**Definite Articles and Their Uses: Diversity and Patterns of Variation**

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**1.** **Introduction: Establishing comparability**

1. **purely notional basis**: ways of encoding **definiteness** (articles, demonstratives, possessives, word order, topicality, sentential stress, adnominal pronouns, case, number marking, aspect, etc.) The basic assumption of structuralism (De Saussure): **the sign** as inseparable union of acoustic image and concept (*signifiant* vs. *signifié*) would have to be abandoned (but see Lazard, 2012); this results in a heterogeneous collection of phenomena.
2. **well-known domain and area as a starting point**: studies of **definite articles** in European languages (Hawkins, 1978; Nocentini, 1996; C. Lyons, 1999; De Mulder & Carlier, 2011); extending the scope from there; **historical development** as a basis (Greenberg, 1978; Hawkins, 2004; Heine & Kuteva, 2006).
3. comparability on the basis of **‘comparative concepts’** (Dryer, Haspelmath, Becker) (Haspelmath “an element accompanying a noun and signaling that the referent of the NP is uniquely identifiable”; Becker (2018): “An article is a marker that systematically occurs with a noun and whose primary function is to indicate the referential function of the noun”)
4. **geographical distribution:**

Frequent in European languages and in North-Africa, (emergent in Finno-Ugric and Slavic languages at the periphery of Europe, etc.); **definite articles** are also found in Central Africa, in the Pacific, in Meso-America, in North- and South-America and in Australia) (cf. Becker, 2018: high number of indefinite and presentational articles in Eurasia, a high number of definite articles in Africa, and a strong bias towards anaphoric articles in Australia)

* **focus of this paper:** (i) on definite articles; (ii) on semantic analysis (iii) feedback of comparison for the analysis of individual languages (iv) on Europe;

**2. ‘In-/definiteness’: a concept in need of explication**

(i) analysis in terms of more basic notions: **reference**, **uniqueness** (salience) in relevant context; **identifiability**; **maximality**/**inclusiveness** (non-truth-conditional implicature?), relevant for plural and for mass terms; presupposition of **existence;**

(ii) **explication** **in terms of formal semantics**

* referents are in the external world (Russel, Frege)
* uniqueness and non-uniqueness effect (cf. (1a))
* use as bound variable ; (cf. (1b))
* predicative use (cf. (1c-d))

(1) a. Scott is not the only author of *Waverly*. (Coppock & Beaver, 2014: 8)

b. Every man respects the woman he marries. (Gisborne, 2012: 625)

c. My great opponent and the hero of my youth **has** passed away.

d. Mary is tall, intelligent and the love of my life.

- definite descriptions presuppose uniqueness, but not existence and acquire existential import through general type-shifting operations (Coppock & Beaver, 2014); > definite NPs become determinate (denoting individuals) or indeterminate (functioning as an existential quantifier)

- referential use in argument position; definite articles as structure building devices:

(iii) presupposition of **uniqueness** and identifiability in a certain context; **spelling out the contexts** (cf. Hawkins, 1978):

* uniqueness in immediate situation (situational use: presence)
* absolute uniqueness (e.g. *the Pope*)
* uniqueness in larger situation (cultural context)
* uniqueness through sufficient description (**cataphoric;** “established reference”)
* uniqueness established by preceding context (anaphoric use)
* uniqueness in personal memory, partial description (anamnesic, **recognitional** use, emploi mémoriel)
* uniqueness and identification by association (associative use)

A ‘recognitional’ use and ‘cataphoric’ use can also be found in the indefinite domain (Germ. *zo’n*, *Ich möchte zo’n Messer* ‘I am looking for a kind of knife’)

**3. Typologies of article systems**

**3.1. Types of articles as different stages of grammaticalization**

* Derived from demonstratives (*ille*), possessives or intensifiers (*ipse*) through grammaticalization
* Stages of grammaticalization: (3 stages: Greenberg, 1978; 4 stages: Hawkins, 2004; 5 stages: Heine & Kuteva, 2006: observed in emergent articles at the periphery of Europe):

|  |
| --- |
| Stage ∅ → stage I → stage II → stage III |
| Dem (+cl) → def. art. (+cl) → general article (-cl ) → class marker |
| Dem (-cl) → def. art. (-cl) → general article (-cl ) → noun marker |

