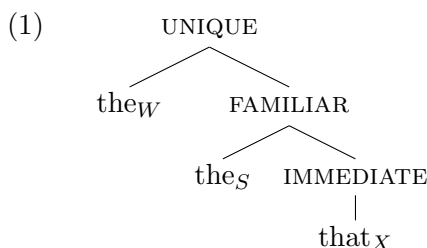


Semantics of definite descriptions: A micro-typology

Definite articles and demonstratives contribute in making a reference (‘determinate’, following Coppock & Beaver 2015). This paper is concerned with better understanding the semantic contribution of the elements labeled ‘definite’ or ‘demonstrative’ in various languages. Studies have shown that there is often a lot of semantic overlap between what has been called a definite and what has been called a demonstrative (Roberts 2002, Wolter 2006). The picture was not clear, due to the focus given to English *the* and *that*, and the effort to give a semantic analysis consistent with the labels ‘definite’ and ‘demonstrative’. It turns out, however, when we discard the superficially-determined labels and examine the determinate elements in other languages, English *the* and *that* are not so representative of the possible semantic meanings. Based on data in German, Korean, Romanian, and ASL, this paper proposes a) that there are three different kinds of meanings possible with determinate elements: unique, familiar, and immediate, and b) that languages have various ways of marking these distinctions morphologically.



The proposed distinction is structured as in (1), where all determinate reference encodes uniqueness, but a subset encodes familiarity. This idea has already been discussed in Schwarz 2009, and I provide additional evidence for this. In addition, I propose that the familiarity-encoding elements must further be distinguished between being anaphoric and deictic. The deictic uses are encoding immediacy, and I show how different languages make this distinction not obvious to English.

Support for distinguishing familiarity from uniqueness. Schwarz (2009, 2013) shows that German makes a morphophonological distinction between the uniqueness-encoding definite (‘weak article’, used in situationally unique cases, contraction possible) and the familiarity-encoding definite (‘strong article’, used in anaphoric and covarying cases, contraction not possible). I show additional evidence using Korean, Romanian, and ASL.

Korean. There is no overt marking of definiteness when a description refers to a situationally unique element. The noun simply appears bare, as shown in (2a). On the other hand, when the description is anaphoric or covarying with an already-established referent, demonstrative *ku* appears, as shown in (2b).

- (2) a. *amsuthulong-un inlyu-sasang choycholo (*ku) tal-ey chaklyukhayss-ta.*
 Armstrong-TOPIC man-history first ku moon-DAT landed
 ‘Armstrong was the first to land on the moon in human history.’ [Unique]
- b. *thulephul-ey tayha-n chayk-i issnu-n motun tosekwan-eyse na-nun *(ku)*
 truffle-DAT about-RC book-NOM exist-RC every library-DAT I-TOPIC **ku**
chayk-ul pillyewass-ta.
 book-ACC borrowed
 ‘In every library with a book about truffles, I checked out the book.’ [Covarying]

Romanian. In globally unique cases like (3a), no article is used. On the other hand, in strong uses anaphoric or covarying, an article is used as in (3b).

- (3) a. *Armstrong a fost primul care să aterizeze pe lună.*
 Armstrong has been first.the who SUBJ land.SUBJ+3SG on moon
 ‘Armstrong was the first to land on the moon.’ [Unique]
- b. *In fiecare bibliotecă care are vreo carte despre varză, caut în (acea) carte*
 in each library that has some book about cabbage search.1SG in (that) book
dacă pot să frig la grătar varza.
 if can.1SG SUBJ grill.SUBJ+1SG cabbage.the
 ‘In every library about cabbage, I check in the book whether one can grill cabbage.’ [Covarying]

ASL. Similar to Korean and Romanian, the weak uses are not overtly marked in ASL, resulting in simply having the noun signed. In familiar cases, pointing (IX: indexical) is used (Irani 2016).

- (4) JOHN BUY IX_a BOOK, IX_b MAGAZINE. #(IX_a) BOOK EXPENSIVE.
‘John bought a book and a magazine. The book was expensive.’ [Anaphoric]

Familiarity must be further distinguished. Deictic uses are clearly distinguished from other familiarity-encoding uses in situations where uniqueness or existence of the referent is not established. When uniqueness is not established due to having multiple potential referents, the deictic description points out one of them (‘zoom-in’ following Wolter’s (2006) term), and when existence is not established due to unfamiliarity, the referent is pointed out by the deictic description (‘zoom-out’ (Wolter 2006)). German and English allow one morpheme to cover both anaphoric (non-deictic) and deictic uses, while Korean, Romanian, and ASL distinguish between them in different ways.

German. While Schwarz discusses that the strong article can be used deictically, he mentions that phonological stress is necessary for such uses. The strong article can be used in both zoom-in and -out cases, the zoom-out cases are reported to be worse. Demonstratives, on the other hand, are more natural in these cases.

Korean. While Korean uses *ku* for all anaphoric and covarying cases, it uses a separate morpheme *ce* for deictic uses like the zoom-in (5a) and zoom-out (5b) cases.

- (5) a. **ku/ce pyel-i yeypputa.* b. **ku/ce pyel-ul pwa!*
*ku/ce star-NOM pretty *ku/ce star-ACC look.IMP
‘That star is pretty.’ [Zoom-in] ‘Look at that star!’ [Zoom-out]

ASL. ASL uses IX for both anaphoric and deictic uses, but there is a difference in where the IX is directed at. For anaphoric cases, loci are established and IX points to the established loci. For deictic cases, on the other hand, IX points to the actual referent in the context.

Romanian. Romanian allows either the inflectional definite or article *acela* in anaphoric cases, as shown in (6a). In deictic contexts, however, Romanian uses both the inflectional definite and the article *acela*.

- (6) a. *Am cumpărat o carte. Cartea / acea carte a fost scumpă.*
have.1SG bought a book book.the / that book has been expensive
‘I bought a book. The book was expensive’ [Anaphoric]
b. *Îmi place steaua *(aceea/aia).* (*pointing*)
me.CL.DAT pleases star.the that+the.COLLOQ
‘I like that star.’ [Zoom-in]

These languages support the proposed distinction in (1), with Romanian providing particularly interesting evidence, where the deictic use encoding immediateness has both the inflectional definite used in anaphoric cases and *acela* used in covarying cases. Based on the cross-linguistic data, I propose that all determinate descriptions encode uniqueness, while a subset of those also encode familiarity, and a subset of those encode immediacy. Adding to Schwarz’ semantics for the strong (familiar) article in (7), I argue that the immediacy-encoding elements require an additional presupposition that the referent is made immediate ((7) in bold), either linguistically (through recency, etc.) or deictically.

- (7) $\lambda s_r. \lambda P. \lambda y: \exists!x(P(x)(s_r) \ \& \ x=y \ \& \ \mathbf{x \text{ is immediate}}. \iota x.P(x)(S_r) \ \& \ x=y$ [Schwarz 2009]

Coppock & Beaver 2015. Definiteness and determinacy. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 38. **Irani 2016.** Two types of definites in American Sign Language. *Definiteness Across Languages Workshop*. **Roberts 2002.** Demonstratives as definites. Information Sharing. **Schwarz 2009.** Two Types of Definites in Natural Language. UMass Amherst Thesis. **Schwarz 2013.** Two kinds of definites cross-linguistically. *Language and Linguistics Compass* 7. **Wolter 2006.** That’s that: The semantics and pragmatics of demonstrative noun phrases. UCSC Thesis.