Introduction

In the late 80s Szabolcsi (1987) and Stowell (1989) noticed that some languages display an interesting asymmetry between argument and non-argument nominals: some nominal expressions which must be introduced by a determiner when used in argument function can appear determinerless in non-argument function. The phenomenon is clearly illustrated by the following Italian examples:

(1)  a. Il/un/quel dottore si precipitò sul luogo dell’incidente
    b. *Dottore si precipitò sul luogo dell’incidente
    c. Incontro spesso il/un/quel dottore per le scale
    d. *Incontro spesso dottore per le scale

(2)  a. Dottore, faccia presto!
    b. *Il/un/quel dottore, faccia presto!
    d. Gianni è (un/il/quel) dottore
    e. (Quello) stupido dottore!

To account for these facts, Szabolcsi and Stowell proposed the existence of a systematic difference in the structural representation of nominals in argument and non-argument function: according to them, arguments would always require a D to be present in the representation, while non-arguments could be simple NPs. Their hypothesis can be summarized by a principle like the following:

(3)  A DP can be an argument, an NP cannot

The hypothesis in (3), in some or other version, has enjoyed a remarkable popularity, in spite of the fact that it suffers from a certain weakness of empirical support. In fact, it postulates the existence of structural asymmetries between arguments and
non-arguments on the basis of paradigms like (1) and (2), but it disregards the fact that such neat contrasts show up only rarely in the observed languages.

Actually, on one hand, the possibility for a non-argument to appear determinerless is generalized only for vocatives, while it is restricted to some (relatively few) lexical choices for predicates. These restrictions haven’t been thoroughly studied yet, which leaves some room for the objection that what makes the omission of the determiner possible in cases like (2d) might not be the non-argument status of the nominals involved, after all.

On the other hand, it is a well-known fact that, even in languages that make extensive use of articles, several types of nominals have to appear determinerless, namely, proper names, nouns introduced by the so-called ‘Saxon Genitive’ or a possessive, plural and mass bare nouns, bare singular count nouns (in languages lacking the indefinite article, such as Icelandic)\(^1\). The hypothesis that only DPs can function as arguments can be saved in these cases by postulating the presence of a phonetically null D, but as such this solution might end up being a mere ad hoc proposal, deprived of any empirical content.

Despite of these problems, the hypothesis in (3) does receive strong empirical support by somewhat marginal data which, however, cannot easily be explained unless one postulates the existence of a structural asymmetry between arguments and non-arguments. In the cases in point certain nominals which appear determinerless when used as predicates or vocatives, as an hypothesis like (3) would predict, show an interesting behaviour when used in argument function. In this case, in fact, their D position is filled either by an article void of any semantic content or by the head N raised to D, again without semantic consequences. A clear example of this sort has been studied in Longobardi (1994), who noticed the existence in Italian\(^2\) of the following paradigm:

\[(4)\]

a. Gli scenografi hanno ricostruito fedelmente l’antica Roma/Agrigento  
b. Gli scenografi hanno ricostruito fedelmente Roma/Agrigento antica  
c. *Gli scenografi hanno ricostruito fedelmente antica Roma/Agrigento  
d. Per l’occasione la cittadina è stata camuffata da antica Roma/Agrigento

---

\(^1\) To this list two other rather eternogeneous groups of nominal expressions should be added: nominals appearing in certain idiomatic expressions and nominals appearing in certain prepositional phrases. In both cases the presence of a determiner is rather unpredictable, being required or excluded in each single case. It is however likely that in these two cases the nominals are not really arguments, and therefore they will be left out from the present discussion.

\(^2\) Similar data are found in many Romance varieties.
Nominals without the article in the Germanic languages

Note first how the perfect synonymy of (4a) and (4b) shows that in (4a) the article does not contribute to the meaning of the nominal expression. However, it is obligatory in argument function, unless, according to Longobardi’s analysis, the noun itself has raised to fill D (as in (4b)), so that, even in the absence of an overt determiner, the D position is arguably visibly filled. In (4c) and (4d) there is no visible determiner, nor does N-raising to D apply; this results in sharp ungrammaticality when the nominal appears in argument function (as in (4c)), while the sentence is perfectly acceptable when the nominal is used as a predicate (as in (4d)). Longobardi accounts for the observed pattern by resorting to a principle like (3), precisely on the basis of the fact that the presence of the article (an ‘expletive’ article in his terms) or the movement of N to the D position cannot be explained on semantic grounds in these cases. Rather, the asymmetry between arguments and non-arguments favours a syntactic explanation, which assigns different structural representations to the two types of nominals.