**proposal partly based on previous work (e.g. Hawkins** (2004: 84-86)):

demonstrative > endophoric > situational > general > specific > class/noun marker

**formal reduction:** differentiation from demonstratives

**desemanticization:** loss of deictic component, of contrastive component

**extension of contexts:** uniqueness in more and more abstract contexts

**3.2. ‘Comparative concepts’, hierarchies and semantic maps for article systems**

**3.2.1. M. Dryer (2005; 2014)**

* WALS, Chapter 37 (M. Dryer) as starting point

**syntactic basis for comparability:**

* free or bound morphemes, constituents of NPs/DPs; derived but different from adnominal demonstratives; typically forming an opposition with indefinite articles; cannot occur on their own (cannot be a head);

**semantic criteria:**

* very broad definition in Dryer (WALS): “coding definiteness”; anaphoric use as sufficient condition; cf. Davis et al. 2014 for pertinent criticism
* **Dryer’s reference hierarchy and types of NPs** (2014)

anaphoric definites > non-anaphoric definites > pragmatically specific definites > pragmatically non-specific (but semantically specific) indefinites > semantically non-specific indefinites

(**contiguous subsets** of this hierarchy may be encoded by a certain type of article)

**3.2.2. L. Becker (2018)** *Articles in the World’s Languages***.**

* **10 types of referents** based on how identifiability is achieved in context (deictic, recognitional, absolutely unique, anaphoric, bridging …referents) (cf. Hawkins, 1978)
* **9 types based on the distinction between referent types:** recognitional, anaphoric, definite, inclusive-specific, exclusive-specific, nonspecific, indefinite, presentational and referential articles;
* article types may encode adjacent areas on the hierarchy of referents; the definite article may encode 7 referent types, whereas the recognitional and the anaphoric article only encode a single referent type;
* **referents** are not entities in the (real or discourse) world, but concepts;

**4. Zooming in again on Europe: differentiations in form and distribution**

1. **article + demonstrative** (*derjenige*)

* frequent phenomenon; also found in German

(2) Diejenigen, die noch keinen Antrag gestellt haben, sollten dies möglichst schnell tun.

‘Those who have not submitted any application are asked to do so as quickly as possible.’

* contrastive meaning of demonstratives; clear preference for cataphoric use

1. **purely anaphoric** (Dryer, 2014: e236)

* clear differentiation from demonstratives through participles like Engl. *aforementioned*; Germ. *besagt*, *genannt*, *selbig*; Fr. le *dit*; no perfect compatibility with demonstratives; participles can replace the definite article;
* *der-lei* ‘anaphoric reference to kinds’

(3)a. Ein Fahrzeug wurde direkt vor dem Dom geparkt. Das/??dieses genannte Fahrzeug wurde abgeschleppt. ‘The aforementioned vehicle was towed away.’

b. Besagtes Fahrzeug wurde abgeschleppt.

* two types of anaphora

(4)a. Kerber spielt in der nächsten Runde gegen S. Williams. **Sie/die** muss aber erst einmal ihr Erstrundenspiel gewinnen.

‘Kerber will face S. Williams in the next round. She/the latter will have to win her first round match, however.

b. Der Hausbesitzer informierte den Handwerker bevor **er/d(ies)er** nach Hause ging.

‘The owner of the house informed the workman, before going home/he went home.’

c. Die Mädchen lieben ihre Mütter und **ihre/deren** Schwestern.

‘The girls love their mothers and their (own) sisters.’ (in opposition to poss. pronoun)

1. **the strong- weak distinction** (Germanic: Frisian, Dutch, Scandinavian; Rhine area, etc.)

* two articles (Heinrichs, 1954; Ebert, 1970; De Mulder & Carlier, 2011; Schwarz 2013, 2014)
* fusion with prepositions with an initial vowel (Standard German)

FRISIAN:

**strong**: anaphoric, pseudo-anaphors; cataphoric; immediate situations (gestural); no uniqueness; associative: complex bridges (‘pragmatic definiteness’)

**weak**: situational uniqueness; associative: simple bridges (‘semantic definiteness’)

(5) a. Karl geht noch zur Schule.

