

Variation and change in the Degree Phrase

Will Oxford, University of Manitoba

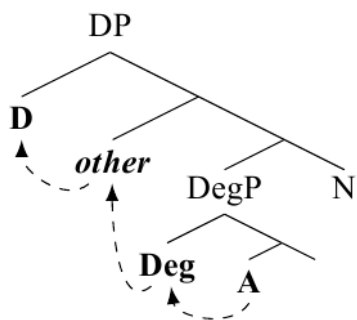
Abstract. This squib investigates syntactic variation and change in the Degree Phrase (DegP) using three modifiers in the semantic field of ‘different’ as a case study: English *different* and *other* and French *différent*. The squib makes two main claims. The synchronic claim is that these modifiers display extensive microsyntactic variation, spanning a range of positions from A in the DegP to D in the DP. The diachronic claim is that items in this class display a tendency to move to higher syntactic positions in a way that is familiar from better-studied syntactic domains. Data from the DegP is thus compatible with, and useful for, generative theories of syntactic variation and change.

Keywords: adjectives, comparatives, degree words, postdeterminers, syntactic change, grammaticalization, English, *different*, *other*

1. Introduction

Variation and change in the extended nominal and verbal projections have received much attention in generative syntax, but less is known about the Degree Phrase (DegP), the extended projection of the adjective. For example, Roberts and Roussou’s (2003:233) landmark study only briefly alludes to “the various degree markers which may make up a functional system associated with AP.” This squib investigates variation and change in the DegP through a case study of three modifiers in the semantic field of ‘different’: English *different* and *other* and French *différent*. Aside from passing mentions by Kayne (2005:13) and Cinque (2005:327), these items have received little attention in the generative syntactic literature, although there has been extensive work in both formal semantics (e.g. Heim 1985; Beck 2000; Alrenga 2007, 2010; Brasoveanu 2008) and functional syntax (e.g. Breban 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010), which this squib will draw upon. The squib makes two main claims. The synchronic claim is that there is extensive microsyntactic variation among the ‘different’ modifiers, which occupy a range of positions spanning from A in DegP to D in DP, as shown in (1). The diachronic claim is that the positions in (1) form a trajectory along which upwards movement has occurred in a way that is familiar from other syntactic domains. Data from the DegP is thus compatible with, and useful for, generative theories of syntactic change.

(1) Positions for modifiers in the semantic field of ‘different’



In particular, it will be argued that English *different* has moved from A to Deg (§2), English *other* has moved from Deg to a determiner-like category in the DP proper (§3), and French *différent* has moved all the way to D itself (§4).

2. Different

The synchronic syntactic patterning of English *different* diverges from other English adjectives in two respects: complement selection (§2.1) and the availability of comparative and superlative forms (§2.2). In both respects, *different* can pattern not only as a typical adjective (lexical category A) but also as a comparative degree head (functional category Deg), with the latter function having developed diachronically from the former (§2.3).

2.1 Complement selection

This section compares the complement-taking properties of *different* with two other items: the semantically similar lexical adjective *distinct* (A) and the comparative degree head *more* (Deg), exemplified in the DegP *more interesting*.¹

¹ I take DegP to have the structure [_{DegP} Deg AP], with Deg⁰ hosting a null morpheme in non-comparative forms and a comparative degree morpheme (*more/-er* or *less*) in comparative forms. I do not examine other members of the Deg category such as *so*, *too*, and *enough* because they select a result clause rather than a comparative clause (see e.g. White 1997, 2004) and are thus not relevant to the data under discussion. The structure of DegP may in fact be richer than simply Deg + AP, as the comparative morpheme may occupy a QP layer between Deg⁰ and AP (Corver 1997; Kennedy & McNally 2005; Svenonius & Kennedy 2006). Since this squib aims only to determine whether certain elements in the DegP are lexical (A⁰) or functional (Deg⁰/Q⁰), I will abstract away from the Deg⁰/Q⁰ distinction and use Deg⁰ as a cover term for the entire functional region of the extended adjectival projection.

Many English adjectives can select a complement PP headed by a particular preposition (e.g. *proud of*, *angry at*, *curious about*). As shown in (2), both *different* and the lexical adjective *distinct* can select a PP headed by *from* while the comparative degree head *more* cannot. In this example, then, *different* patterns like A rather than Deg. (The selectional relationships in the following examples are highlighted through the use of bolded or underlined text.)