Though data like those in (4) provide a strong empirical support in favour of (3), its validity as a universal principle has been challenged, on the basis of the conspicuous number of superficial exceptions to it. For example Chierchia (1998) proposed that it may be subject to parametrical variation, and in particular that the Romance and the Germanic languages differ with respect to the value assigned to the parameter: in Romance arguments would indeed be always DP, even in the absence of a visible determiner; in Germanic, on the contrary, certain arguments would be simple NPs. This proposal is made plausible by the observation that the use of argument nominals without an overt determiner, and in particular of bare nouns, is much more widespread in Germanic than it is in Romance, and seems to receive further support by the fact that no convincing set of data comparable to those in (4) has been observed in Germanic yet. In detail, here are the constructions that may count as potential counterevidence for (3) in the Germanic languages:

(5)  a. Proper names:
while visible N-to-D with proper names and a few common nouns is attested in several Romance varieties, a comparable strategy has not been observed in Germanic.

b. Nouns preceded by a genitive:
some Romance varieties (e.g. French) require the omission of an overt determiner in the presence of a possessive pronoun; these cases, however, are easily reconciled with (3) by analyzing the possessive itself as a determiner, filling the D position. In the Germanic languages, on the other hand, the determiner is omitted also in the presence of a genitive argument in the con-
struction labelled ‘Saxon genitive’ by Romance grammarians\(^3\); since this genitive can be a complex nominal expression, i.e. an XP rather than a head, one cannot assume that it is in D. Thus, in order to save (3) one needs to postulate some suitable (and probably null) filler for the D position in this case.

c. Nouns with a definiteness suffix:
there is a Romance language, namely Rumanian, in which the definite article appears suffixed to the leftmost word of the nominal expression; it is reasonable to suppose that it is indeed in D (cf. Dobrovie-Sorin 1987, Grosu 1988). Among the Germanic languages, a morpheme which displays some similarity to the Rumanian article is found in the Scandinavian languages; however, there is good evidence that this morpheme is not the equivalent of the definite article, but is rather a definiteness marker found in a position lower than D\(^4\). Still, the presence of the definiteness marker in Scandinavian languages excludes in many cases the presence of an overt determiner, thus the D position remains apparently empty.

d. ‘Bare’ nouns:
‘bare’ nouns, i.e. plural or mass nouns with generic or existential interpretation, have a restricted distribution in the Romance languages, roughly similar to that of the empty categories; this has been taken to indicate that in Romance an empty category is filling the D position of this type of nominals (Contreras 1986, Longobardi 1994). Comparable restrictions do not seem to hold in any Germanic language; therefore, for the latter group of languages there seems to be no empirical motivation for postulating a zero determiner in these constructions.

---

\(^3\) I will hereafter refer to this construction using the label ‘s-genitive’. The ‘s’ is meant not only to stand for ‘Saxon’, but also to recall that in all the Germanic languages this genitive is realized by means of an -s morpheme, which in some cases (English, Scandinavian) is not a case morpheme attached to the head noun but rather a postposition-like affix attached to the whole nominal phrase.

\(^4\) According to Delsing (1993), the morpheme attached to (some) definite nouns in Scandinavian “is traditionally seen as a definite inflection on the noun” (p. 73). Delsing rejects this view, and follows Taraldsen (1990) in considering this morpheme a “suffixedit definite article”. However, I prefer the ‘traditional’ approach, see section 1.2 below for discussion.
Nominals without the article in the Germanic languages

e. Determinerless singular count nouns in argument function:
in the (modern) Romance languages only plural or mass nouns can appear ‘bare’ in argument function. On the other hand, in at least one Germanic variety, Icelandic, a language that lacks indefinite articles, also singular count nouns can function as arguments without being introduced by an overt determiner. As in the case of Germanic bare plural and mass nouns, the distribution of Icelandic bare singulars is unrestricted, and therefore offers no empirical support to postulating that some empty category fills the D position of these nominals.

In the following sections, I will examine certain nominal expressions in various Germanic languages, all otherwise admitting a wide use of argument nominals without a visible determiner; I will show how a series of restrictions on the use/absence of the determiner with such expressions, if correctly analyzed, provide evidence in favour of the validity of (3) also in Germanic. I will then present some new data from modern English suggesting that, when no determiner is present, an empty category might fill the D position in this language too. The discussion will also serve to shed some light on the nature and interpretation of articles.

1. Arguments for (3) in the Germanic languages

1.1. Visible N-to-D

In the introduction it was stated that no visible N-to-D is attested in Germanic. Actually, in Crisma (1997) it is shown that a case of N-to-D is observable in one Germanic variety, namely (a variety of) old English5, though limited to a single lexical choice, the noun God ‘God’, modified by the adjective Ælmihtig ‘Almighty’6. A thorough search on the first series of the Catholic Homilies by Ælfric and on his Lives of Saints (end of the X century) has shown that there is a significant correlation, shown in table (6), between the presence/absence of a determiner and the position of the adjective, which in this construction, and only in this construction, can either precede or follow the noun:

5 Henceforth OE.
6 The possibility for the adjective Almighty to follow the noun God survives as a relic in modern English, but the complete regular pattern observable in OE has been lost.
First, note the total absence of instances in which the determiner cooccurs with a post-nominal adjective. This is indeed what the N-to-D hypothesis would predict (cf. the Italian pattern in (4)). Even more interesting results can be obtained by separating arguments and non-arguments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>+se</th>
<th>-se</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ælm. God</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God ælm.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is clearly shown by the tables in (7) and (8), in argument function only two of the three attested sequences are admitted: Determiner-Adjective-Noun and Noun-Adjective. The two constructions are exemplified below:

(9) a. On anginne middaneardes cwæð se ælmhita God on beginning world-Gen said the Almighty God at the beginning of the world the Almighty God said:...

b. god ælmihtig cwýð.

