

Two Kinds of Definites in Classifier Languages

Contrary to most earlier claims in the literature, we demonstrate that crucial aspects of definiteness are overtly marked in classifier languages and follow recently established typological patterns of definiteness marking. Specifically, *demonstrative descriptions* are used for *familiar* definites while *definite bare nouns* are used only in contexts licensed by *uniqueness*.

In classifier languages such as Mandarin (Cheng & Sybesma 1999) and Thai (Piriyawiboon 2011), both of which lack articles, bare nouns can be interpreted in a number of ways, including as definites, scopeless indefinites, and kinds. In the literature, the availability of definite interpretations for bare nouns is often established on the basis of a very simple sentence like the following. We will illustrate our claims for Thai; essentially identical facts hold for Mandarin:

- (1) mǎa kamlaj hǎw.
dog PROG bark
'The dog(s) are barking.' (Piriyawiboon 2011:43)

While classifier languages do have demonstratives, there is evidence that they are not extensionally equivalent to definite articles because they do not exhibit Löbner (1985)'s *consistency* effect:

- (2) dèk khon nán nɔɔn yùu tɛɛ dèk khon nán mâi.dâi nɔɔn yùu
child CLF that sleep IMPF but child CLF that NEG sleep IMPF
'That child is sleeping but that child is not sleeping.' (cf. #*the*) (Piriyawiboon 2011:49)

Thus, Jiang (2012:15) claims that "most [classifier languages] do not have marked definiteness. . . ."

While we agree that these languages lack definite articles, we maintain that the distinction between bare nominals as in (1) and demonstrative expressions as in (2) *does* distinguish definites in classifier languages. Specifically, in anaphoric definite contexts (strongly familiar in the terms of Roberts 2003), bare nouns are degraded, and demonstratives must be used:

- (3) mǎa-khiin tóʔ phaŋ pay tua niŋ. tóʔ #(tua nán) tham maa càak máy-sàk
last-night table break PRFV CLF INDF. table CLF this make come from wood-teak
'Last night a table broke. The table was made of teak wood.'

This generalization extends to covarying interpretations of anaphoric nominals, e.g. donkey anaphora:

- (4) [chaawnaa thúk khon thîi mii khwaay₁] tii [khwaay (tua nán₁)*_{1/2}]
farmer every CLF that have buffalo hit buffalo CLF that
'Every farmer that has a₁ buffalo hits that₁ buffalo.' (vs. *generic* 'buffalos₂' w/o *Dem*).

These examples pose a problem for the claim that definiteness is unmarked in classifier languages.

On the other hand, definite bare nouns freely occur in contexts where the referent is (situationally) unique. In such contexts, demonstratives are odd:

- (5) a. naayók chiaŋ-mày (#khon nán) gròot mâak b. duaŋ-can (#duaŋ nán) sàwàaŋ mâak
mayor Chiang Mai CLF that angry very moon CLF that bright very
'The mayor of Chiang Mai is very angry.' 'The moon is bright.'

Most bridging uses of definites likewise require bare nominals while demonstratives are marked:

- (6) bâan khǒɔŋ chǎn thùuk khliin sát phaŋ. lǎŋkhaa (#lǎŋ nán) hǎay paj læy
house POSS 1SG ADV.PAS wave hurl collapse roof CLF that disappear PRFV EXH
'My house was struck by a wave and collapsed. The roof completely disappeared.'

Definiteness on 'roof' arises due to a situationally defined notion of uniqueness by virtue of its part-whole relationship with 'house.' If 'roof' is explicitly mentioned earlier, making it strongly

familiar, the demonstrative becomes obligatory. Thus, definite bare nouns in classifier languages are licensed only by uniqueness. Anaphoric definites must be marked with a demonstrative.

