisible for later steps of the computation. Abstracting away from the rest, one possible way of representing the result is given in (44) (involving some rebracketing operation that applies in syntax proper such as m-merger in Matushansky 2006).

- (44)
- 
- ```

graph TD
  DP --> D
  DP --> XP
  D --- D_feats["[*φ*: a,b]"]
  XP --> N1plusdi["N1+di"]
  XP --> NP2
  N1plusdi --- N1plusdi_feats["[φ: m,sg]"]
  NP2 --- NP2_feats["[φ: a,b]"]
  
```

One problem this approach faces has to do with constituency again. Based on the coordination facts, prepositional *di* and the  $N_2$  must form a constituent to the exclusion of the  $N_1$ . This is not warranted in (44). I will, however, not exclude this analysis yet, as it seems to be able to account for a number of other properties.

For instance, the split in the modification data follows from the  $N_1$ 's phrase structural status: it can be modified by minimal but not by maximal categories. In addition, though the coordination test suggests otherwise, the movement data seem to support a structure of the kind in (44). (45a) is unacceptable as *wh*-extraction of the constituent [*di*  $N_2$ ] is only grammatical if *cazzo* is interpreted in its literal meaning. (45b) shows that the  $N_2$  cannot be extracted, regardless of whether *di* is pronounced or not. This can be taken to follow from the ban on P-stranding in Italian.

- (45) a. #[Di che insetto]<sub>i</sub> non ha mai visto [un cazzo *t<sub>i</sub>*]?  
of what insect not have.3SG never seen a dick  
b. \*[Che insetto]<sub>i</sub> non ha mai visto [un cazzo (di) *t<sub>i</sub>*]?  
what insect not have.3SG never seen a dick of

The same yields for clefts. Also, clitic substitution shows a similar result, cf. (46). The partitive clitic *ne* cannot substitute the constituent [*di*  $N_2$ ] in (46a) and the accusative clitic *la* cannot substitute the  $N_2$ , regardless again whether *di* is pronounced or not.

- (46) a. \**Ne<sub>i</sub>* ha mai vista una cazzo *t<sub>i</sub>* (... di farfalla)?  
PART.CL have.3SG ever seen a dick of butterfly  
b. \**L<sub>i</sub>'* ha mai vista una cazzo *t<sub>i</sub>* (di) (... farfalla)?  
ACC.CL have.3SG ever seen a dick of butterfly

The incorporation structure can explain the fact that, at the point where the derivation attempts to target the constituent [*di*  $N_2$ ], for movement or else, it no longer forms a constituent to the exclusion of the  $N_1$ . Assuming that moving the  $N_2$  alone is independently excluded by the ban on P-stranding, the only possible target for movement or substitution is the whole binominal. This is in fact attested. Example (47a) provides an example for topicalisation and example (47b) one for clitic right dislocation.

- (47) a. [Quella cazzo di macchina] non la guido di sicuro  
that dick of car not it drive.1SG certainly  
'As for that fucking car, I am certainly not going to drive it.'  
b. L' ho comprato *t<sub>i</sub>* per te [quel cazzo di troiaio]<sub>i</sub>!  
it have.1SG bought for you that dick of piece.of.junk  
'I bought it for you, that fucking piece of junk!'

Finally, an ulterior attenuation of the coordination facts is that nothing can intervene between the  $N_1$  and prepositional *di*. Some adjectives associated with the  $N_2$ , for instance, may occur in either the low position preceding the  $N_2$  or in a higher position above the  $N_1$ , but not between the  $N_1$  and *di*.

- (48) il mio {vecchio} cazzo {\*vecchio} di {vecchio} amico d' infanzia  
the my old dick old of old friend of childhood  
'My old childhood friend.'

Similarly, I believe that the only word in the binominal after which it is not possible to pause (unless it is repeated upon continuation) is the  $N_1$ . This is indicated by the starred #, which refers to a pause in (49). The impossibility of pausing in that position can be taken to indicate

phonological unity and parallels what can be observed with object clitics in front of auxiliary verbs, cf. (50).