(ÆLS X, 211)

(10) a. Se apostol ða  astrehte his handa wið heaven, thus the apostle then stretched his hands towards heavens, thus biddende, “Þu Ælmihtiga God, on ðam de Abraham gelyfde,...” praying, “thou Almighty God, in whom PRT Abraham believed”

b. Þyllice tacna cyðað þæt Crist is ælmihtig God such tokens declare that Christ is almighty God

(ÆLS XXI, 435)
Nominals without the article in the Germanic languages

To sum up, in OE⁷ one observes the following paradigm⁸:

\[(11)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. \text{se Ælmihtiga God} & \quad \text{(in argument function, cf. (9a))} \\
b. \text{God Ælmihtig} & \quad \text{(both in argument and non-argument function, cf. (9b))} \\
c. *\text{se God Ælmihtiga} & \quad \text{(unattested)} \\
d. Ælmihtiga God & \quad \text{(only in non-argument function, cf. (10))}
\end{align*}
\]

Now, exactly the same pattern is observed in modern Swedish for the same lexical items⁹. Thus, in argument function only the forms corresponding to (11a) and (11b) are admitted:

\[(12)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. \text{Jag har sett den allsmäktige Gud} & \quad \text{I have seen the almighty God} \\
b. \text{Jag har sett Gud allsmäktig(e)} & \quad \text{I have seen God almighty} \\
c. *\text{Jag har sett den Gud allsmäktige} & \quad \text{(unattested)} \\
d. *\text{Jag har sett allsmäktige Gud} & \quad \text{(unattested)}
\end{align*}
\]

\[(13)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. \text{Den allsmäktige Gud har talat till oss} & \quad \text{The almighty God has spoken to us} \\
b. \text{Gud allsmäktig(e) har talat till oss} & \quad \text{God almighty has spoken to us} \\
c. *\text{Den Gud allsmäktige har talat till oss} & \quad \text{(unattested)} \\
d. *\text{Allsmäktige Gud har talat till oss} & \quad \text{(unattested)}
\end{align*}
\]

In predicate function, on the other hand, the form corresponding to (11d) (Adjective-Noun, with no determiner) is perfectly acceptable, along with that corresponding to (11b) (Noun-Adjective):

\[(14)\]
\[
\begin{align*}
a. *\text{Han trodde sig vara den allsmäktige Gud} & \quad \text{He believed himself to be the almighty God} \\
b. \text{Han trodde sig vara Gud allsmäktig(e)} & \quad \text{He believed himself to be God almighty} \\
c. *\text{Han trodde sig vara den Gud allsmäktige} & \quad \text{(unattested)} \\
d. \text{Han trodde sig vara allsmäktig Gud} & \quad \text{He believed himself to be allmighty God}
\end{align*}
\]

The data shown in (6) through (14) closely parallel the Italian ones in (4), which Longobardi (1994) used to motivate the N-to-D hypothesis. Crucially, in the present cases too the article does not seem to have any semantic import, nor has the raising \}

---

⁷ Or, more precisely, in the variety of OE used by Ælfric.
⁸ The forms are cited for simplicity in the Nominative case, though all four cases are attested.
⁹ I am indebted to Verner Egerland for pointing out to me the similarity between OE and Swedish, and for providing the relevant examples.
of N to D any obvious semantic correlate. Thus there seems to be no reasonable expla-
nation for the OE and Swedish data unless one resorts to some principle like (3),
and motivates the insertion of the expletive article or the raising of the noun by the
need of satisfying the requirement that a nominal argument have a filled D position.

Note that, apart from the data just presented, OE and Swedish do not resemble
Romance languages in their use of determiners, but they rather qualify as ‘well be-
haved’ Germanic languages with respect to the properties in (5): they admit s-
genitive, a wide use of ‘bare’ nouns, and, in the case of Swedish, also the use of de-
terminerless nominals with a definiteness suffix; these languages, then, have all the
properties that could be taken to support proposals in the spirit of Chierchia’s
(1998), i.e. proposals of parametrizing a principle like (3), admitting its validity only
in those languages that show an extensive use of overt determiners while excluding
it for those varieties in which the absence of overt determiners is as widespread a
phenomenon as in the Germanic languages. The facts discussed in this section,
therefore, provide evidence against this proposals.

