Typically, adjectives that occur in definite noun phrases are weakly inflected (in Icelandic), but on some occasions, they may be inflected strongly. It has often been noted in the literature that those strongly inflected adjectives cannot have a restrictive reading.

Based the “minimal pair” in (1), Cinque (2010: 141/2) conjectures that the Icelandic adjectival inflection may be taken as an overt marking of the adjectival ‘source’: STRONG ↔ Direct Modification (DM); WEAK ↔ Reduced Relative Clause (RRC). As argued in Pfaff (2012), however, there is evidence against the conclusion that the pattern exemplified by (1b) is DM in Cinque’s sense.

Strong adjectives in definite noun phrases as in (1b) and (2) are traditionally referred to as appositives (icel.：“viðurlög”; cf. Rögnvaldsson 1984), and there are some clear differences between such appositives and DM adjectives. Appositive adjectives are predicative and may be paraphrased with a non-restrictive relative clause, cf. (2), they are thus indicative of an underlying predicative structure (contrary to DM adjectives). Certain non-predicative adjectives that are arguably DM (for instance so-called, alleged…), on the other hand, are excluded from that pattern and some pattern involving a weakly inflected adjective has to be used instead, cf. (3).

There are some uses of non-predicative strong adjectives in definite noun phrases that are somewhat reminiscent of DM adjectives, expressives (damned, bloody…) being a case in point, cf. (4), but even in those cases it can be shown that they differ from Cinque’s DM adjectives. They are furthest away from the noun preceding both DM and RRC adjectives, cf. (5), whereas DM adjectives, on Cinque’s account, are expected to be closest to the noun and follow RRC adjectives. In parallel to the ordering of the adjectives themselves, we observe that strongly inflected adjectives precede weakly inflected adjectives, which is indicative of a different kind of ordering: STRONG >> WEAK.

In this talk, I will give an overview of the most common uses of strongly inflected adjectives in definite noun phrases, and argue that those adjectives cannot be properly captured as either DM or RRC (given Cinque’s criteria), but provide various kinds of evidence that we need to assume a third source of adnominal adjectives.

*Abreviations used in the glosses: RESTR – restrictive; DEF – suffixed article; WK – weak inflection; STR – strong inflection; ART – free article.

(1) a. gul.i bill-inn (+RESTR) (Rögnvaldsson 1984, Delsing 1993)
gul.WK car-DEF

b. gul.ur bill-inn (–RESTR) yellow.STR

the yellow car car-DEF

(2) Hann horfði upp í blá.an himin-inn (Práínsson 2007)
he looked up in blue.STR sky-DEF

He looked up into the sky, which, BTW, was blue (at that time)
(3)  a. *svokölluð afstæðiskenning-in
    so-called.Str theory-of-relativity-DEF
   a’. afstæðiskenning-in svokallað.a
    theory-of-relativity-DEF so-called.WK
   The so-called theory of relativity

   b. *meint.ur þjófur-inn
    alleged.Str thief-DEF
   b.’ hinn meint.i þjófur
    ART alleged.WK thief
   The alleged thief

(4)  a. Ég varð að lesa bólvað.a bók-ina
    I had to read cursed.Str book-DEF
   I had to read the bloody book
   b. Loksins fann ég blessað.an lykil-inn
    finally found I “blessed”.STR key-DEF
   Finally, I found the damn key

(5)  a. bólvað.ur gaml.i niðingur-inn
    cursed.Str old.WK scoundrel-DEF
   b. I gær hitti ég bólvað.an meint.a bankaræningja-nn
    yesterday met I cursed.Str alleged.WK bank-robber-DEF
   Yesterday, I met the bloody alleged bank-robber
   c. Presturinn skvetti bólvuð.u blessað.a vatn-inu á mig
    the priest splashed cursed_STR blessed.WK water-DEF on me
   The priest splashed the bloody blessed water on me
   (said for instance by some demon)

References: