

## Temporal information and definite descriptions

**Summary:** Definite descriptions are one of the most well investigated expressions in philosophy of language and linguistics. This paper investigates in what respect temporal information enters the interpretation of a definite DP. I discuss examples where the definite DP may be interpreted temporally dependent on the main clause predicate or temporally independent. Interestingly this difference correlates with the length of the article in languages that have more than one definite article. The temporal dependence of the article choice in two-article languages has gone unnoticed in the literature, so far. I will use data from Zurich German.

**Background:** We may distinguish two basic uses of definites: the descriptive use (*the author of Waverley*) and the anaphoric use (*a book . . . the book*). Many German dialects have two definite articles: a full variant and a reduced variant. The full variant is usually associated with anaphoricity (or familiarity): the referent of the definite description refers back to a referent introduced by a previously mentioned expression. The reduced article is associated with uniqueness: the referent of the definite description refers to an entity that is unique in the situation of utterance or unique as such. That is, semantic and discourse pragmatic considerations are used in order to explain definite article choice. Schwarz (2009) explicitly claims for Standard German that two forms for the definite article support the idea that two theories, the familiarity theory (Kamp/Heim) and the uniqueness theory (Russell/Frege), are necessary in order to explain the facts. The familiarity theory explains the use of the full form, and the uniqueness theory explains the use of the reduced form (see also Jenks 2015).

**New data:** However, there seem to be a series of exceptions to the generalizations that the full article corresponds to anaphoricity and the reduced article to uniqueness. Consider (1). In this example a definite with a full form article is used although there is no familiar referent introduced in the previous context. The reduced-article definite *s baby* instead of *das baby* seems dispreferred according to my informants in the text sequence. It seems contradictory to interpret the nominal property simultaneously with the main clause predicate in the last sentence of (1). The descriptive content of the DP is temporally independent of the main clause predicate.

- (1) I han d Maria sletscht mal 2010 gsee. Da isch sie hochschwanger gsi. Jetztig  
I have the Maria the last time 2010 see<sub>part</sub>. Then she was highly pregnant be<sub>part</sub>. Now  
isch das Baby 8 Jahr alt.  
is the<sub>full</sub> baby 8 years old  
'The last time I have seen Mary was 2010. She was pregnant then. Now the baby is 8 years old.'

(2), on the other hand, requires the short article. The property of being a baby is simultaneous with the property of being a girl. Both properties hold in the future. The individual will be coming into existence. It is not possible to refer to a time of the existence of the baby that is not part of being a girl. The full article is not possible in this case. The descriptive content of the DP is temporally dependent of the main clause predicate.

- (2) I han d Maria geschter gseh. Sie isch hochschwanger. S'baby wird es meitli.  
I have the Maria yesterday see<sub>part</sub>. She is highly pregnant. The<sub>red</sub> baby will be a girl.  
'Yesterday, I met Mary. She was pregnant. She will have a girl.'

In addition to exceptions concerning the case where a discourse new (unfamiliar) definite noun phrases must occur with a full article in two-article languages, I will look at discourse old (familiar) definite noun phrases that nevertheless must occur with a reduced article as in (3). Notice the rising

tone on the noun of the definite description *d Frau*.

- (3) Ich han mit ame maa und ere frau gred. d FRAU isch a Lehreri gsi.  
 I have with a man and a woman talked. The<sub>red</sub> woman is a teacher be<sub>part</sub>  
 ‘I was talking to a man and a woman. The WOMAN was a teacher<sub>fem</sub>.’

Following Musan (1999), I will argue that contrastiveness may trigger a temporally dependent interpretation – as with indefinites. Therefore the reduced article must be used in those constructions in a two-article language.

**Account:** My account builds on insights from the research on the temporal interpretation of noun phrases from the last 30 years (Enç, Musan, Kusumoto, and Rapp and von Stechow) and combines it with findings on Germanic article systems of languages with two definite articles. I investigate a variable C-account and propose that the reduced article and the full article have similar meaning components expressing a Russellian quantificational determiner that is contextually restricted. The full article turns out to be tensed (in a sense) in Zurich German. Syntactic accounts do not seem necessary in order to predict which form of the definite article is used in a two-definite-articles language.

I will propose an analysis of the reduced definite article akin to indefinites. It introduces a uniqueness condition on the descriptive content. The interpretation of the temporal parameter of this construction is exactly the same as the one of indefinites, as shown in (4). The nominal property is temporally dependent on the main clause predicate. I will show that apparent counterexamples are due to the introduction of time adverbials or a side effect of a special temporal interpretation of the noun, following Rapp (2015).

- (4)  $[[\mathbf{d}_{-red}]]^{g,c} = \lambda P.\lambda Q.\lambda t.\exists x[x \in C_D \ \& \ P(x, t) \ \& \ \forall y[y \in C_D \ \& \ P(y, t) \Rightarrow x = y] \ \& \ Q(x, t)]$

The full variant of the definite article introduces an independent time variable as in (5). The article shifts the evaluation time of the descriptive content in this version.

- (5)  $[[\mathbf{d}_{-ful}]]^{g,c} = \lambda P.\lambda Q.\lambda t.\exists x[x \in C_D \ \& \ \exists t'[t' \in C_T \ \& \ P(x, t') \ \& \ \forall y[P(y, t') \ \& \ y \in C_D \Rightarrow x = y]] \ \& \ Q(x, t)]$

**Outlook:** In a dynamic framework, the mechanisms of introducing existence and uniqueness may differ. I refer the reader to Coppock & Beaver (2014) for the problems that motivate a dynamic account. Such an account has to be enriched by temporal information in order to predict the article choice in a language like Zurich German, for example.

## References

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