1.2. Articles and adjectives

In all the Germanic languages proper names can or must appear determinerless.
However in some Germanic languages, here exemplified by German, the presence of
a determiner is obligatory when the proper name is preceded by an adjective:

(15) a. (Der) Johann hat gestern angerufen
   ‘Johann called yesterday’
   b. Der gute Johann hat gestern angerufen
   the good Johann has yesterday called
   c. *Guter Johann hat gestern angerufen

An analogous pattern is observable in other Germanic languages, among which
is, again, OE (cf. Crisma 1997, in press). What makes these cases particularly inter-
esting for the present purposes is that, once more, there is an asymmetry between
argument and non-argument nominals: when the proper name is used in non-
argument function, the article may be omitted, even in the presence of an adjective.
The asymmetry is well exemplified in the following OE pair:

(16) a. ac [...] was se arfæsta Paulus for Cristes naman oft beswungen
   but [...] was the pious Paul for Christ’s name often tormented (ÆChom i, 392)
   b. [...] gefullode ðone arleasan Saulum, and worhte hine arfæstne Paulum
   ... baptized the impious Saul, and made him pious Paul (ÆChom i, 390)
In these cases too the article appearing with nominals in argument function qualifies as an ‘expletive’, for it does not seem to have any quantificational force. Thus, one observes again an asymmetry between arguments and non-arguments which cannot be attributed to a difference in their meaning, but rather suggests the validity of a principle like (3).

Note that the interaction between adjectives and articles, as well as its sensitivity to the argument/non-argument status of the nominal involved, produces a pattern which is a partial replica of the Italian one presented in (4) (and of the OE and Swedish one discussed in the previous section): the only difference seems to be that in the present case the proper name cannot cross over the adjective and raise to D, as we saw happen with Italian proper names and with the name for God in OE and Swedish. The obligatory insertion of an ‘expletive’ article, however, suggests that, even in spite of the absence of visible N-to-D, a syntactic relation between the proper name and the ‘left periphery’ of the nominal group, i.e. the D position, must be established, and that this relation is blocked by the insertion of an adjective. Once again, the asymmetry between arguments and non-arguments indicates that the necessity of this relation should be attributed to some restriction on the syntactic representation of arguments, i.e. to some version of the principle in (3).

A similar interaction between articles and adjectives had already been noted in some Scandinavian languages by Delsing (1993). In these languages, exemplified below by Swedish, a definite nominal is made of a head with a definiteness morpheme suffixed to it, without any prenominal determiner:

(17) a. bil-en
car-DEF
‘the car’

Here, the definiteness morpheme should not be considered a real suffixed article like the Rumanian one: the fact that it appears lower than any adjective suggests that it occupies a position lower than D. Thus, nominals like the one exemplified in (17) arguably lack an overt determiner. However, in a way which recalls the German pattern shown in (15), whenever an adjective modifies the noun, a determiner is ins-

---

10 E.g. covert movement.

11 This view radically differs from the approach taken by Delsing, who suggests that the definiteness morpheme is a real suffixed definite article, attached to the noun raised to D. This hypothesis, however, does not explain what is the suffix attached to the noun in double definiteness constructions like the Swedish one in (18). A more promising alternative seems to be that of assuming covert movement of the definiteness affix to D, maintaining that adjectives may block this movement.
serted in the leftmost position of the nominal group; this determiner too lacks quantificational force and therefore qualifies as ‘expletive’, since the definiteness suffix -en is itself sufficient to express the definiteness of the noun phrase:

(18)  
  a. den stora bil-en  
       the big car-DEF  
  b. *stora bil-en

Delsing assumes Longobardi’s (1994) framework, and explains the Scandinavian facts postulating the existence of an N-to-D movement in constructions like (17). Further, he suggests that adjectives have a ‘blocking effect’ on this movement, thus forcing the insertion of an article as in (18a)\textsuperscript{12}.

Since the article inserted in sentences like (18a) qualifies as ‘expletive’ in our terms, for it does not contribute to the meaning of the nominal expression, one might be tempted to use these facts as evidence in favour of (3). In order to do so, however, one needs to find some difference between argument and non-argument nominals, otherwise the insertion of the ‘expletive’ article in cases like (18a) could be attributed to some other syntactic restriction, e.g. the article could be required as a formal licensor of the adjective.

Actually, such a difference between argument and non-arguments exists. Swedish\textsuperscript{13} has the peculiarity of allowing the definiteness suffix to appear in nominals used as vocatives, contrary to what happens in most of the other Germanic languages in which the definiteness value of a nominal used as vocative is never overtly expressed. Vocatives, exactly like argument nominals, can be modified by an adjective; however, contrary to what happens with nominals in argument function, in this case the presence of an adjective does not provoke the insertion of a pre-adjectival determiner, therefore vocatives exhibit a pattern which is the reverse of the one (18):

(19)  
  a. *Nu, den lille grabb(en), ska vi se\textsuperscript{14}  
       now, the little boy(-the), shall we see  
  b. Nu, lille grabb(en), ska vi se  
       now, little boy(-the), shall we see

(20)  
  a. *Den snälle magistern!

\textsuperscript{12} I will essentially accept this account, though I assume that the movement in question is covert.

\textsuperscript{13} As well as Faroese, according to Delsing (1993).