(2) Sue gave a {**different/distinct/*more** interesting} answer [PP **from** what I expected].

However, it is also possible for *different* to select a comparative clause introduced by *than*, a property shared with the comparative degree head *more* but not with the lexical adjective *distinct*, as shown in (3) (cf. Huddleston & Pullum 2002:1144; Alrenga 2007:19, 2010:158). In this example, then, *different* patterns like Deg rather than A.

(3) Sue gave a {**different/*distinct/more** interesting} answer [CP **than** I expected].

An analysis in which *different* always belongs to the category A would create two problematic exceptions: *different* would be the only A that can select a *than*-clause and it would also be the only case in which a *than*-clause is introduced by anything other than a comparative Deg head (*more/-er/less*). Both exceptions are avoided if we posit that there are in fact two *differents* in English: LEXICAL *DIFFERENT*, a lexical A that patterns with other lexical adjectives in selecting a *from*-PP, and FUNCTIONAL *DIFFERENT*, a comparative Deg head that patterns with the comparative Deg heads *more/-er/less* in selecting a *than*-clause. All examples of *different from*, as in (2), are instances of lexical *different*, while all examples of *different than*, as in (3), are instances of functional *different*. Positing this distinction captures the exceptional dual patterning of *different* and allows us to maintain the generalization that only comparative Deg heads can introduce *than*-clauses. The proposal that *different (than)* belongs to the grammatical category Deg also dovetails with the formal semantic work of Alrenga (2007, 2010), who argues that the semantics of *different* has much in common with the semantics of comparative degree heads.

2.2 Comparative and superlative forms

A second argument for splitting *different* into lexical and functional variants comes from its behaviour in comparative and superlative constructions. A canonical lexical adjective such as *distinct* can be made comparative by adding comparative Deg *more*, which selects a *than*-clause,

as in (4a), and it can be made superlative by adding superlative Deg *most*, as in (4b). (In (4a), note that the *from*-PP is selected by *distinct* while the *than*-clause is selected by *more*.)

- (4) a. Sue's answer was **more** distinct [from what I expected] [**than** I was prepared for].
b. Sue's answer was the **most** distinct [from what I expected].

The same possibilities are available for lexical *different* (i.e. *different from*), as shown in (5).

- (5) a. Sue's answer was **more** different [from what I expected] [**than** I was prepared for].
b. Sue's answer was the **most** different [from what I expected].

However, if lexical *different* is changed to functional *different* (i.e. *different than*), the comparative and superlative constructions become ungrammatical, as shown in (6).

- (6) a. *?Sue's answer was **more** different [than I expected] [**than** I was prepared for].
b. *Sue's answer was the **most** different [than I expected].

The grammaticality contrast is predicted by the proposed analysis. Lexical *different (from)* is categorially A and is thus compatible with a comparative or superlative Deg head, but functional *different (than)* is categorially Deg and should thus be mutually exclusive with other Deg heads. Functional *different (than)* cannot participate in comparative or superlative constructions because the position that the comparative or superlative Deg head would occupy is already occupied by *different*. The distribution of comparative and superlative forms thus provides a strong confirmation of the proposed split of *different* into lexical (A) and functional (Deg) variants.

2.3 Diachronic development

This section outlines the diachronic syntax of *different* based on data from the OED, which shows that the current synchronic variation in the status of *different* is the result of a diachronic change from A to Deg.

The story of English *different* begins in the 1300s, when the adjective *different* and the verb *differ* were both borrowed from French. The earliest complements involved the prepositions *from* and *to* (*differ from*, *different from*, *different to*)—the usage that I would classify as lexical *different* in present-day English. The lexical status of *different to* is clearly indicated by the example in (7), in which *different* is conjoined with the lexical adjective *unlike*.

- (7) His lyght is moche **different and vnylike** [to the lyght of the holygoost].
 his light is much different and unlike to the light of the holy ghost
 ‘His light is much different from, and unlike, the light of the holy ghost.’ (OED, 1526)

The first attested use of *different* with a *than*-clause in the OED is the example in (8), which dates from 1644, approximately three centuries after *different* was first borrowed.

