

Honorific titles are D

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Abstract. This study proposes a hypothesis that honorific titles such as English *Mr* and Japanese *san* occupy the D head position and discusses its consequences to the syntax and semantics of nominals. Seven pieces of supporting evidence are presented using data from various languages. If the proposed hypothesis is correct, (i) nominals in languages without articles are not NP but DP, (ii) proper names cannot be D but N, and (iii) a semantic parameter concerning the basic denotation of common nouns such as Chierchia's (1998) Nominal Mapping Parameter is unnecessary.

Keywords. honorific titles; articles; proper names; DP; syntax; semantics; Japanese; Malay; Tagalog

1. Introduction. Almost all languages have honorific titles (henceforth "titles") such as *Mr* in English and *san* in Japanese. Furthermore, in some languages, they are virtually obligatory when (human) proper names are used, because only in limited situations is politeness irrelevant in our daily language use. Thus, in Japanese, this virtual obligatory use of titles has given rise to a variety of titles derived from common nouns. In the mock TV news programme scene below, the common nouns *rebootaa* 'reporter' and *yoogisha* 'suspect' are used as titles, except when the reporter refers to himself/herself, as in (1c), to whom s/he should not be polite.

(1) Japanese

- a. Genba kara *Yamada* *(*rebootaa*) ga o-tutaesi-masu.
scene from Yamada reporter NOM POL-report-POL
'Reporter *Yamada* is reporting from the scene.'
- b. "*Yamada* *(*rebootaa*) kara *Tanaka* *(*yoogisha*) no sugata wa mie-masu-ka?"
Yamada reporter from Tanaka suspect GEN figure TOP see-POL-Q
'Can Reporter *Tanaka* (= you) see Suspect *Tanaka* from there?'
- c. "... ijoo, genba kara *Yamada* *(*rebootaa*) ga o-tutaesi-masi-ta."
that's.all scene from Yamada reporter NOM POL-report-POL-PST
'That's all for Reporter *Yamada*'s (= my) report from the scene.'

In this connection, Kikuchi (1997:245) states that occupation terms used as titles occur with proper names because the relevant people cannot be referred to without titles, not because they deserve respect. Thus, in news reports, *kyooju* 'professor' is still used with a professor's name even when s/he is in the news for a misdeed. Similarly, in the Indonesian news report in (2), *guru* 'teacher' is used to avoid the titleless use of a proper name, even though it is not a title commonly used for teachers, for whom *Pak* 'Mr' and *Bu* 'Ms' are normally used.

(2) Indonesian

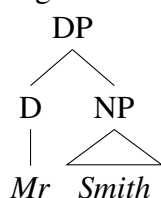
Guru Budi meninggal setelah di-pukul leher-nya oleh salah satu siswa-nya.
teacher Budi pass.away after PASS-hit neck-3 by one.of student-3
'Teacher *Budi* passed away after being hit in his neck by one of his students.'¹

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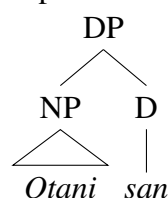
Despite their ubiquity across languages and their virtually obligatory status in some languages, titles have seldom been made a topic of syntactic discussions, arguably because they are thought to be a matter of morphology, pragmatics, sociolinguistics or stylistics, but not syntax. This study is concerned with the syntax of honorific titles. I propose a hypothesis that titles occupy the D head position (section 2). This hypothesis is supported by the empirical facts presented in section 3. In section 4, I discuss two potential problems for the hypothesis. Section 5 concludes the paper and discusses the consequences of the hypothesis for the syntax and semantics of nominals. Specifically, if titles are D as this study claims, (i) nominals in languages without articles are not NP but DP, (ii) proper names cannot be D but N, and (iii) a semantic parameter concerning the basic denotation of common nouns such as Chierchia’s (1998) Nominal Mapping Parameter is unnecessary.

2. The claim. I propose that titles occupy the D head position, as shown in the trees in (3).

(3) a. English



b. Japanese



I am aware of two exceptions to the proposed hypothesis. The exceptions may not behave identically to native titles in terms of word order and other properties discussed below.