\textsuperscript{14} These Swedish examples are taken from Delsing (1993) and modified by the insertion of an adjective. The grammaticality judgement were kindly provided by C.Platzack.
the kind teacher-the
b. Snällle magistern!
kind teacher-the

Here again, the article inserted in argument function, and absent in vocatives, does not have any semantic import, since the definiteness of the nominal expression is already expressed by the definiteness morpheme -en. These cases, then, represent an instance of those argument/non-argument asymmetries which cannot apparently be motivated on semantic grounds, and that constitute the strongest empirical argument in favour of the validity of (3), also in some of the Germanic languages.

1.3. Genitive placement

The construction I labelled s-genitive, as for example is found in modern English, displays a cluster of three properties:

A. the presence of the genitive excludes the presence of the article or any other determiner;
B. the nominal group ‘inherits’ the definiteness value of the genitive;
C. the genitive occupies the leftmost position in the nominal group. This position, being higher than adjectives, is arguably a derived position, since the genitive, an argument of the noun, is probably generated closer to N than (non-argument) adjectives;

That these three properties seem to correlate may receive a straightforward ‘functional’ explanation: no determiner is allowed in this construction because its function and position at the left periphery are taken up by the genitive itself. Of course, one still needs to make precise what is the position occupied by the genitive and how its definiteness value is transmitted to the nominal expression containing it, but on the whole the absence of any determiner in these constructions seems amply justified. It is so, however, only if one can show that the three properties always correlate.

Among the Germanic languages, German seems to provide evidence in this sense. In German the arguments of the noun can be realized as non-prepositional genitives in both pre- and post-nominal position (with some lexical restrictions). However, only nominals introduced by a genitive in the leftmost position (property C) must always be used without determiner (property A), and agree in definiteness with the genitive (property B); nominal arguments containing a post-nominal genitive (no C) display the same pattern as D-less nominals lacking genitive arguments altogether, i.e. they require to be introduced by an overt determiner or, if they lack it, they behave like bare nouns: exactly like bare nouns, in fact, they can appear determinerless only if the head N is a mass or plural noun, but not if it is a singular
count noun (no A); also, again like bare nouns, they are interpreted as existentials or generics, regardless of the definite or indefinite status of the genitive (no B):

(21) a. Ich habe Marias Buch gelesen
   I have Mary’s book read
   ‘I read Mary’s book’ (definite interpretation = there is only one relevant book)
   b. *Ich habe Buch Marias gelesen
   c. Ich habe das/ein Buch Marias gelesen
      ‘I read the/a book by/belonging to/etc. Mary’ (the definiteness value depends on the choice of the determiner)

(22) a. Ich habe Marias Bücher gelesen
   I have Mary’s books read
   ‘I read Mary’s books’ (with definite interpretation = all of Mary’s books)
   b. Ich habe Bücher Marias gelesen
      ‘I read books by/belonging to/etc. Mary’ (with indefinite interpretation = not necessarily all of Mary’s books)
   c. Ich habe drei/die Bücher Marias gelesen
      ‘I read three/the books by/belonging to/etc. Mary’ (the definiteness value depends on the choice of the determiner)

Thus in German two possibilities are attested: either the genitive moves to the leftmost position of the noun phrase, and then ‘functions as an article’; or the genitive remains low, and then a determiner is required (unless the noun phrase qualifies independently as a ‘bare noun’). These facts apparently confirm the necessity for the three properties A, B and C to correlate.

However, there is at least one Germanic language, namely Icelandic15, in which the three properties A, B and C do not cooccur. Icelandic genitive constructions, in fact, are characterized by properties A and B, but not by property C: the genitive modifier excludes the presence of a determiner, it ‘transmits’ its definiteness value to the whole nominal expression containing it, but it surfaces on the right of the head noun it modifies, as shown by the following examples:

(23) a. Ég las bók kennarans
   I read book teacher-the
   ‘I read the book of the teacher’
   b. Ég las bók kennara

15 Old English displays the Icelandic pattern too (cf. Crisma 1997), though it co-exist with the modern English one.
I read book teacher
‘I read a book of a teacher’
c. Ég las bók Jóns
I read book Jón
‘I read Jón’s book’

The existence of the Icelandic pattern immediately poses the problem of why the genitive overtly raises to the leftmost position in those languages in which the three properties A, B and C of the s-genitive do coexist, e.g. in German, as discussed above. This movement, in fact, doesn’t seem necessary for the nominal to ‘inherit’ the definiteness value of the genitive phrase, therefore the ‘functional’ explanation attempted above does not provide a motivation for it. What we need instead is a syntactic explanation: attracting the genitive phrase must be a syntactic property of the ‘left periphery’ of the noun phrase, i.e. of D; thus in languages like German (as well as most of the other Germanic languages) but not in Icelandic, D seems to require a local relation with the genitive ‘transmitting’ its definiteness value to the whole DP.