- (49) una (#) cazzo (\*#) di (#) banana  
 a       dick       of       banana  
 ‘A fucking banana.’
- (50) Oggi (#) t’/ti (\*#) ho        (#) visto.  
 today   you       have.1SG   seen  
 ‘I saw you today.’

Given that the movement facts follow rather smoothly, let us push this idea a bit further to see if the coordination facts can be derived, too. If one assumes that the incorporation is the result of Matushansky-style m-merger, as hinted at above, one may in fact derive them.<sup>17</sup> Consider the following derivation. First, one descriptive noun is generated. Then the prepositional *di* is merged. Now, these steps are repeated and the two constituents are merged together into a coordination structure. An example is given in (51).

- (51)
- 
- ```

  graph TD
    A[&P] --- B[XP]
    A --- C[&']
    B --- D[di]
    B --- E[NP2]
    C --- F[&]
    C --- G[XP]
    G --- H[di]
    G --- I[NP3]
  
```

The structure in example (51) is merged with the  $N_1$ . This yields the structure in (52).

- (52)
- 
- ```

  graph TD
    A[NP] --- B[N1]
    A --- C[&P]
    C --- D[XP]
    C --- E[&']
    D --- F[di]
    D --- G[NP2]
    E --- H[&]
    E --- I[XP]
    I --- J[di]
    I --- K[NP3]
  
```

At this point, given the structural deficiency of the  $N_1$ , m-merger must apply, yielding (53).

- (53)
- 
- ```

  graph TD
    A[&P] --- B[XP]
    A --- C[&']
    B --- D[N1+di]
    B --- E[NP2]
    C --- F[&]
    C --- G[XP]
    G --- H[di]
    G --- I[NP3]
  
```

<sup>17</sup>M-merger is chosen here as for the sake of concreteness. In principle, any operation which affects the structure before the determiner is merged is a viable alternative.

Given this derivation, both the incorporation of the  $N_1$  and the repetition of *di* are warranted. In order for the derivation to yield the desired result, both the timing of m-merger and the fact that it targets *di* rather than the coordinator are crucial. These are general problems that the m-merger based account of head-movement faces. These issues are addressed in Matushansky (2006).<sup>18</sup>

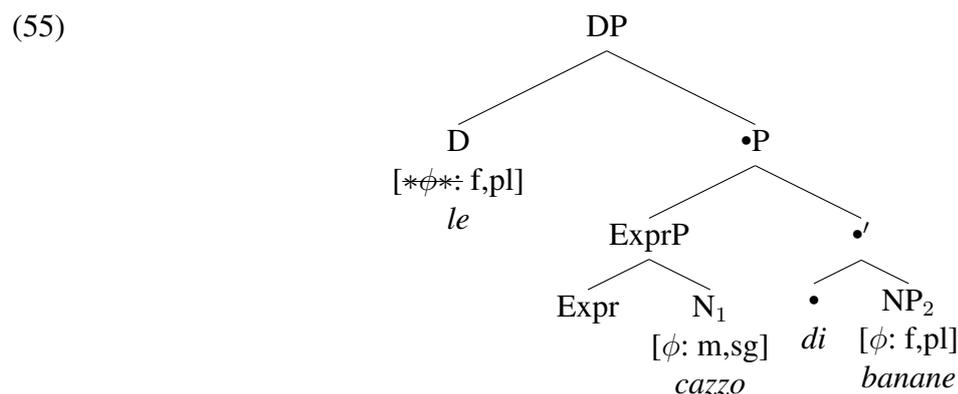
### 3.2.3. $N_1$ merges with functional category

Yet another possibility to derive the  $N_1$ 's invisibility is to assume the following: there is a functional category that merges with the expressive noun. The functional head will derive the right semantic type, i.e. it is a function from a category of a *descriptive* type to an *expressive* type. In a way this proposal would be a Schönfinkelisation of the expressive function proposed in Potts (2007). The descriptive noun and the expressive noun are merged as arguments of Pott's  $\bullet$ -function, the former as its complement, and the latter as its specifier. The original  $\bullet$ -function is defined as in (54) (Potts 2007:187).