The first exception is borrowed titles. The position of borrowed titles tends to be that in the original language. For example, the Japanese title *san* was borrowed into English as a suffix and occurs after rather than before the name (e.g. *Otani-san*, **san Otani*). Similarly, *misutaa* in Japanese, whose origin is English *Mr*, occurs before rather than after the name (e.g. *misutaa Sato*, **Sato misutaa*).

The second exception is morphological titles. By morphological titles, I mean titles that attach to names in morphology, either by affixation or compounding. The borrowed title *-san* in English also belongs to this exception category because it is a suffix. In Japanese, morphological titles can be distinguished from syntactic ones prosodically. Syntactic titles do not trigger the deaccenting of the name, with the name retaining its accent, as in (4a). The name is independent from the title prosodically as well as syntactically. By contrast, morphological titles trigger the deaccenting of the name. As a result, only one accent is assigned to the entire expression, as in (4b).

(4) ‘Teacher Aoyama’ (Accent [tonal fall] is indicated by “]”).)

a. Syntactic title

[_N Ao]yama] [_D sense]i]

b. Morphological title

[_N Aoyama sense]i]

Crucially, syntactic titles with two accents are the norm. Although morphological titles with a single accent exist, few actually use them. Hence, titles need to be discussed primarily in syntax.

¹ *Republika*, <https://news.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/18/02/06/p3pds440-simpatimengalir-untuk-pak-guru-budi>, accessed 10 March 2023.

3. Supporting facts. In this section, I present seven kinds of evidence for the hypothesis put forward in the previous section. The evidence comes from various languages.

3.1. CO-OCCURRENCE RESTRICTION WITH DEFINITE ARTICLES. First, titles do not co-occur with a definite article in English.

- (5) a. *the* president
b. *Mr* President
c. **the Mr* President
d. **Mr the* president

Given that definite articles occupy the D head position, this restriction suggests that titles also occupy the same position, i.e. D.

3.2. CO-OCCURRENCE RESTRICTION WITH PERSONAL PRONOUNS. Second, in Japanese, personal pronouns do not co-occur with a title, as in (6a) and (6b).

- (6) a. 'you' + title
 ?anata *san*, *kimi *san*
b. 'I' + title
 *boku *sama*

Assuming that personal pronouns are D,² this co-occurrence restriction suggests that titles occupy the same syntactic position, i.e. D. The second person pronoun *kisama* also suggests the common syntactic position (i.e. D) shared by titles and personal pronouns because it consists of the title *sama* and the prefix *ki-*, which means 'noble'.

The forms in (7) appear to be counterexamples to the co-occurrence restriction on personal pronouns and titles.

- (7) a. 'you' + title?
 omae *san*, anata *sama*
b. 'I' + title?
 ore *sama*, boku *chan*

However, I argue that these are single lexicalized pronouns containing a title, analogous to *kisama* discussed above, and hence are not true counterexamples.

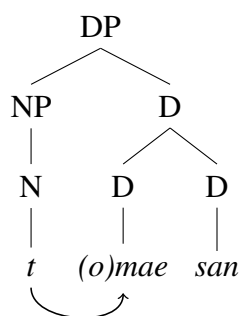
In the history of Japanese, many personal pronouns developed from common nouns. For instance, the Modern Japanese second person pronouns *omae* and *anata* respectively originate from the common nouns *mae* 'front' and *anata* 'over there'.³ This diachronic change is thought to involve an N-to-D movement. Now, the forms in (7) arise when the D head is not empty but already occupied by a title and the resultant adjunction structure is lexicalized as a single D. These two processes are depicted in (8a) and (8b), respectively.

² But see Furuya (2012), who claims that personal pronouns in Japanese are not D because they allow pronominal modifiers as in (i).

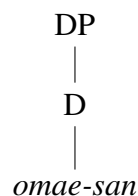
(i) isogasii anata-tati gakusei
 busy you-PL student
 'you students, who are busy'

³ *Mae* is still used in this sense whereas *anata* has lost its original locational meaning and is only used as a personal pronoun.