The hypothesis that attracting the genitive may be a syntactic property of D receives further support by the fact that Icelandic differs from the other Germanic languages for another property of its D position: in Icelandic, in fact, not only plural and mass nouns but also singular count nouns may appear “bare” in argument function (with an indefinite interpretation), while in the other modern Germanic languages these type of nominals are always introduced by an indefinite article or some other indefinite determiner. Compare for example Icelandic with German16:

(24) a. Ég las bók
I read book
‘I read a book’
b. *Ich las Buch
I read book

Note that the correlation between the possibility of inheriting the definiteness value of a postnominal genitive and the lack of the indefinite article is shown also outside the Germanic domain, and must therefore reflect some deep crosslinguistic principle:

(i) a. tmunat ha-xamaniyot
    painting the sunflowers
    ‘the painting of the sunflowers’ (Hebrew, from Borer 1994)
b. mab y brenin
    son the king
    ‘the king’s son’ (Welsh, from Rouveret 1994)
Note that this reasoning, if on the right track, implies that a functional position, most likely a D, is projected when the genitive is attracted to the left of the noun phrase. A plausible hypothesis is that this D contains an empty determiner which needs a local identifier, as will be discussed in section 2 below. Now, whatever the role of the raising of the genitive in licensing an empty D position, for the purposes of the present paper it is crucial to note that this movement need not apply when the nominal is used in non-argument function. Thus genitive movement gives rise to one of these argument/non-argument asymmetries which are crucial evidence for the hypothesis in (3). Consider the following German examples:

(25) a. Ich habe Marias Sohn kennengelernt
   I have Mary’s son met
   ‘I met Mary’s son’
   b. *Ich habe Sohn Marias kennengelernt
   c. Ich habe den/einen Sohn Marias kennengelernt
      ‘I met the/a son of Mary’s’

(26) a. Hans hat sich als Marias Sohn vorgestellt
    Hans has himself as Mary’s son introduces
    ‘Hans introduced himself as Mary’s son’
   b. Hans hat sich als Sohn Marias vorgestellt

As shown by the pattern in (25), when a nominal with a singular count head is used as an argument, either the raising of the genitive phrase or the insertion of an overt determiner are necessary for the sentence to be grammatical. On the other hand, when the same nominal appears as a predicate the genitive may remain low while no determiner is inserted (cf. (26)). Once again, then, the argument status of a nominal imposes the purely morphosyntactic filling of a phrase-initial functional slot. If it is true that genitive raising is driven by D, and therefore that D is always present when the genitive has raised to the leftmost position of the noun phrase, these data are explained only admitting that a D must be present with argument nominals but can be absent with non-argument nominals. In other words, also the difference in the application of genitive raising between arguments and non-arguments counts as a crucial piece of evidence in favour of the validity of (3) in German.

2. Conditions on the empty determiner

In section 1 I presented three types of evidence that also in several Germanic languages (German, Old English, continental Scandinavian) the distribution of articles and, more abstractly, of a D head may depend on the argument or non-argument
status of the nominal expression, determiner omission being more frequently attested with the latter type of nominals. In all the cases examined the articles appearing with arguments qualified as ‘expletives’, therefore the data could be taken as evidence that (3) might hold also for the (observed) Germanic languages.

If this is the case, one is forced to the conclusion that also in these languages whenever there is no visible determiner, D is filled by a null category. However, this conclusion is in contrast with the fact that the Germanic languages seem to lack independent empirical support for it. In fact, as briefly hinted at in the introduction (cf. (5d)), various restrictions on the distribution of bare nouns in Romance indicate that they have the same distribution of non-pronominal empty categories, which in turn suggests that an empty category might fill the D position of this type of nominals (cf. Contreras 1986, Longobardi 1994); on the other hand, the distribution of bare nouns in the Germanic languages is much less restricted, and does not offer support for a similar hypothesis.

In this section I will present some data suggesting that the absence of determiner has certain properties typical of the presence of an empty category also in some Germanic languages, though the type of evidence discussed is completely different from the kind of evidence pointing to the same conclusion for Romance.

According to Rizzi (1986), empty categories are subject to two kinds of requirements: on one hand they must satisfy some formal restrictions, and in particular they need a local licenser, on the other hand they are allowed only when their feature content is recoverable. Rizzi’s proposal is summarized under (27):

(27) Split ECP (Rizzi 1986):
An empty category [e] must be:
(i) formally licensed by default
(ii) properly identified by contextual identification

The restrictions on the distribution of bare nouns in Romance first discussed by Contreras (1986) were essentially attributed to the first part of the Split ECP, namely to the need for an empty category to be formally licensed. In the following sections, on the other hand, I will argue that in Germanic, and more precisely in modern English, the interpretation of nominals without an overt determiner is best accounted for assuming that an empty category is present in these cases, obeying the restrictions posed by the second part of the Split ECP.
2.1. The identification of the feature [±definite]

The first, apparently obvious characteristic of the Germanic languages is that the nominals appearing in argument function without an overt determiner are never ambiguous between a definite and an indefinite reading, though (in)definiteness is not overtly marked. Thus, in Germanic, as well as in all languages having one or two articles in their lexicon, the definiteness value of a nominal expression can always be determined independently of the context. This distinguishes Germanic languages from those languages, like for example Latin, Homeric Greek, most of the modern Slavic languages, Chinese and many more, that lack articles altogether, in which the definite or indefinite interpretation of a nominal expression is not expressed in the morphosyntax, but is simply recovered by means of pragmatic strategies. The difference between languages with articles and languages without articles can then be captured assuming that in the former there is a grammatical feature [±definite].

