Most Slavic languages lack definite and indefinite articles (cp. English the, a) as grammatical markers of (in)definiteness in nominal phrases. Instead, other linguistic means are used to express the semantic and pragmatic notion of (in)definiteness: word order, demonstratives, possessives, case distinctions, verbal aspect, and adjectives. Yet, despite these undisputed descriptive generalizations, there is still considerable disagreement among Slavic linguists as to the structure of the noun phrase. The main debate is whether Slavic noun phrases are headed by a functional category D(eterminer) as a syntactic expression of definiteness (the so-called the DP-Hypothesis) or by a N(oun), with a more traditional structure.

In this talk, I focus on the grammatical representation of definiteness and its implications for the structure of nominal expressions in Slavic languages, that lack definite and indefinite articles. I show that the universal concept of definiteness is not encoded in the syntactic representation of nominal phrases in such languages, contra the view of many Slavic linguists working in the Chomskian Minimalist Framework (e.g., Rappaport 1998, Progovac 1998, Leko 1999, Aljovic 2002, Rutkowski 2002, Pereltsvaig 2004, 2007).

Using morphological and syntactic facts from many Slavic languages, I demonstrate that elements that are traditionally known as determiners, such as universal quantifiers, possessives, demonstratives, and indefinite determiners jedan ‘one’ and neki ‘some’, have the categorial status of an adjective, on par with ordinary adjectives. More precisely, in these languages, determiners can occur both prenominally and postnominally (e.g. Czech: ta devčata pekna/devčata ta pekna; Polish: ta mila dziewczyna/dziewczyna ta mila; Serbian/Croatian: ta lepa devojka/devojka ta lepa). This shows that Slavic determiners do not have the status of a functional category, since generally, functional categories (e.g. D(eterminer), AGR(eement), TNS(tense), C(omplementizer)) do not allow postposing. For example, in languages claimed to have a functional category Determiner, the postposing of determiners is not an option (e.g., English: *book the, French: *livre le, Italian: *libro il).

I propose an internal structure for noun phrases in articleless, Slavic languages, a structure which accounts for word order patterns without resorting to the functional-lexical category distinction. Specifically, I propose that both determiners and universal quantifiers are NP-adjuncts. Treating them as NP-adjuncts accounts for the fact that they can switch order with respect to each other (cf. (1)), but cannot permute with N’-adjuncts, such as adjectives (cf. (2)), or with specifiers, such as possessives (cf. (3)).

Thus, based on word order, headedness tests and information structure, I show that noun phrases in articleless Slavic languages have a simple, ‘bare’ structure stripped of any functional categories. This has implications for linguistic theory, since it means that the DP-hypothesis is not supported for all languages (for similar findings see also
Boskovic, 2008). Rather, headedness of the noun phrase depends on the existence or non-existence of articles in a given language.

Examples:

(1) a. sve ove slike  
   all these pictures  
   a’. ove sve slike  
   these all pictures  
(2) a. ove stare slike  
   these old pictures  
   a’. *stare ove slike  
   old these pictures  
   b. sve stare slike  
   all old pictures  
   b’. *stare sve slike  
   old all pictures  
(3) a. ove Jovanove slike  
   these John’s pictures  
   a’. *Jovanove ove slike  
   John’s these pictures  
   b. sve Jovanove slike  
   all John’s pictures  
   b’. *Jovanove sve slike  
   John’s all pictures

References:


Bošković, Željko. 2008. What will you have, DP or NP? In *Proceedings of NELS* 37.