Schwarz (2009, 2013) identifies two distinct definite articles in German and other languages that make a similar distinction: *strong* articles are used in anaphoric/familiar contexts while *weak* articles are used in unique contexts. Thus, strong vs. weak articles correspond to the demonstrative vs. bare noun distinction in Thai and Mandarin. Adopting a Fregean analysis of definite descriptions, Schwarz derives weak/unique definites via a resource situation pronoun on the definite article (7-a), typically supplied with a default *topic situation*, while familiar definites include an additional identity condition and an indexical pronominal argument (7-b) (cf. Elbourne 2005:114):

$$(7) \quad \begin{array}{ll} \text{a.} & \llbracket the_{weak} \rrbracket^g = \lambda s_r. \lambda P_{\langle e, st \rangle} : \exists! x P(x)(s_r). \iota x [P(x)(s_r)] \quad (\text{Schwarz 2009:81}) \\ \text{b.} & \llbracket the_{strong} \rrbracket^g = \lambda s_r. \lambda P_{\langle e, st \rangle}. \lambda y : \exists! x P(x)(s_r). \iota x [P(x)(s_r) \wedge x = g(y)] \quad (\textit{ibid}:135) \end{array}$$

One appeal of this analysis for Schwarz is that it allows a minimally distinct semantics for what are two very similar article paradigms in German, while providing a relatively direct account of why the familiarity requirement holds of strong articles: a discourse referent must exist.

However, because the unique uses of definites are associated with bare nominals in classifier languages, we propose that these interpretations can arise without a determiner via application of *situation restriction* (Jiang 2012:177), where the kind-level denotation of nouns in classifier languages (Krifka 1995, Chierchia 1998) is supplied with a resource situation pronoun:

$$(8) \quad \llbracket m\check{a}a \rrbracket^g = \lambda s_r. DOG(s_r) \quad (\text{ex. (1), in a context with a unique dog})$$

This strategy for deriving uniqueness definites can make use of the same situation-semantic resources argued for by Schwarz (2009) while accounting for the absence of bound readings (4). Also, as bare nominals lack the existence and uniqueness presuppositions associated with definite articles, they can still be used in, e.g., existential constructions which show definiteness effects.

We propose that demonstrative (familiar) definites in classifier languages resemble the strong article denotation in (7-b), differing only in presupposing existence without uniqueness (see (2)):

$$(9) \quad \llbracket n\acute{a}n \rrbracket^g = \lambda s_r. \lambda P_{\langle e, st \rangle}. \lambda y : \exists x P(x)(s_r). \iota x [P(x)(s_r) \wedge x = g(y)] \quad (\text{exx. (2)-(4)})$$

This denotation naturally accommodates demonstratives, which absent linguistic context must rely on pragmatics to identify their referent. The covarying interpretation of demonstratives arises via dynamic binding of the discourse-bound index (Chierchia 1995), y in the example above.

Classifier languages are thus problematic for Elbourne (2013)'s analysis of definiteness, which only relies on situation variable binding. For Elbourne, the only difference between referential and covarying uses of definite descriptions is the index on the situation variable. Thus, Elbourne predicts that the resource situation pronoun on bare nominals could be bound (contra (4)), and he would need to block bound readings in classifier languages via stipulation. Furthermore, bare nominals in classifier languages *can* give rise to covarying readings providing they are licensed by bridging relationships like part-whole possession (not shown). Bridging is expected to give rise to covarying interpretations in our analysis because those contexts pragmatically license covert discourse-bound indices that can be dynamically bound (cf. Schwartz 2009 for German).

In conclusion, classifier languages support the ideas that 1) both familiarity and uniqueness are necessary components in a theory of definiteness, as proposed by Schwarz (2009), and 2) covarying readings of definite descriptions do not arise via situation-variable binding.

SELECTED REFERENCES: **Elbourne**, P. 2005. *Situations and Individuals*. MIT Press. **Elbourne**, P. 2013. *Definite descriptions*. Oxford UP. **Jiang**, L. 2012. Nominal arguments and language variation. PhD Diss., Harvard U. **Schwarz**, F. 2009. Two types of definite in natural language. PhD Diss., UMass Amherst.