(8) a.



b.



These changes only occurred with a limited number of items. Not all common nouns can be used pronominally by means of N-to-D movement, nor were all common noun-origin personal pronouns lexicalized with any title as a single personal pronoun.

3.3. CO-OCCURRENCE WITH APs. Third, in English, titles attach to an AP to form a nominal denoting individuals possessing the property described by the AP, as in (9a). The same function is found with the definite article *the*, as in (9b).

- (9) a. Mr Super Rich ‘male individual who is super rich’
 b. the super rich ‘individuals who are super rich’

This similarity shows not only that titles occupy the same syntactic position as definite articles (i.e. D), but also that they share an important semantic component with definite articles. Specifically, titles turn a property (type $\langle e, t \rangle$) into an individual (type e). *Mr* can thus combine with an NP, which also denotes a property, as in *Mr Big Shot*.

For concreteness, I propose the semantics of *Mr* as in (10a), where the material connected by \blacklozenge is a conventional implicature.⁴

- (10) a. $\llbracket Mr \rrbracket = \lambda P \iota x [P(x)] \blacklozenge \lambda P [\text{male}(\iota x [P(x)])]$
 b. $\llbracket Mr \text{ Super Rich} \rrbracket = \iota x [\text{super_rich}(x)] \blacklozenge \text{male}(\iota x [\text{super_rich}(x)])$

In this analysis, *Mr* is essentially a definite article. Descriptively, *Mr P* denotes a uniquely identifiable individual with property *P* in a given context.

3.4. DEFINITE ARTICLE EXPRESSING INTIMACY. Fourth, definite articles in German (southern dialects in particular) attach to a personal name to express intimacy (Boase-Beier & Lodge 2003:235).

(11) German

Ist der Franz da?
 is the Franz there
 ‘Is Franz there?’

(Boase-Beier & Lodge 2003:235)

The meaning expressed by the definite article in (11) is one typically conveyed by titles. For example, titles such as *chan* and *kun* in Japanese are used to indicate intimacy. This fact makes

⁴ (10a) crucially differs from the semantics of *Mr* proposed by McCready (2019:87) in that McCready analyses titles as contributing only conventional implicatures with no descriptive/at-issue content.

sense if titles and definite articles both occupy the syntactic D head position. It can be said that the D head can be exploited to encode honorific meanings.⁵

3.5. T-V DISTINCTION. Fifth, D being a locus of honorific meanings can also be confirmed by the existence of multiple personal pronouns differing in degrees of familiarity and respect. Many Indo-European languages have two kinds of second person singular pronoun, which is known as “T-V distinction.” Thus, French has *tous-vous* and German has *du-Sie*, where the latter of each pair is used for an addressee who is unfamiliar to the speaker or towards whom the speaker wishes to show respect. Many languages in East and Southeast Asia make finer distinctions, as shown in (12). The rightmost words (i.e. *anata* and *anda*) are normally used for unfamiliar addressees and in formal situations (typically in writing), and, roughly put, the formality and familiarity levels decrease towards the left end.

- (12) Second person personal pronouns differing in honorificity
- a. Japanese
temee, kisama, omae, kimi, anta, anata
 - b. Malay
kau, engkau, awak, kamu, you, anda

Similar honorificity distinction is found in the titles in these languages. Some of them are listed in (13) in the order of increasing formality/respect.

- (13) Titles differing in honorificity (M: male, F: female)
- a. Japanese
kun^M, chan^F, san, sama, shi, dono
 - b. Malay
saudara/saudari^F, encik^M/cik^F, tuan^M/puan^F

In English, these items may all translate as *Mr* and *Ms/Miss/Mrs*, which are distinguished by gender (and marital status). Some Japanese and Malay titles are also sensitive to gender, as indicated by the superscripts “M” and “F”.⁶ Notice that gender is a feature often associated with D. This fact adds additional support for the hypothesis that titles are D.

