ENGLISH GRAMMAR

Nouns, Determinatives, and NPs

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Nouns, Determinatives, and NPs

Plan for the lecture:

- Nouns and their definition
- The category of Determinatives
- The Determiner function
- The DP Hypothesis and why it's a mistake
- Prenominal attributive modifiers
- Pronouns, and why they are really nouns
- Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular ***they***

Defining nouns: what the general public thinks

‘I got through 12 years of state funded schooling with the sum total of my grammatical knowledge being — Nouns are thing words, verbs are doing words, and adjectives are describing words. I suspect we never covered adverbs.’

John Wilkins, on his blog
Evolving Thoughts (14 June 2008)

Defining nouns: history without evolution

‘We declared war on terror. We declared war on **terror** – it’s not even a noun, so, good luck. After we defeat it, I’m sure we’ll take on that bastard ennui.’

Jon Stewart, in a graduation address at the College of William and Mary

‘I think – uh – the con– th... the phrase “the war on terror” – uh – as... as if there could be a war on an adjective, I mean it’s – it’s just – or an adverb – it doesn’t really work.’

Stefan Halper, Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs in New York, interviewed on radio WHYY

Defining nouns: history without evolution

Where did the ‘thing-word’ caricature come from?

- Lowth, *A Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762): A noun is ‘the name of any thing conceived to subsist, or of which we have any notion’
- Murray, *English Grammar* (1795): A noun ‘is the name of any thing that exists, or of which we have any notion’
- Curme, *English Grammar* (1925): ‘A noun . . . is the name of a living being or lifeless thing’
- Garner, in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition (2003): ‘A noun is a word that names something’

250 years of saying the same old same old!

Nouns: they don't all denote things

fire:	process of combustion (rapid oxidation)
absence:	not being there
emptiness:	nothing being there
failure:	not managing to
lack:	failing to be provided when needed
method:	how (by what means) something is done
assistance:	being there with supportive actions

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We don't get our definition of 'Noun' from metaphysics; we get our metaphysics from the use of our nouns.

Nouns: what they do have in common

- Four inflectional forms: singular and plural plain case $\times$ singular and plural genitive case
- Serve as heads of NPs with functions like Subject, Object, Predicative Complement, Complement of Preposition
- Preceded by determinatives like *the* or *a*(*n*)
- Modified by (preceding) adjectives like *big*
- Modified by (following) relative clause modifiers like *who I didn't recognize*

Nouns: an irregular lexeme with full paradigm

Inflectional forms of ***child***

	PLAIN	GENITIVE
SINGULAR	*child*	*child's*
PLURAL	*children*	*children's*

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Phonologically, regular nouns are only half as complex:

Inflectional forms of ***dog***

	PLAIN	GENITIVE
SINGULAR	/dag/	
PLURAL		/dagz/

Determinatives as a distinct category

The 'qualifies a noun' definition of Adjective leads all dictionaries to include among the adjectives:

(i) both the articles (*the*, *a*(*n*)

(ii) both demonstratives (***this***, ***that***)

(iii) all quantifiers (*all*, *some*, *most*, *several*, . . .)

(iv) all numerals (*one*, *two*, . . . , *243*, . . .)

(v) the dependent genitive forms of pronouns (*my*, *your*, . . .)

Treating these as Adjectives makes a complete hash of the syntactic properties of that category.

Determinatives as a distinct category

The proposal defended here (and in *CGEL*):

- Determinative is a **category** of words (like Noun or Preposition), distinct (but not disjoint) from Adjective, containing about 35 basic items plus all the numerals.
- **Determiner** is a **function** (like Subject or Head).
- Determinatives often (but not always) serve as Determiner.
- The Determiner function is often (but not always) filled by a Determinative.
- **Genitive NPs** can also serve in Determiner function.

Determinatives as a distinct category

A Grammar of Spoken English (Harold Palmer and F. G. Blandford, 1939) cites some criteria for distinguishing adjectives from a class of **determinatives** (Fr. *adjectifs déterminatifs*) from the class of adjectives:

(a) Determinatives cannot be used predicatively.

Alert residents objected. $\sim$ *The residents were alert.*

All residents objected. $\not\sim$ **The residents were all.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

(b) Determinatives only rarely express grade (comparison).