- (8) We make use of them in a quite **different** manner [**then** we did in the beginning]. (OED, 1644)

This development represents the emergence of functional *different*, which occurred when a new functional Deg head was innovated from the existing lexical A *different*. Examples of such “tree-climbing” syntactic change are familiar from the nominal and verbal domains, such as the development of Romance definite articles from demonstratives and the development of English modals from lexical verbs (e.g. Roberts and Roussou 2003). The case study of English *different* helps to illustrate that the adjectival projection is subject to the same diachronic forces that apply to nominal and verbal projections.

The diachronic story sketched above appears to be broadly compatible with the extensive work that Tine Breban has undertaken on adjectives such as *different* from a functional perspective (e.g. Breban 2003, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010). Breban’s empirical concerns are different from mine: she focuses on interpretation and referentiality whereas I focus on distributional factors such as clause selection and comparison.² However, Breban reaches the same conclusion that *different* originated as a lexical adjective and underwent grammaticalization beginning around 1570 (Breban 2008:286). Breban’s observation (following Adamson 2000) that such grammaticalization tends to involve leftward movement is analogous to the tree-climbing account that follows naturally in a generative framework.

3. Other

The synchronic syntactic patterning of English *other* differs from canonical adjectives to the extent that *other* is best analyzed as a function word in the DP rather than the DegP (§3.1). In the

² For example, Breban (2008:267) discusses how *different* originally expressed only “the lexical meaning of unlikeness” and then later developed a new “more grammatical” meaning in which it indicates “non-identity between discourse referents.”

past, however, *other* patterned much like present-day functional *different*, so its current status is the result of a diachronic shift from DegP to DP (§3.2).

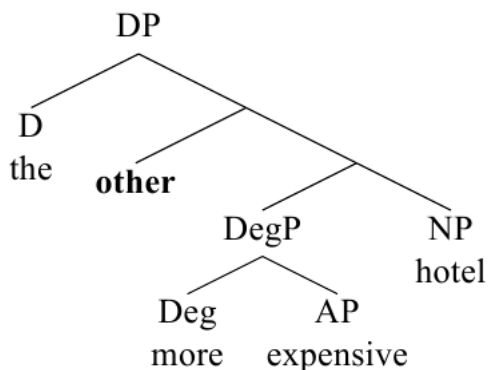
Before examining the patterning of *other*, it should be noted that the form *another* is simply the surface realization of the sequence of *an* plus *other*, as Quirk et al. (1985:389) conclude: “*Another*, although spelt as a single word, is to be considered a fusion of the two words *an* and *other*”. When adjacent, *an* and *other* have the unique property of syllabifying as a single word [ə.'nʌ.ðə] (discussed in §3.1 below), but the synchronic compositionality of this sequence is indicated by the fact that it can be broken up through the addition of an intensifier: *She becomes **another** person on stage, She becomes a whole other person on stage*. Examples containing the form *another* are thus fully relevant to the discussion of *other*.

3.1 Synchronic status

For most present-day English speakers, *other* patterns with neither A nor Deg. Unlike A, *other* lacks comparative and superlative forms (**the otherer/otherest answer*, **the more/most other answer*), and unlike Deg, *other* cannot select a *than*-clause: **John read **another** book [CP **than** I expected]*.³ Furthermore, unlike typical adjectival constructions, *other* cannot serve as a predicate: *The new version is good/better/best/different/*other*. The absence of these fundamental grammatical properties makes it difficult to justify classifying *other* as an adjectival element. I suggest that rather than occurring in the DegP like lexical adjectives and comparative degree heads, *other* is instead a function word in the DP proper and is thus more akin to a numeral or demonstrative than it is to an adjective. The proposed position of *other* is sketched in the tree in (9); I leave the categorial identity of this position as a matter for future research.

³ Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1145) note that although *other* cannot select a *than*-clause, the string *other than* is attested in sentences such as *He has no income **other than** [DP what the government provides]*, always with a nominal complement. Huddleston and Pullum suggest that in such occurrences, *other than* is a compound preposition fossilized from a time when *other* and *than* could co-occur more generally (see §3.2 below).