3.6. HEAD DIRECTIONALITY. Sixth, titles tend to occur before personal names in head-initial languages such as English, Malay, Thai and Vietnamese, whereas they occur after personal names in head-final languages such as Japanese, Korean, Burmese and Tibetan. This tendency suggests that titles are not an adjunct or dependent but a head.

3.7. DIACHRONIC CHANGE FROM ARTICLE TO TITLE. The final evidence is a diachronic change from an article to a title. Proto-Austronesian had proprial articles, which occur before personal names and are distinct from ordinary articles occurring with common nouns. Both types of articles inflected for case. Many modern Austronesian languages, especially those in Taiwan and the Philippines, retain this article system. The articles in Tagalog are summarized in (14).

⁵ Of course, honorific meanings can be expressed by other elements in a nominal, which include the noun itself, plural markers (e.g. anti-honorific plural marker *-domo* in Japanese) and case markers (e.g. honorific case markers *kkeyse* [NOM] and *kkey* [DAT] in Korean).

⁶ *Chan* in Japanese is typically used for young females, but it can also be used for other people to express intimacy.

(14) Tagalog articles

Type	NOM	GEN	OBL	Example
Proprial	<i>si</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>kay</i>	<i>si/ni/kay Maria</i> ‘Maria’
Ordinary	<i>ang</i>	<i>ng</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>ang/ng/sa babae</i> ‘the woman’

Malay has lost morphological case-marking altogether. However, the Proto-Austronesian nominative proprial article **si* has survived until today by transforming into a title. Because *si* no longer marks the nominative case, it can occur in both subject and object, as illustrated by (15).

(15) Malay⁷

a. Subject

Rupanya *si Razif* tu ada masalah dengan se-orang perempuan ni.
 seemingly SI Razif that have problem with one-CLF female this
 ‘Razif seems to have a problem with this one girl.’

b. Object

Ziyad mencapai telefon bimbit-nya dan menelefon *si Zamri*.
 Ziyad reach mobile.phone-3 and telephone SI Zamri
 ‘Ziyad picked up his mobile phone and called Zamri.’

In fact, it is more common for *si* to be used with NPs headed by a common noun and APs, as shown in (16). Although English titles also combine with NPs and APs (see section 3.3), such instances of *si* can be translated into English better by the definite article *the*.

(16) Malay

a. *Si* + NP

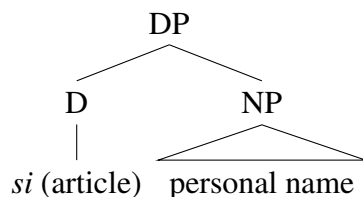
si {ibu / isteri / gagak / India / pemandu van / baju hitam}
 SI mother wife crow India driver van clothes black
 ‘the mother/wife/crow/Indian/van driver/(one wearing a) black shirt’

b. *Si* + AP

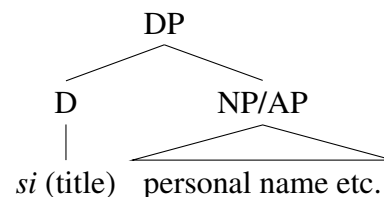
si {cantik / kecil / gemuk / bodoh / cerewet / mati / zalim}
 SI beautiful small fat stupid fussy dead cruel
 ‘the beautiful/small/fat/stupid/fussy/dead/cruel (one)’

The change from a proprial article into a title can be understood naturally if both articles and titles occupy D, as depicted in (17).

(17) a. Proto-Malayo Polynesian



b. Malay



⁷ These sentences were taken from the ZSM MXD2012 subcorpus of the Leipzig Corpora Collection (Goldhahn et al. 2012) using MALINDO Conc (Nomoto et al. 2018). (15a) <http://cerpen2u.wordpress.com/>, (15b) http://alamjin-tuan_kelarias.blogspot.com/2011_01_01_archive.html

This analysis predicts that titles, more specifically native syntactic titles (as opposed to borrowed and/or morphological titles; cf. section 2), do not exist in languages with proprial articles. This prediction seems to be correct in Tagalog. What appear to be native titles in (18) turn out to be ordinary common nouns because they contain the linker *ng* as is the case with other pronominal modifiers, as shown in (19). Notice that the alleged titles are preceded by the article *si* in (18), which also indicates that they are not in D.