Those who succeeded were more motivated than the others.

**Those who succeeded were more most than the others.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

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Those who succeeded were more motivated than the others.

**Those who succeeded were more most than the others.*

(c) Determinatives only rarely take modifiers, and in particular do not take intensifying modifiers.

[*Very alert*] *residents objected.*

*[*Very all*] *residents objected.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

Four more reliable criteria also distinguish Adjectives from Determinatives:

(d) Determinatives do not stack, or even (for the most part) co-occur in NP structure.

Responsible, alert, intelligent residents helped out.

**These, the, all residents helped out.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

(e) Adding a Determinative can make a singular count noun into a grammatical NP but adding an adjective cannot:

I heard [$_{\text{NP}}$ *this guy*] *was asking about me.*

**I heard* [$_{\text{NP}}$ *thin guy*] *was asking about me.*

Determinatives as a distinct category

(f) Most Determinatives occur in the **fused determiner-head** construction, where a Determinative serves as Determiner and Head simultaneously and thus constitutes a whole NP. No adjective does this.

I'd like to hear more about $[_{\text{NP}}$ *this*$]$.

**I'd like to hear more about* $[_{\text{NP}}$ *thin*$]$.

Determinatives as a distinct category

One further minor point is that there is a phonological condition sufficient to guarantee **non**-adjectivehood:

(h) Adjectives can never begin with phonological /ð/, but determinatives can, and some do (*that*, *the*, *this*).

As a result of a historical accident, initial /ð/ is never found in Nouns, Verbs, or Adjectives.

Determinatives as a distinct category

There are about 35 basic Determinatives:

a(*n*)	*a few*	*a little*	*all*$^{+}$	*another*
any	*both*	*certain*$^{+}$	*each*	*either*
enough	*every*	*few*$^{+}$	***little***$^{+}$	***many***
much	*neither*	***no***	***one***$^{+}$	*said*$^{+}$
several	*some*	*such*$^{+}$	*sufficient*$^{+}$	***that***
the	***this***	*various*$^{+}$	***we***$^{+}$	*whatever*$^{+}$
whatsoever^{+}	*what*$^{+}$	*whichever*	*which*$^{+}$	*you*$^{+}$

Words with superscript ‘ + ’ belong to other categories as well.
Words in ***boldface italics*** have varying inflectional forms.

The Determiner function

The **Determiner** of an NP is intuitively an initial subconstituent that fixes certain properties like definiteness and quantification and make it fit for use semantically as an argument.

In semantic terms, a Determiner combines with the property denotation of a nominal expression to form a full NP meaning (a generalized quantifier, under many accounts).

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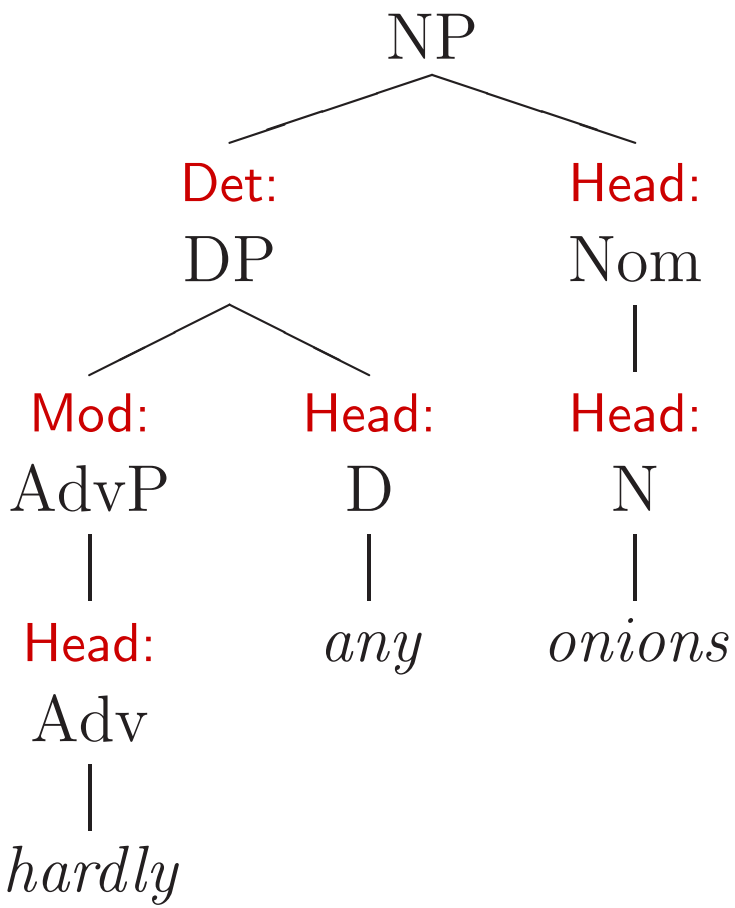
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What does 'Specifier' mean in post-1970 transformational grammar? Not clear. But probably Determiner — i.e., it's regarded as a function, not a category, and certainly not a lexical category.