- (9) Structure of the DP *the other more expensive hotel*



The analysis of *other* as a DP function word accounts for the absence of comparative/superlative forms and the inability to select a *than*-clause, since the locus of these properties is DegP rather than DP. The DP analysis of *other* also correctly predicts that *other* cannot function as a predicative adjective, since *other* does not occur within an adjectival projection.

In addition to explaining the lack of adjectival patterning, the DP analysis of *other* is also better equipped to account for two additional properties of *other*. The first is the ability of *other* to fuse with the indefinite article: the sequence *an* + *other* is syllabified as a single word ([ə.'nʌ.ðə], spelled *another*) but the sequence of *an* + adjective (e.g. *an* + *older*) is not (*[ə.'nɒl.də], **anolder*). Analyzing *other* as a DP function word and *older* as a DegP gives us a principled way to explain this difference, since, as illustrated in (10), *an* and *other* are adjacent heads in the same functional projection whereas *an* and *older* are separated by a phase boundary (assuming that DegP, as a maximal projection, is a phase, following e.g. Kramer 2010:211).

- (10) a. [DP ***an other*** [DegP *red*] *car*] (→ ***another***)
 b. [DP ***an*** [DegP ***older***] [DegP *red*] *car*] (****anolder***)

If we assume that fusion cannot occur across a phase boundary, as proposed for coalescence by Piggott and Newell (2006), it follows that *an* + *other* can fuse while *an* + *older* cannot.

The second property of *other* that is compatible with a DP analysis is its ability to occur without an overt N, as in *the others* (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:1544). This freely-available “pronominal” function is consistent with the behaviour of other DP function words such as numerals, quantifiers, and demonstratives, as shown in (11a), but not with attributive DegPs such as absolute adjectives, comparative adjectives, and functional *different*, as shown in (11b).

- (11) a. DP function words can occur without overt N: *other*, numeral, Q, Dem
- i. I graded **the other papers**. / I graded **the others**.
 - ii. I graded **three/many/those papers**. / I graded **three/many/those**.
- b. DegP cannot occur without overt N: adjective, comparative, functional *different*⁴
- i. I graded **the long(er) papers**. / *I graded **the long(er)s**.
 - ii. Sue gave **different answers** than I expected. / *...**different**s than I expected.

Based on the above evidence, I conclude that *other* in present-day English is best regarded as a DP function word rather than an adjectival element in DegP.

3.2 Diachronic development

Although present-day *other* has little in common with comparative adjectives, this was not always the case. The OED data shows that until quite recently, the patterning of *other* was almost identical to that of present-day *different*. As recently as the 19th century it was possible for *other* to function as a predicative adjective meaning ‘different’, as in (12) (cf. Breban 2010:154-155). Note, as well, the occurrence of the intensifier *far* in (12b), which, in present-day English, is compatible with comparative Deg heads (e.g. *far more interesting*) but not with *other*.

- (12) a. Eumaneus was Morganes broþer, Bot his maners were alle **oþer**.
 Eumaneus was Morgan’s brother but his manners were entirely other
 ‘Eumaneus was Morgan’s brother, but his manners were entirely different.’
 (OED, 1450)
- b. This Italian poetry is in a world far **oþer** from ours of to-day. (OED, 1879)

Other was also freely able to select a comparative clause headed by *than*, as in (13).

⁴ An exception to the generalization in (11b) is the construction exemplified in *The meek shall inherit the earth*. However, this construction is quite narrowly restricted to certain adjectives and “certain fairly well-established classes of persons” (Quirk et al. 1985:421-24), whereas the pronominal use of DP function words such as *other*, numerals, quantifiers, and demonstratives in (11a) has a much more general distribution.

- (13) Is it possible that such maner of men should be of any vertue **other** [_{CP} **then** their
is it possible that such manner of men should be of any virtue other than their
profession requireth]?
profession requires
'Is it possible that such kinds of men should be of any virtue other than what their
profession requires?' (OED, 1589)

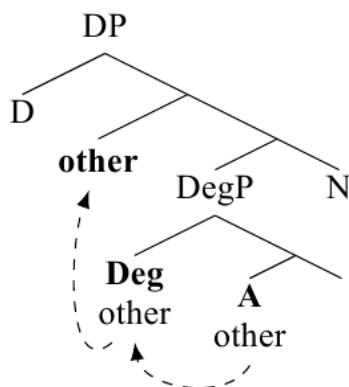
It was even possible for *other* to select a PP headed by *from*, as in (14).