If one can show that in Germanic, in the absence of an overt determiner, the definiteness value of a nominal expression is determined under precise formal conditions roughly of the type satisfying (27ii) above, i.e. the value of [±definite] is always properly identified, this will be an argument in favour of the hypothesis that in such cases an empty category subject to (at least) the second part of the Split ECP is filling the D position.

First, the fact that, in the absence of an overt definiteness suffix or an overt definite s-genitive, determinerless nominals are interpreted as indefinites suggests that [−definite] is the unmarked value of the feature, which is recovered by means of a default interpretive strategy analogous to that recovering the φ-features of an expletive pro. As for the only two types of nominals which may receive a definite interpretation even if no overt article is present, i.e. nominals containing an equally definite s-genitive, and nominals with a definiteness suffix attached to them (allowed only in Scandinavian languages), it is clear that some syntactic process allows the recovery of the marked value of the feature, i.e. [+definite], thus permitting the use of a null determiner instead of an overt one. Recall in fact that a naive ‘functional’ explanation was not sufficient to account for the absence of an overt article in these cases, in particular we saw how a precise syntactic configuration was required in the case of s-genitives.

---

17 And possibly those of arbitrary pro, though Rizzi (1986) postulates the existence of a special rule for the assignment of arbitrary interpretation.
More in detail, I will assume that in the case of the Scandinavian languages, there is covert movement of N-to-D, and therefore in these cases D is not really filled by an empty category subject to the ECP. As for the s-genitive, one needs some process of agreement between the genitive raised to a Spec position, probably to check case, and a head, which might be D itself or possibly a functional head immediately lower than D. Contrary to what happens with the identification of pro in pro-drop languages, in this case the overt realization of a feature in a Spec permits the recovery of the value of the same feature on the agreeing head; this is more similar to the hypothesis of dynamic agreement suggested for French wh-questions (cf. Rizzi 1991). For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it suffices for the null determiner to obey precise formal conditions for the proper identification of its content.

Summarizing, the Germanic languages allow for the following strategies for the identification of the value [±definite] of a D head:

(28) I. Strategies to assign a + value to [±definite]:
   a. Definite article (or other definite determiner)
   b. Definiteness affix on a head lower than D
   c. Local identification by means of a genitive

II. Strategies to assign a – value to [±definite]:
   default

These strategies are all subject to precise formal conditions, which can arguably be attributed to (some version of) the second part of the ECP, thus supporting the view that an empty category may be present in these cases.

2.1. The identification of the feature [±count]

Note that if the mechanism (28) for the recovery of the value of [±definite] is correct, the indefinite interpretation should always be assigned as the default option whenever (28 I)a, b or c do not apply. If this is the case, however, a reasonable expectation is that the indefinite article should not exist. In order to support (28), therefore, it would be desirable to show that the so-called ‘indefinite article’ does not mark indefiniteness, i.e. does not express the negative value of the [±definite] feature, but rather encodes some different information. Then, one will have to outline the conditions on the proper identification of the information encoded by the ‘indefinite’ article when the latter is not overtly realized, in order to verify whether

18 Possibly only of the DEF feature.
these condition are compatible with the Split ECP and therefore support the hypothesis that determiners void of phonetic content may fill the D position.

What really is the information encoded by the ‘indefinite’ article can be discovered observing the interpretation of bare singulars in languages lacking the indefinite article altogether, such as Icelandic20 or Hebrew21:

(29) ?axalti xazir
   eat-PAST-1sg pig/pork
   ‘I ate pork/a pig’

(30) Ég borðaði hákarl á þorrablótinu
   I eat-PAST-1sg shark at ‘winter festival’-DEF
   ‘I ate shark/a shark at the Winter Festival’

As is apparent from the English translation of the examples in (29) and (30), the difference between languages with the ‘indefinite’ article and languages without it is that, in the latter, nominal expressions with a singular head noun are systematically ambiguous between a count and a mass interpretation. Thus, the role of the ‘indefinite’ article is not to mark indefiniteness, which is assigned by default by virtue of (28), but to assign a count reading to singular nouns, avoiding the count/mass ambiguity typically found in languages like Icelandic and Hebrew which do not have a true correspondent of the ‘indefinite’ article. What the ‘indefinite’ article really is, therefore, is nothing but the morphological expression of the positive value of a feature [±count].