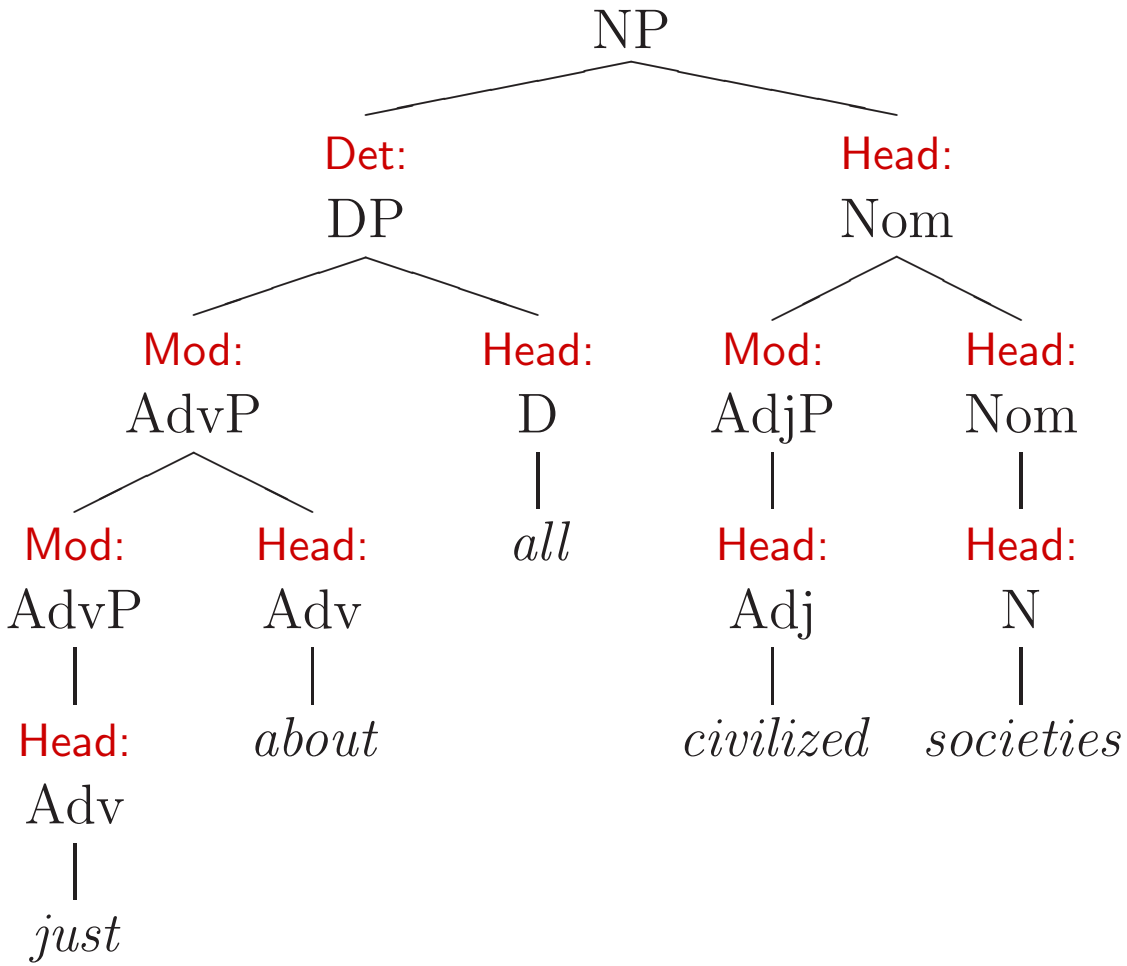
The 'DP Hypothesis'