(54) Where  $\alpha$  is of type  $\langle \sigma, \epsilon \rangle$  and  $\beta$  is of type  $\sigma$ , [and  $\sigma$  is a descriptive and  $\epsilon$  an expressive,]

$$[[\alpha]]^c \bullet [[\beta]]^c = [[\beta]]^{[[\alpha]]^c ([[ \beta ]]^c)^c}$$

Within this approach I propose to Schönfinkel (54) to yield a function which first takes an expression with descriptive content  $\alpha$  and then relates it to one with expressive content  $\beta$ , returning  $\alpha$  with altered context of interpretation. In addition, prepositional *di* will be the spell-out of the  $\bullet$ -function.<sup>19</sup> The functional head merging with the expressive noun to derive the correct semantic type, which I will call Expr, will warrant that the  $N_1$  may no longer intervene in the Agree relation between D and the  $N_2$ . This follows from the fact that the  $N_1$  will be too deeply embedded to c-command the  $N_2$ . Since closeness is defined in terms of (asymmetric) c-command, if the  $N_1$  does not c-command the  $N_2$ , it can no longer be closer to D than the  $N_2$ . This can be seen in the structure in (55).



<sup>18</sup>Matushansky does not discuss examples where m-merger applies to an externally merged element. She does discuss examples where m-merger applies to internally merged elements, clitics, so that my derivation is fully possible in her system.

<sup>19</sup>Prepositional elements such as English *of* or Italian *di* have been proposed to be the spell-out of various different functions, e.g. the head of a small clause (cf. den Dikken 2006), a partitive particle (cf. Barker 1997), a *residue operator* (cf. Zamparelli 1998), a  $\pi$ -operator (cf. Chierchia 1984).

An immediate advantage of this approach is that some seemingly category-free expressions such as *caspita* (section 3.2.1) can be used as the  $N_1$  even though they are no N. The modification facts are less trivial, but I propose that they can be derived in two ways: either the set of minimal modifiers has the right semantics to modify the constituent comprising the  $N_1$  and Expr, or the expressive noun must for some reason be structurally very small when it merges with the functional head Expr. The first option may have to do with the fact that, as pointed out to me by Rebecca Woods (p.c.), *stra-*, *mega-*, pejorative *-acci-* and the like have expressive semantics as well. The second option may follow from some principled reason of how the lexicon and syntax interact, which is to say from however derivational morphology differs from inflectional morphology. Though the details are unclear at this point, the second option may give an advantage in answering why D does not agree with the  $N_1$ . In fact, so far, the functional-head approach only derives the fact that the  $N_1$  does not intervene, not why Agree cannot target it. Considering that the idea that Expr has to merge with structurally small categories, that Expr can combine with elements such as *caspita* which are not nouns, and that the resulting category is not nominal, I conclude that changing category will make the  $\phi$ -features inaccessible for the syntax. This is to say that, though Expr may be merging with a root that, as part of its lexical information contains some inherent  $\phi$ -features, once the syntactic object is not a noun anymore, the initial inherent  $\phi$ -features become obsolete for syntactic computation so they are not represented. To convince you of this, consider the following. All Italian nouns have inherent  $\phi$ -features. Many of these nouns can be turned into verbs. The infinitive form of the verbs can in turn be used as nouns. As a concrete example, take the feminine singular noun *chitarra* ‘guitar’. We can make the verb *schitarrare* ‘play around on a guitar’ from it with the productive *s-* prefix. We can now use this form as a noun again, *lo schitarrare* ‘the act of playing around on a guitar’. This form, as any infinitive verb form used as a noun, is masculine, not feminine. Were all of these derivations available information for the syntactic computation, I would find it surprising that the final result does not make use of the initial  $\phi$ -feature information to preserve the inherent feminine gender of *chitarra*. This is surely a very old point, a re-evocation of the split between derivational and inflectional morphology alluded to above. Based on these considerations, I would like to contend that the very presence of Expr is the solution. When Expr combines with a noun, the noun’s inherent features become irrelevant and inaccessible for further syntactic computation but crucially present on the noun itself and readable by the morpho-phonological component.