Of course, one expects the identification of the value of the feature [±count] to take place by means of strategies analogous to those observed for the identification of the feature [±definite], which in turn parallel the strategies that properly identify the content of pro. For some cases it is easy to show that it is indeed so. Thus the English translation of example (30) shows that the absence of the ‘indefinite’ article with a singular noun gives rise to a mass interpretation, which suggests that a -value is assigned to the feature [±count] by default and is therefore unmarked. Also, the recovery of the + (i.e. marked) value of the feature proceeds along ways analogous to the recovery of the + (i.e. marked) value of the [±definite] feature: either an overt marker for the feature [+count] is inserted (the ‘indefinite’ article), or this information is encoded by some affix attached to the head noun (the overt plural morphology).

20 I am indebted to Thórhallur Eythórsson for providing and discussing the relevant data (and many more).

21 Hebrew data were kindly provided and discussed by Ur Shlonsky.
For the identification mechanism of the feature [+count] to be a perfect parallel of that of the feature [+definite] one still needs to show that identification is possible via a local relation with a genitive modifier. In other words, one would expect a s-genitive to be able to ‘transmit’ not only its definiteness value to the noun phrase, but also its [+count] value. This expectation is indeed fulfilled, as shown by the following (modern) English data:\(^{22}\):

(31) a. Rich donors’ children enjoy special treatment by the College administration\(^{23}\)
    b. A rich donor’s children enjoy special treatment by the College administration
    c. *Rich donors’ child enjoys special treatment by the College administration
       (intended meaning: a/the child of rich donors)
    d. A rich donor’s child enjoys special treatment by the College administration

(32) a. Some of that year’s prizes were suspiciously awarded to rich donors’ children
    b. Some of that year’s prizes were suspiciously awarded to a rich donor’s children
    c. *One of that year’s prizes was suspiciously awarded to rich donors’ child
       (intended meaning: to a/the child of rich donors)
    d. One of that year’s prizes was suspiciously awarded to a rich donor’s child

(33) a. Rich parents’ spoilt children can be unbearable\(^{24}\)
    b. A rich mother’s spoilt child can be unbearable
    c. *Rich parents’ spoilt child can be unbearable
    d. A rich mother’s spoilt child can be unbearable

In these examples one can see that, while a plural noun, i.e. a noun whose [+count] value is independently marked by the plural morphology, may be modified either by a singular or by a plural s-genitive, a singular noun needs a singular count s-genitive in order to receive a count interpretation\(^{25}\). As expected, this restriction does not hold in languages lacking the indefinite article, such as Icelandic, in which the analogous to (33c) is perfectly acceptable.

(34) dekurðarn     ríkra foreldra   getur verið      oþolandi

---

\(^{22}\) Similar data are discussed in Crisma (1997) and in Bernstein, Cowart and McDaniel (1999).

\(^{23}\) The latter, treat these cases as bare nouns, and assume the possibility of (covert) movement of some D features from the genitive to the D position of the main noun phrase.

\(^{24}\) Special thanks to Judy Bernstein and Dana McDaniel for discussing the relevant examples.

\(^{25}\) Note that (32c) becomes grammatical if child receives a mass reading, the whole sentence assuming a ‘cannibalistic’ flavor.
spoilt child rich parents can become unbearable

Given that in the absence of overt marking for [+count] (‘indefinite’ article or plural morphology) also the [+count] value can be recovered by means of local identification by a singular count genitive, the mechanism for the recovery of the value of the features [+definite] and [+count] is now perfectly parallel:

(35) I. Strategies to assign a +value to [+count]:
   a. Indefinite article
   b. Overt plural morphology
   c. Local identification by means of a genitive

II. Strategies to assign a –value to [+count]:
   default

Finally, note that contrasts like those represented in (31)-(33) are only observable when the genitive is indefinite, and therefore does not transmit a [+definite] value to the whole noun phrase. Compare in fact (31c), (32c) and (33c) with (36):

(36) My Grandparents’ house

In this case a plural genitive modifies a singular count head. Note however that the nominal expression ‘inherits’ a [+definite] value from the genitive. Now, definite determiners do not seem to encode also the count/mass distinction: a definite singular noun is in fact systematically ambiguous between a count and a mass reading:

(37) a. John insists that we buy the shark he saw at the Aquarium to keep it in the swimming pool
    b. John insists that we buy for dinner (all) the shark he saw this morning at the market

Therefore it turns out that the D position can encode only one among the two features [+definite] and [+count] at a time. It is interesting that the recovery of content by means of local identification by a genitive manifests an identical restriction: a nominal ‘inherits’ the value of only one of the two features expressed by the article.

These identification mechanisms are not simple ‘functional’ strategies, but are rather instances of syntactic processes. Since it is reasonable to identify these processes with the second part of the Split ECP, it becomes plausible to analyze determinerless arguments as instances of phonetically null determiners rather than as simple NPs, even in a language such as modern English, where other types of evidence in this sense are at first sight absent.
Nominals without the article in the Germanic languages

Old English Sources

References
Rouveret, Alain. 1994. Syntaxe du gallois: le groupe nominal. Ms, Université de Paris VIII.