The DP Hypothesis is not merely that some phrases have D as Head. *CGEL* agrees that there are phrases with D as Head such as *hardly any*, *just about all*, *almost every*:



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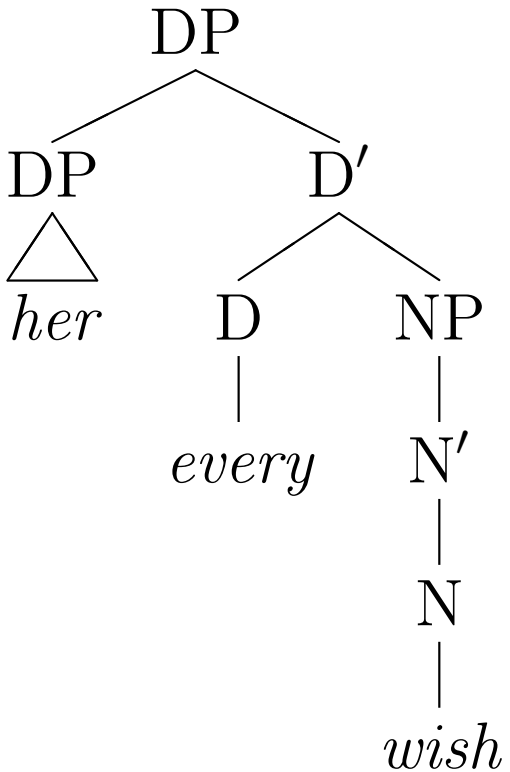
But the DP hypothesis is not that some phrases have D as Head; it is that **phrases like *the archbishop* and *this bicycle* have the D as Head**.

In a phrase like *the king of France*, it is claimed that *the* is the Head. The rest of the phrase, *king of France*, is a dependent, specifically a **Complement**.

Once informally proposed by John Lyons, the DP Hypothesis was revived in 1987 in the MIT doctoral dissertation of Steven Abney.

The ‘DP Hypothesis’

Abney proposed this structure for the phrase *her every wish*:



The 'DP Hypothesis'

But this exemplificatory phrase is decidedly archaic, representing an utterly non-productive construction:

**your each bicycle*

**the archbishop's any mistake*

**those workmen's the tools*

**my both feet*

Abney chooses an extraordinarily non-representative case to provide initial motivation for his analysis.

It apparently represents a rare survival of *every* in an adjective use (in the way that *several* still marginally does).

The ‘DP Hypothesis’

At least four arguments tell strongly against the DP Hypothesis.

The 'DP Hypothesis'

Contra-DPH Argument 1: Syntactic selection

1. Syntactic selection

Many verbs and adjectives are strictly subcategorized for a PP complement with a specific Preposition as Head: *rely on somebody*, *trust in somebody*, *laugh at somebody*, *approve of somebody*, *agree with somebody*...

Not a single lexical item has been found that syntactically requires a DP complement with a specific Determinative.

The 'DP Hypothesis'

Contra-DPH 2: Semantic selection

2. Semantic selection

Verbs often need a Subject or Object NP with a certain semantic sort of Noun as Head.

E.g., transitive ***disperse*** needs an Object NP headed by an N denoting a collection of separable entities; intransitive ***disperse*** needs a Subject of that sort.

But no verb has ever been found to select an Object that is universally quantified, or downward-entailing, or indefinite.

The 'DP Hypothesis'

Contra-DPH 3: Determinerless constructions

3. Determinerless constructions

Large numbers of distinct NP constructions have no Determiner, or have only a genitive NP as Determiner. Under the DP Hypothesis these must have **heads that are both phonologically and semantically empty**.