‘Charles still goes to school.’

b. Karl ging zu der Schule hin.

‘Charles went to the school building.’

c. Karl ist im Gefängnis.

‘Charles is (doing time) in prison.’

d. Karl ist jetzt in dem Gefängnis.

‘Charles is now inside the prison.’

e. Ich möchte zur Kirche gehen.

‘I would like to go to church.’

f. Ich möchte zu der Kirche hingehen.

‘I would like to go to the church.’

**properties of weak definites in German** (Cf. Bosch, 2012):

* semantic enrichment
* no existential presupposition
* truth-conditionally similar to indefinites (*Als das Feuer ausbrach, saß Karl im Auto/in dem Auto und Fritz auch* ‘When the fire broke out, Charles was inside a/the car and so was Fritz.’)
* no identification of referent required or possible

1. **generic reference**

* There is no special generic article (cf. Becker, 2018)
* Languages resort to a variety of options (definite, indefinite, bare NPs)
* Similar tendency observable for abstract terms.

(6) a. La solitude est difficile à supporter. (French)

b. (Die) Einsamkeit ist schwer zu ertragen. (German)

c. Loneliness is difficult to live with.

(7) a. Les faucons sont des oiseaux de proie. (French)

b. (Die) Falken sind Raubvögel. (German)

c. Falcons are predator birds.

(8) Greek > Basque > French, Hungarian > German > English (cf. Longobardi, 1994, 2001)

1. **emergent definite articles**

Frequent development at the periphery of Europe; Mandarin *nà* (cf. Jin Cui, 2013)

(9)a. Lăobăn bei shāhài le. nà ba dāo jĭngfāng yijīng zhăodào le.

Boss PASS murder PART na CLF knife police already find PERF

‘The boss was murdered. The police has already found the knife.’

b. Lăobăn bei shāhài le. (nà ge) xiōngshŏu yijīng bei dàibŭ le.

‘The murderer has already been arrested’.

* Associative anaphor/bridging anaphora: In (6a) the use of *nà* – which always requires a classifier - is preferred to the bare noun; more so than in the case of association based on part-whole relationships (6b).
* The proximal *zhè* is preferred when referring to definite entities. (Mei Fang, p. 19)

**5. Specific and non-specific articles: Unresolved puzzles**

* frequent in Oceanic languages (Polynesian, in Melanesia rare: Tîrî~~n~~)
* *le* vs. *se* in East Futunan and in Samoan, *te* in Māori*, te* vs. *he* in East Uvean

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Singular: East Futunan/East Uvean | Plural |
| specific | **le - te** | Ø - **te 'ū** |
| non-specific | **se - he** | **ni** |

* These articles exhibit the semantic discussed for the indefinite article in European languages (Mary wants to marry an Englishman. Here he comes./But she cannot find one.)

EAST FUTUNAN

(10)a. E iai **le** Pilitania e fia ’āvaga a Malia mo ia.

‘There is an Englishman Malia wants to marry’.

b. E faka’amu a Malia ke ’āvaga mo **se** Pilitania.

‘Mary would like to marry an Englishman.’

**Becker (2018)**:

1. a specific referent is not identifiable but linked to a particular referent of its kind
2. a non-specific referent corresponds to a single, but no particular referent of its kind

* The specific article is found in many contexts where European languages use the definite article (**individual concepts**, **associative anaphors,** etc.**),** but also
* to introduce a discourse referent
* for emphatic (affirmative) assertion of **membership in a class** in **contrast** to another (East Uvean: *Ko* *te fafine ia, mole ko te tagata*. ‘It is a woman, not a man’ but:

*Ko Soane mole ko he ‘Uvea ia* ‘Soane is not a real Uvean’);

* cf. ko he ika ‘This is some fish.’ fai he tohi ‘Write a letter.’)

WEST UVEAN (Djoupa, 2012)

(11)a. E isi e kete i dogu tafa.

NPST exist NSPC bag OBL my side

‘There is a bag next to me.’ (\*E isi de kete i dogu tafa.)

EAST FUTUNAN (Atonio p.c.)

(11)b. Ko **le** minisi ka ano ki Alofi. ‘Le ministre va aller à Alofi.’

c. Ko **se** minisi ka ano ki Alofi. ‘Un ministre irait à Alofi.’