- (14) a. A person quite of **other** principles [_{PP} **from** her former husband]. (OED, 1673)
b. Either the Anlaf here spoken of was **another** person [_{PP} **from** Olaf] or [etc.].
(OED, 1867)

This suite of comparative properties indicates that *other* was, at the very least, a comparative Deg head like present-day functional *different*—and considering the examples in (14), in which *other* selects a *from*-PP, it may have originated as a lexical adjective. Up to a century ago, then, there may have been “lexical *other*” (A) and “functional *other*” (Deg), just as I have proposed for present-day *different*. The reanalysis of *other* as a higher, non-comparative DP function word in present-day English thus seems to have been a relatively recent development.

The resulting picture of the diachronic syntax of *other* is sketched in (15). Each of the three positions for *other* correlates with independent syntactic properties: *other* in A selects a PP headed by *from*, like other lexical adjectives; *other* in Deg selects a comparative clause introduced by *than*, like other comparative Deg heads; and *other* in the DP selects neither a PP nor a clause, like other DP function words such as numerals and demonstratives.

- (15) Diachronic syntax of *other*



The diachronic syntax of *other* provides a second example of the upwards trajectory of syntactic change in the Degree Phrase—and beyond, in this case, to the DP proper.

4. *Différent*

This section reports briefly on existing work by Laca and Tasmowski (2003, 2004) and Tovenà and Van Peteghem (2006) on French *différent*, which has developed similarly to English *different* and *other* but has progressed even farther along the upwards trajectory—all the way to D itself. Laca and Tasmowski show that French *différent* has a determiner form that evolved from the original lexical adjective (which also remains in use, as in English). An example of determiner *différent* is given in (16a). The status of *différent* as a determiner here is indicated by its complementary distribution with other indefinite determiners, as illustrated in (16b).

(16) Determiner *différent* in French (Laca and Tasmowski 2004:110)

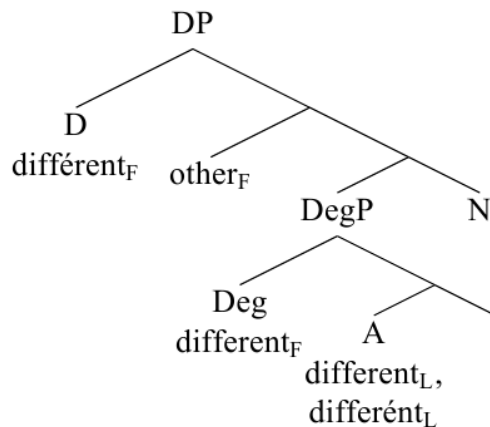
- a. *Différents organismes ont demandé sa collaboration.*
different organizations have requested his collaboration
‘Various organizations have requested his collaboration.’
- b. **Plusieurs différents / *De différents organismes ont demandé...*
several different / de different organizations have requested

Tovenà and Van Peteghem (2006) propose that the evolution of *différent* from A to D involved an intermediate stage in which *différent* was a semantically bleached adjective. Breban (2008:265) concludes from this that “there is not only semantic but also morphosyntactic gradience between the categories of adjective and determiner.” The analysis that I have proposed captures this morphosyntactic gradience by positing additional syntactic positions between A and D—namely Deg in the adjectival projection and the functional head occupied by *other* in the DP.

5. Conclusion

This squib has used modifiers in the semantic field of ‘different’ as a window into syntactic variation and change in the DegP. There is extensive synchronic variation among these items, which, as shown in (17), span a range of positions from A in the DegP to D in the DP.

(17) Present-day positions of ‘different’ words (L = lexical variant, F = functional variant)



Syntactic change among this class displays a clear tendency for items to move to higher syntactic positions: A > Deg for English *different*, A > Deg > DP for English *other*, and A > D via intermediate steps for French *différent*. In both English and French, the diachronic trajectory that begins in the DegP is not confined there, but rather continues into the DP proper.

Overall, this squib has shown that the DegP exhibits patterns of syntactic variation and change that are analogous to what is known about better-studied domains. The rich synchronic and diachronic variation in the DegP make it a useful testing ground for microparametric approaches to syntax.

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