- all NPs with prenominal genitive (*his eye*; *the baby's hat*);
- all bare plural NPs (*pictures of children*);
- all bare role NPs (*bishop of London*);
- all strong proper nouns (*Berkeley*, *Obama*, *Japan*);
- all pronoun-headed NPs (*him*, *we*, *it*);
- all one-word bare-NP exclamations or accusations (*Idiot!*)

The 'DP Hypothesis'

Contra-DPH 3: Determinerless constructions

and also hundreds of other constructions with bare NPs:

- *with hand on heart*; *functioning as Head*; *tongue in cheek*; *time for a drink*; *engine roaring like a lion*; *ear to the keyhole*; *face smeared with chocolate*; *next morning*; *speaking German*; *under Turkish rule*; *we made good time*; *when evening comes*; *at nightfall*; *of considerable height*; *pistol at the ready* . . .

Spot check: 57 of the first 100 NP tokens in *Dracula* have no Determinative.

The 'DP Hypothesis'

Contra-DPH 3: Determinerless constructions

By contrast, NPs that lack a head noun are entirely restricted to cases analysed by *CGEL* as **function fusion** of Head with Determiner or Modifier.

(1) The Head function may be filled by one of a special list of Determinatives: in *Look at this* the word *this* is both Determiner and Head.

(2) The Head function may be filled by one of a select range of Modifiers: in *The French dislike it* the word *French* is both Modifier and Head.

The 'DP Hypothesis'

Contra-DPH 4: Obligatoriness and optionality

4. Obligatoriness and optionality Under the DP Hypothesis and X-bar theory we should expect that D (the Head) would be **obligatory**, and the noun-containing NP complement optional.

But with the articles — central and prototypical determinatives — we find the D is often optional:

I love the children. $\sim$ *I love children.*

A cabbage would be nice. $\sim$ *Cabbage would be nice.*

The noun-containing complement, on the other hand, is absolutely obligatory:

The stuff impressed me. $\not\sim$ **The impressed me.*

An alligator attacked me. $\not\sim$ **An attacked me.*

The 'DP Hypothesis'

There have been extraordinarily few serious defenses of the 'DP Hypothesis'.

I am aware of one survey article:

> Bernstein, Judy B. 2001. 'The DP Hypothesis: Identifying Clausal Properties in the Nominal Domain.' In Mark Baltin and Chris Collins (eds.), *The Handbook of Contemporary Syntactic Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 536-561.

But the arguments there seem to me astonishingly weak and inconclusive.

The 'DP Hypothesis'

A morphological argument of Bernstein's: Some languages (not all) have identical or very similar morphology for **genitive + head** constructions and **subject + predicate** ones.

A semantic argument: there is a rough analogy
IP : CP :: NP DP. The semantic correlates are:

IP	:	proposition
CP	:	clausal argument
NP	:	nominal predicate
DP	:	nominal argument

Such correlations may be interesting. But how do they support the claim that *the*, rather than *children*, is Head in a phrase like *the children*?

The ‘DP Hypothesis’

CGEL has the semantic correlates too:

bare Clause	:	proposition
Subordinator-marked Clause	:	clausal argument
Nominal	:	nominal predicate
NP	:	nominal argument

I can see no argument for DP here.

The ‘DP Hypothesis’

Bernstein’s syntactic discussion seems oriented not toward arguments that D is Head and N is not, but merely toward reviewing ways in which transformational movement can be used to defend the ‘DP Hypothesis’ against objections.

On the problem of phrases with no D serving as arguments:

> ‘It is natural to assume . . . that these nominal expressions are (DP) arguments introduced by a determiner [i.e., ‘determinative’ — GKP] devoid of lexical content.’

The ‘DP Hypothesis’

But another strategy is available too:

> ‘another argument-forming strategy . . . (subject to parametric variation), namely, raising the N-head to D. This strategy may form articleless nominal expressions involving proper names . . . ’

So the idea is that you start with

$[_{DP}\ [_{D}\ \emptyset\ ]\ [_{NP}\ \text{Noun}\ ]\ ]$

and move the noun to get

$[_{DP}\ [_{D}\ \text{Noun}\ ]\ [_{NP}\ \emptyset\ ]\ ]$

The 'DP Hypothesis'

The closest thing to an argument for N to D raising comes from observations by Longobardi (1994):

Il	*mio*	*Gianni*	*ha*	*finalmente*	*telefonato.*
the	my	John	has	finally	telephoned

**Mio*	*Gianni*	*ha*	*finalmente*	*telefonato.*	
my	John	has	finally	telephoned	

Gianni	*mio*	*ha*	*finalmente*	*telefonato.*	
John	my	has	finally	telephoned	

"My Johnnie finally called."