Finally, it must be asked what the predictions of this approach are, especially given the number of required stipulations. If functional projections are part of the vocabulary of Universal Grammar, introducing a new functional projection predicts that these should be present in (at least a subset) of the other languages of the world. Also, for this approach to be principled and testable in any way, the requirement on the timing of merger of Expr had better be general. All languages which have Expr as part of their vocabulary and make use of it should therefore instantiate the same quirky agreement pattern or similar syntactic effects. This may be correct for German. Consider (56).<sup>20</sup> The determiner agrees with the second noun rather than with the first, strongly resembling to the CoN on the surface.

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<sup>20</sup>*Scheiß* is the masculine counter-part of feminine *Scheiße* (as in *Was soll der/die Scheiß/Scheiße?* ‘what should the.M.SG/the.F.SG shit/shit?’). Also, (56) is not a simple compound as the stress rule for compounds which would assign the main stress to only one of the two nouns (and in particular to *Scheiß*) does not apply. Both nouns have their own main stress.

- (56) a. Ein-e Scheiß Banane  
 a-F.SG shit.M.SG banana.F.SG  
 ‘A damn banana.’

Unfortunately, testing this claim goes beyond the purpose and reach of this paper. I will limit myself to pointing out that not only expressive nouns seem to exhibit this peculiar non-minimal agreement pattern. In fact, in Hausa (Afro-Asiatic), the noun *ìree* which denotes ‘kind’ cannot be agreed with when used as the N<sub>1</sub> of a binominal. This is shown in (57).<sup>21</sup>

- (57) a. Wà-cè irì-n mootàa?  
 which-F kind.M-LNK.M car.F  
 ‘Which kind of car?’  
 b. \*Wà-nè irì-n mootàa?  
 which-M kind.M-LNK.M car.F  
 ‘Which kind of car?’  
 c. Wà-d’annè irì-n kàrnai?  
 which-PL kind.M-LNK.M dog.M.PL  
 ‘Which kind of dogs?’

The same is reported for *kind* in certain English dialects (cf. Zamparelli 1998; Carlson 1977). Holding the functional projection Expr responsible for the non-minimal agreement pattern, the possibility of a unifying account which comprises examples (56) and (57) is lost.

#### 4. Evaluation

This section aims to summarise what I deem to be the core properties of the CoN. These are (i) the agreement facts, (ii) the N<sub>1</sub>’s invariance in number, (iii) the modification facts, (iv) the coordination facts, (v) the movement facts, and (vi) the semantics.

##### i Agreement

In the CoN, any element c-commanding the binominal obligatorily agrees in  $\phi$ -features with the structurally more distant noun. Thus, given a M.SG N<sub>1</sub> and a F.PL N<sub>2</sub>, in a constituency [N<sub>1</sub> [of N<sub>2</sub>]], determiners and verbs can only exhibit F.PL agreement.

##### ii Number invariance

The N<sub>1</sub>’s value for number remains invariant in the CoN, regardless of whether it is a singular or a plural noun (e.g. *cazz-o* ‘-M.SG’ vs. *accident-i* ‘-M.PL’, (5b)).

##### iii Modification

The N<sub>1</sub> of the CoN cannot be modified by phrasal/regular adjectives, while it can be modified by derivational morphology such as the pejorative, or elements which seem to incorporate or adjoin such as *stra-* ‘extra’.