**6. Diversity in distribution**

* **earlier typologies** (Krámský, 1972; Lyons, 1999; Dryer, 2005): languages with and without articles, one or two, free form or affix; interaction with morphological categories; delimitation from demonstratives, etc.);

**6.1. The use with proper names** (independent development?)

* **Greek** (names of persons, places, months, planets, holidays, years; generic and abstract nouns); combines with demonstratives (Dem. + Art. + N); **Albanian**, except in vocatives;
* Germanic: regions, rivers vs. states; augmentative use with persons (pejorative, familiar; honorific);

(12)a. Germ. der Fritz; der gute, alte Paul; die Callas; der Herr Müller

b. de mijnheer Valkenburg (Art + Poss)

* **separate development** rather than further extension: not in French despite extension of definite article to generic nouns; not in Basque in spite of obligatory definite articles in argumental nominals; not in Arabic, unless the articles are an inseparable part of the name;

**6.2. Multiple** use (Albanian, Greek, Yiddish, Romanian, Arabic, Scandinavian, Bavarian)

Yiddish

(13)a. di grine oygn

b. die oygn di grine

b. le problème, le plus énervant, …

- oppositions with superlatives of quantity expressions (Cf. Coppock)

c. The Labour Party got **the most** votes. …**flest röster**) (opposite marking in Swedish)

d. **Most** people like chocolate. (**De flesta** människor(na)…) (English ≠ Swedish ≠ German)

**6.3. Articles as** **structure-building devices**

FRENCH

(14)a. le plus grand problème ‘the biggest problem’

* action nominalizations vs. gerunds in English
* combinations with abstract terms (*the good, the bad*)
* in many Polynesian languages the (specific) article is the only nominalizing device

(15) East Futunan (Moyse-Faurie 1997: 95)

1. Kua tāle lali e Tuilekete i le usu. ‘Tuilekete hit the bell in the morning.’
2. Ko lenā loa le tāo o le lali e Tuilekete la i le usu.

pred deic then spec hit poss spec bell erg T. emph obl spec morning

‘Then comes T. hitting the bell in the morning.’

**6.4. Cooccurrence** with demonstratives, possessives or both

(Mod. Greek, Hungarian, Chamicuro (Amazonian), Polynesian, Tîrî (Melanesian), Abkhaz, Guarani, Italian) (cf. Haspelmath, 1999)

* redundant or difference in meaning; information on historical development; semantic composition?

**6.5. Use inside of adpositional phrases** (Himmelmann, 1998)

**lack** of articles: Romanian, Albanian, Tagalog, Bantu, Germanic, locative or temporal nouns in Polynesian languages,

**ENGLISH**: meaningful choice: *Next year – the next year*; *the following year*; avoidance of indefinite article in subject position;

**Basque**: the presence of the overt definite article appears to be **obligatory** in Basque argumental nominals

**German**: weak article only in combination with prepositions

**Time cycles**: on Monday, at noon, in May, in winter (≠ German;)

**Institutions**: go to school/church/work/hospital/prison (≠ French; ≠ German)

**Odors**: smell of cat/cow/garlic (= German; ≠ French)

**Transport**: by bus/train/bike/plane/on foot (≠ German; = French)

**Cause (circumstantial/emotional)**: die of hunger; die from exhaustion, out of anger, in anger (= German; = French);

**Material**: made of gold, of cloth, made of wood (= German; = French)

**Musical instruments**: play (the) piano/trombone/guitar/flute/viola/drums (≠ German = French; BrE ≠ Am.E) French jouer du piano, du trombone, de la guitare, de la flûte…

**7. Summary and Conclusion**

* The typology of article systems provides valuable information on basic meaning, the functions and the historical development of definite articles:

(i) on the basic referential meaning of articles and its differential extension to contexts, (generic constructions, abstract, non-referential nouns)

(ii) on the extension to contexts where they are redundant (proper names, humans, places and times)

(iii) on their function as structure-builders in their multiple use, where they build multiple noun phrases;

(iv) on their historical development, in combinations with possessives, demonstratives prepositions, etc.

(v) on their preferred combination with certain concepts (cf. Loebner, 2011)

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