The generalization: **Italian dependent genitives with proper names are prenominal iff the definite article is present.**

But that is not does not seem to entail that D has to be Head.

Attributive Modifiers

English allows pre-head modification of nouns by adjuncts of various categorial types:

Adjective Phrase (AdjP):
those nice new green sandals you bought

Nominal (Nom, i.e. $\overline{\mathrm{N}}$): *a labor union organizer*

Gerund-participial Verb Phrase ($\mathrm{VP}_{\mathrm{GPL}}$):
several quietly sleeping children

Past-participial Verb Phrase ($\mathrm{VP}_{\mathrm{PPL}}$):
the university's hastily developed pay reduction plan

Attributive Modifiers

With the ordering of attributive modifiers we find a phenomenon that appears to be syntactic at first but is, I think, truly semantic through and through — or at least, sensitive to both semantic and syntactic properties.

For example, in *nice new green sandals* it seems hard to reorder any of the adjectives:

nice new green sandals
?? *nice green new sandals*
?? *new nice green sandals*
?? *new green nice sandals*
?? *green nice new sandals*
?? *green new nice sandals*

Attributive Modifiers

One suggested operational semantics for the ?? prefix would be "profoundly unlikely to get more than a tiny handful of non-spurious Google hits."

For example: 100 instances of *friendly little white* + Noun can be found using Google; but for ?? *little white friendly*, only 10 hits, most spurious.

Attributive Modifiers

The conditions on sequencing of attributive modifiers are not strict like the condition that says the Determiner precedes the Head. They are **labile** constraints: violating them creates special effects, or lowers acceptability, but does not clearly mark the result as not being English.

Early modifiers (determinatives such as numerals; superlative adjectives; ordinal adjectives; primacy adjectives) have a strong tendency to precede **residual modifiers** (all others):

- *the two vital facts* [D + residual]
- *the largest known meteorite* [sup + residual]
- *the second abortive attempt* [ord + residual]
- *a key new proposal* [prim + residual]

Attributive Modifiers

And within the residual modifiers, there is a weaker tendency to adhere to an order like this:

evaluative modifiers before
general modifiers before
age modifiers before
color modifiers before
provenance modifiers before
manufacture modifiers before
type modifiers

CGEL cites this NP:

an attractive tight-fitting new pink Italian lycra women's swimsuit

Attributive Modifiers

Shifting any modifier leftward in its sequence tends to suggest it is being used contrastively with the following constituent presupposed:

pink Italian swimsuit if Italian swimsuits are under discussion;

Italian pink swimsuit if pink swimsuits are under discussion.

Pronouns and determinatives

The relationship between pronouns and determinatives has been explored in puzzling ways.

Paul Postal, 1966: the 'so-called' pronouns of English are really just special spellings-out of determinatives.

Alan Sommerstein, 1972: determinatives are really just special spellings-out of pronouns.

***CGEL*, 2002:** the pronouns are a special subset of the nouns and determinatives are determinatives, and the differences between them are very clear.

Pronouns and determinatives

English

		SING	PLUR
1st		*I*	*we*
2nd		*you*	*you*
3rd	MASC	*he*	*they*
	FEM	*she*	
	NEUT	*it*	

Pronouns and determinatives

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	FEM	*she*	
	NEUT	*it*	

Jamaican Creole

	SING	PLUR
1st	*mi*	*wi*
2nd	*ju*	*unu*
3rd	*im*	*dem*

Pronouns and determinatives

The inflectional paradigms of the personal pronoun lexemes

NOM	ACC	DEP GEN	IND GEN	REFL
I	*me*	*my*	*mine*	*myself*
you		*your*	*yours*	*yourself*
he	*him*	*his*		*himself*
she	*her*		*hers*	*herself*
it		*its*		*itself*
we	*us*	*our*	*ours*	*ourselves*
you		*your*	*yours*	*ourselves*
they	*them*	*their*	*theirs*	*themselves*

Pronouns and determinatives

A small overlap: there are two **personal determinatives**.