(18) Tagalog

Ito si *Ginoo-ng/Ginang/Binibini-ng* Reyes.
 this NOM gentleman-LK/madame/young.lady-LK Reyes
 ‘This is Mr/Mrs/Miss Reyes.’

(Schachter & Otones 1972:95)

(19) Tagalog

- a. *isa-ng/mabuti-ng/ito-ng* tao
 one-LK/good-LK/this-LK person
 ‘one/good/this person’
 b. *laruan-g* kalan
 toy-LK stove
 ‘toy stove’

(Schachter & Otones 1972:120)

Ginang ‘madame/Mrs’ in (18) does not take a linker arguably because it is not truly native to Tagalog. According to a Facebook posting by Nestor Castro, the word was invented during the colonial period, as *ginoo* was gender-neutral back then and no gendered titles comparable to Spanish *don* ‘Mr’ and *doña* ‘Mrs’ existed.⁸

4. Potential problems. This section discusses two potential problems with the proposed hypothesis, i.e. predicative uses of “title + name” (section 4.1) and the position of plural markers (section 4.2), and presents solutions to these potential problems.

4.1. PREDICATIVE USE. According to the proposed hypothesis, titles are D and semantically they create individual-denoting expressions (type *e*) from property-denoting ones (type $\langle e, t \rangle$). However, DPs headed by a title are sometimes used predicatively, as in (20).

(20) a. English

If someone is pressuring you to change, they are not *Mr Right*.⁹

b. Japanese

Yamada san wa kyoo mo *oshare* san desu ne.
 Yamada SAN TOP today too fashionable SAN COP PART
 ‘Mr/Ms Yamada looks fashionable today too.’

The fact that the indefinite article *a* does not occur with *Mr Right* in (20a) despite its indefinite interpretation confirms that *Mr* occupies D.

In argue that predicative uses such as (20) result from type-shifting by means of Partee’s

⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/malibaypasay/posts/philippine-history-the-word-ginang-was-a-colonial-inventionthe-word-ginang-mrs-w/10159577682975139/>, accessed 13 March 2023.

⁹ A book review on Amazon by Julia Wilson. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Five-Brides-Eva-Marie-Everson/dp/1414397445>, accessed 14 March 2023.

(1987) “pred.” Thus, *oshare san* in (20b) receives the semantics in (21). The conventional implicatures of *san* (see section 5.2) are omitted for simplicity.

$$(21) \text{ pred}(\llbracket\textit{oshare san}\rrbracket) = \lambda x[\cup y[\textit{fashionable}(y)](x)]$$

This denotation captures the meaning of sentence (20b) appropriately. The sentence does not just mean that Yamada is fashionable. Rather, it means that s/he is fashionable in the same manner as the contextually salient fashionable group of individuals.

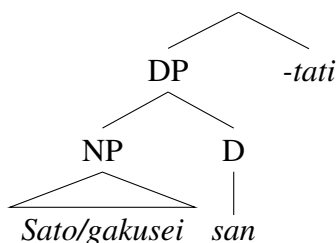
4.2. PLURAL MARKERS. The second problem has to do with the relative order between a title and a plural marker. Plural markers are thought to apply to NPs denoting properties. Hence, given that proper names are NPs in the present analysis, a plural marker is expected to occur between the name and the title. However, the reality is that this order is unacceptable and the plural marker occurs in the outermost layer, as shown in (22).

(22) Japanese

- a. Sato san-tati vs. *Sato-tati san
 Sato SAN-PL Sato-PL SAN
 ‘Mr/Ms Sato and his/her associates’
- b. gakusei san-tati vs. *gakusei-tati san
 student SAN-PL student-PL SAN
 (i) ‘students’ (ii) ‘the student(s) and his/her(/their) associates’

Notice that the interpretations obtained here are those of the so-called associative plural. I follow Nakanishi & Ritter (2008) and posit a position for the associative *-tati* above DP.

(23)



Nakanishi & Ritter analyse the meaning of the associative *-tati* as in (24).

$$(24) \llbracket\textit{-tati}\rrbracket^c = \lambda x: x \text{ is human.group}(x)(c)$$

“*-tati* combines with a human individual x and yields a group that consists of x and his/her associate(s) with respect to the contextual parameter c ”¹⁰

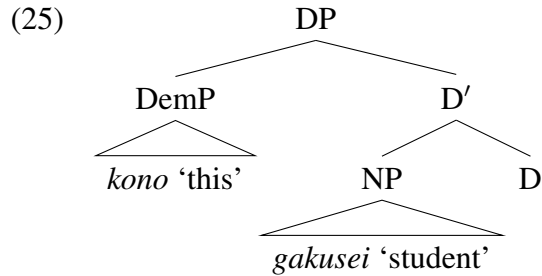
The uniform reading (i) in (22b), where the referents are homogeneous, is obtained if the individual denoted by *gakusei san* and his/her associates happen to share the same descriptive content, i.e. being a student.

5. Conclusion and implications. This paper has proposed that titles are D based on several facts pointing to the syntactic and semantic commonalities between titles on one hand and articles and personal pronouns on the other. The proposed hypothesis has implications for the nomi-

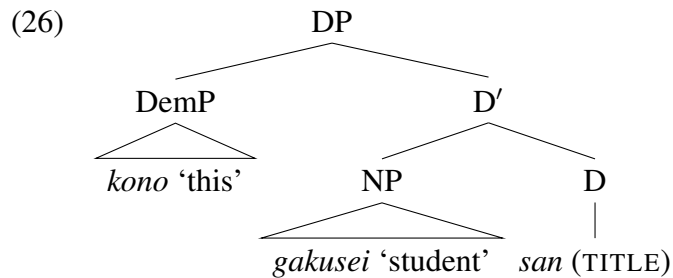
¹⁰ The restriction to human individuals here is too strict because *-tati* can also combine with animals and even with inanimates, especially for young speakers today. Moreover, in Nomoto (2013:section 5.2), I argued that the relevant restriction is not asserted or presupposed but conventionally implicated.

nal structure in languages without articles (section 5.1), the semantics of proper names (5.2) and the universality of common noun denotation across languages (section 5.3).

5.1. LANGUAGES WITHOUT ARTICLES. The first implication has to do with the nominal syntax of languages without articles. If titles are D, nominals in such languages must be DP, contrary to Fukui (1986) and Bošković (2008, 2009) among others. Proponents of DPs (e.g. Kawashima 1998; Watanabe 2006) often have to posit a null D.



Titles can be used as overt evidence for D.

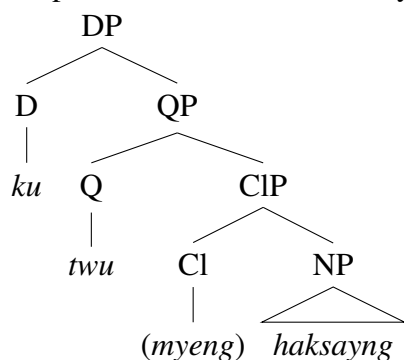


Moreover, titles can be used as positive evidence for D in children’s language acquisition. Child-directed speech seems to use titles more frequently than adults’ speech. In Japanese, parents call their children by their first name and a title, with the name sometimes shortened, as in *Hana chan* for Hanako, when they are small. Animal names are commonly followed by a title, as in *neko chan* [cat TITLE] and *zoo san* [elephant TITLE].

