

THE PROPER APPROACH TO DEFINITE ARTICLES
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Definite articles in proper names (the so-called *proprial articles*) as in (1) have been treated either as expletive (Longobardi 1994, etc.) or as regular (Sloat 1969, Anderson 2003 et seq., Matushansky 2008, etc.). In this talk I reconcile the two views by arguing that all definite articles are merely a formal reflection of a semantic definiteness feature located elsewhere in the structure.

- (1) a. the Hudson, the Bronx, the Netherlands, the Empire State Building
b. la France, les Etats-Unis, (*le) Rochester, la Tour Eiffel

Initial evidence for this proposal comes from the distribution of proprial articles. First of all, in German, the definite article only appears with proper names that are specified for some phi-feature, such as number or gender; the same is true in other languages. Similarly, in Romanian proprial articles can be overt depending on case, hence the semantics does not come into the picture. Secondly, I will discuss non-restrictively modified proper names (2) and argue that their compositional semantics requires an iota operator below the modifying adjective. Thirdly, the proprial article may be overt in function of whether the denotation is a location vs. an object (e.g., in French).

- (2) the inimitable Stravinsky

Extending the analysis to common NPs, several welcome consequences follow. The phenomena of definiteness spreading in Semitic (3) and double definiteness in Scandinavian (4) receive straightforward explanations. The variable realization of the definite article in kind names (5), (6) can be treated as a formal rather than semantic parameter (*pace* Chierchia 1998). Definite articles with pronouns (7) and singleton-reference NPs (8) are more naturally explained, as are cases of pronominal determiners (9).

- (3) ha-baxura ha-intelligentit Hebrew
DEF-girl DEF-intelligent
the intelligent girl

- (4) den hungriga mus.en Swedish
DEF hungry mouse.DEF
the hungry mouse

- (5) a. rice, beans English
b. the impossible, the rich

- (6) *(le) riz, *(les) haricots French

- (7) Ka kite au i a ia. Maori
T/A see 1SG DO DEF 3SG
I saw him.

- (8) the best answer, the only solution, the first proposal, the king

- (9) we linguists, you guys

I will then argue that this proposal, coupled with the view of definiteness as a formal feature, provides further insights into the syntax of phi-features in general (cf. Sauerland's work).

Selected references

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Matushansky, Ora. 2008. On the linguistic complexity of proper names. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 31, pp. 573-627.
Sloat, Clarence. 1969. Proper nouns in English. *Language* 45, pp. 26-30.