<sup>21</sup>The diacritic ` stands for low tone, while no diacritic for high tone; *d*’ is an implosive. The data were collected through consultation with Ari Awagana, who is a native speaker and lecturer in the African Studies Department at the University of Leipzig.

	structural deficiency	functional category
agreement	✓	✓
number invariance	–	?
modification	✓	✓
coordination	✓?	✓
movement	✓	?
semantics	–	✓

Table 2: Evaluation and comparison of the two competing proposals

iv *Coordination*

Generally, when the  $N_2$  of the CoN is coordinated, the prepositional element *di* must be repeated.

v *Movement*

In the CoN only the full binominal can be extracted, i.e. the  $N_2$  alone, the  $N_1$  alone, or [*di*  $N_2$ ] cannot be extracted. The same holds for clefting and substitution by clitics.

vi *Semantics*

Only elements that satisfy all the properties of an expressive as discussed in section 2.1 can function as the  $N_1$  of the CoN.

Table 2 summarises how well the structural deficiency and the functional category approaches fare with respect to deriving these properties. A check mark (✓) indicates that the facts follow from the core assumptions of the approach, a question mark (?) that it is unclear, a dash (–) that it does not follow from what was proposed.

Overall, it seems that the functional category approach fares better, though it may be argued that it requires two very specific and potentially construction-specific assumptions, namely the •-function in the syntax the way it was proposed in this paper, and the functional category Expr.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, a novel binominal construction from Italian was introduced, termed the *Cazzo-of-N* construction (CoN). The structural properties of this construction were discussed, focussing on the construction's agreement pattern. In particular, the agreement pattern is argued to present a challenge for a view of grammar rooted in the Minimalist Programme, where all feature co-variation should be derived by the operation Agree. The operation Agree is subject to Minimality, a locality restriction that prohibits establishing a dependency with an element if there is a structurally closer element of the same type. The CoN, however, seems to exhibit exactly such a pattern. An example is repeated in (58) (=4).

- (58) Dell-e cazz-o di banan-e.  
 PART-F.PL dick-M.SG of banana-F.PL  
 'Some fucking bananas.'

Given that evidence from coordination supports the fact that *cazzo* in (58) is structurally higher than *banane*, it is problematic that the determiner agrees with the noun that is further away, i.e. violating Minimality. In the attempt to attenuate these initial findings and to uphold Minimality as an inviolable principle of natural grammar, other properties of the construction were scrutinised. In conclusion, the  $N_1$  of the CoN appears to be structurally smaller than a fully fledged noun. Various potential analyses were proposed, of which two were discussed in greater detail. The first proposed that the  $N_1$  incorporates into the neighbouring prepositional element *di* and that because of this it can no longer be targeted by Agree. The second proposed that the two arguments of the CoN are introduced by an expressive small clause via a schönfinked version of the  $\bullet$ -function proposed in Potts (2007). The  $\bullet$ -function takes the descriptive noun  $N_2$  as its complement, relating it to the expressive  $N_1$  that is in its specifier, and returning the  $N_2$  with altered context of interpretation. In order for the  $N_1$  to be of the right type, namely an expressive type following Potts, the  $N_1$  was proposed to combine with a new category, Expr. It was finally proposed that this category combines with small objects, heads or roots, and that this being a process more akin to derivational morphology, it rendered the  $N_1$ 's inherent  $\phi$ -features inaccessible to further syntactic computation. This final assumption in particular derives the non-minimal agreement pattern of the CoN without violating Minimality. Overall, it was decided that, although perhaps more construction-specific assumptions were required, the account relying on the category Expr was more successful in deriving the core properties of the CoN: the non-minimal agreement pattern, the number invariance of the  $N_1$ , the availability of non-phrasal but unavailability of phrasal modification, the coordination facts, i.e. the constituency of [*di N<sub>2</sub>*] to the exclusion of  $N_1$ , the impossibility to extract the  $N_2$ , and, finally, the expressive semantic nature and contribution of the  $N_1$ .

#### Abbreviations

1 'first person', 2 'second person', 3 'third person', ACC 'accusative', CL 'clitic', DAT 'dative', F 'feminine', LNK 'linker', M 'masculine', PART 'partitive', PEJ 'pejorative', PL 'plural', SG 'singular', STRONG 'strong pronoun', SUP 'superlative', WEAK 'weak pronoun'.

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