PRONOUN USES	DETERMINATIVE USES
I do all right.	**I man do all right.*
You do all right.	**You man do all right.*
He does all right.	**He man does all right.*
She does all right.	**She woman does all right.*
It does all right.	**It puppy does all right.*
We do all right.	*We men do all right.* ← both OK
You do all right.	*You men do all right.* ← both OK
They do all right.	**They men do all right.*
**The do all right.*	*The women do all right.*
**A does all right.*	*A linguist does all right.*
**Every do all right.*	*Every puppy does all right.*

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

The pronoun lexeme ***they*** has been used with syntactically singular antecedents for seven hundred years or more. The evidence is literally overwhelming.

And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame,
They wol come up . . . (Chaucer, *The Pardoner's Prologue*)

Every servant in their maysters lyverey. . .
(Lord Berners, translation of *Froissart's Chronicles*)

. . . every one prepared themselves.
(George Pettie, *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure*, 1576)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

And every one to rest themselves betake
(Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*)

if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses (*Matthew* **18**:35, Authorized Version)

every fool can do as they're bid
(Jonathan Swift, *Polite Conversation*)

Every person ... now recovered their liberty.
(Oliver Goldsmith, *The History of England*)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

Nobody here seems to look into an author, ancient or modern, if they can avoid it. (Lord Byron, letter)

Who makes you their confidant? (Jane Austen, *Emma*)

Nobody fancies for a moment that they are reading anything beyond the pale. (Walter Bagehot, *Literary Studies*)

A person can't help their birth. (W. M. Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

'Whoever lives there,' thought Alice, 'it'll never do to come upon them this size; why, I should frighten them out of their wits!'
(Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)

'If everybody minded their own business,' the duchess said in a hoarse growl, 'the world would go round a deal faster than it does.' (Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*)

at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they had to say
(Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*)

unless a person takes a deal of exercise, they may soon eat more than does them good (Herbert Spencer, *Autobiography*)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

he could not bear to think that everybody might tramp in to it when they chose

(Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*)

Who ever thought of sparing their grandmother worry?

(Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*)

Everyone in the building is in a constant process of evaluating and criticizing their institution.

(Roger Angell, *Holiday*, November 1953)

too hideous for anyone in their senses to buy

(W. H. Auden, *Encounter*)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

the detachment and sympathy of someone approaching their own death (Alan Moorehead, *The Blue Nile*)

Each designs to get sole possession of the treasure, but they only succeed in killing one another. (Sir Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 4th. ed.)

We can only know an actual person by observing their behaviour in a variety of different situations.
(George Orwell, as quoted by Edward Cranshaw, *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 Dec. 1980)

I had to decide: Is this person being irrational or is he right? Of course, they were often right. (Robert Burchfield, in *U.S. News and World Report* 11 Aug. 1986)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

Mrs. Lynde says she always feels shocked when she hears of anyone ever having been naughty, no matter how small they were. (Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*)

When anybody occupies the room, they won't want all the wardrobe. (Anthony Trollope, *Ayala's Angel*)

So, then, when he ascended the platform to make his profession, everyone, as they recognized him, whispered his name one to the other, in tones of jubilation.
(*Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*, translated and edited by Albert C. Outler)

it didn't enter anybody's head to trouble how they would live
(Joseph Conrad, *The Heart of Darkness*)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

But it was Jonathan, and he was my husband, and we didn't know anybody who saw us, and we didn't care if they did, so on we walked. (Bram Stoker, *Dracula*)

After all I pay as much as anybody else, and I suppose my money's as good as theirs. (W. Somerset Maugham, *Of Human Bondage*)

everyone gave themselves up to the simple pleasures of the hour (Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*)

you will frighten everybody so much that you can do anything you like with them afterwards (Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim*)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

The anxious few who struggle to avoid singular *they* are often guilty of grammatical monstrosities like this:

She and Louis had a game — who could find the ugliest photograph of himself (Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin*)

the ideal that every boy and girl should be so equipped that he shall not be handicapped in his struggle for social progress
(C. C. Fries, *American English Grammar*)

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And a truly spectacular one:

everyone will be able to decide for himself whether or not to have an abortion
(Albert Bleumenthal, New York State Assembly)

Prescriptive Poppycock Interlude: Singular *they*

Why prescriptivists have taken aim at singular ***they*** isn't clear.

What is clear is they are entirely wrong about what we find in the literature of the language they claim to defend.