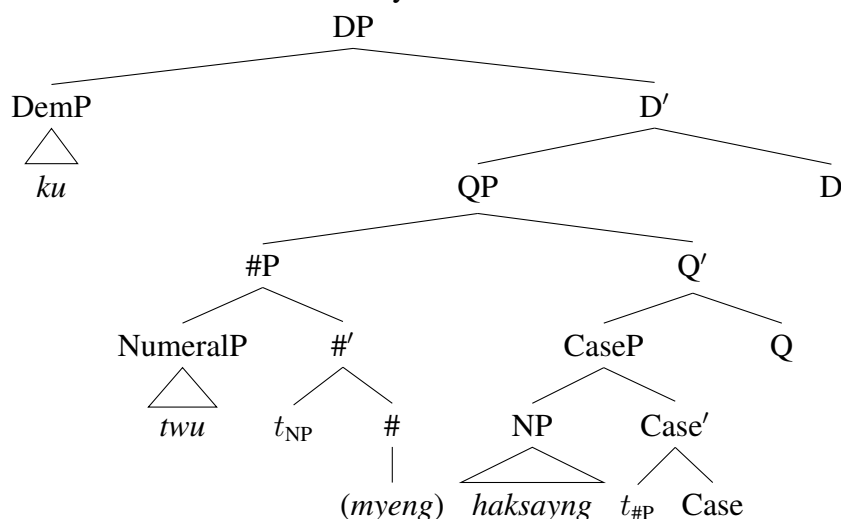
Simpson (2022) recently cast doubt on the across-the-board head-finality in Japanese and Korean nominals and argued that higher functional projections including DP are in fact head-initial. (27b) shows his analysis of (27a). A head-final analysis for the same phrase following Watanabe (2006) is given in (27c) for comparison.

- (27) Korean
- a. ku twu (myeng-uy) haksayng
 that two CLF-GEN student
 ‘those two students’ (Simpson 2022)

- b. Simpson’s head-initial DP analysis



- c. Watanabe’s head-final DP analysis



The hypothesis that titles are D is not compatible with Simpson’s new analysis. In fact, it calls into question the across-the-board head-initial structure widely assumed for Mandarin Chinese. This is because (syntactic) titles in Mandarin Chinese occur after the name, as in *Wang laoshi* [Wang teacher] ‘Teacher Wang’. The proposed hypothesis suggests that Mandarin Chinese nominals are head-final (cf. Huang 1982).

5.2. SEMANTICS OF PROPER NAMES. The second implication is for the semantics of proper names. If titles are D, personal names cannot be D but must be N. Therefore, personal names lexically denote properties (hence, type $\langle e, t \rangle$), like common nouns, supporting the predicative theory of proper names (e.g. Burge 1973; Guerts 1997; Matushansky 2008; Fara 2015; Muñoz 2019). Proper names can only denote individuals (type e) when they combine with an overt or covert title in syntax.¹¹

$$(28) \quad \llbracket Otani \rrbracket = \lambda x[x \text{ bears } Otani]$$

(29) Overt title

$$a. \quad \llbracket san \rrbracket = \lambda P \iota x [P(x)] \blacklozenge \lambda P [\text{animate}(\iota x [P(x)]) \wedge \text{HON}(\iota x [P(x)])]$$

$$b. \quad \llbracket Otani san \rrbracket = \iota x [x \text{ bears } Otani] \blacklozenge \text{animate}(o) \wedge \text{HON}(o) \quad (o = \iota x [x \text{ bears } Otani])$$

¹¹ In addition, proper names can move to D in some languages such as Italian, as convincingly demonstrated by Longobardi (1994).

- (30) Covert title
- a. $[[\emptyset]] = \lambda P \iota x [P(x)]$
 - b. $[[Otani \emptyset]] = \iota x [x \text{ bears } Otani]$

5.3. NOMINAL MAPPING PARAMETER. Finally, the two previous implications provide further reasons for rejecting Chierchia's (1998) Nominal Mapping Parameter, a semantic parameter according to which common nouns in languages without articles denote kinds of type *e*. In the proposed analysis, languages without articles have D, realized as an overt or covert title and functioning as an *et-to-e* type shifter. Furthermore, proper names denote properties. Therefore, it is natural to think that common nouns also denote properties. Common nouns universally denote properties, regardless of the presence or absence of articles in a language.

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