

When determiners abound: implications for the encoding of definiteness

In a language like Greek, the role of the definite article in establishing the reference of a DP seems fairly straightforward: nominals in argument position as in (1a) require the definite article – cf. the limited distribution of bare singulars and plurals, discussed most recently in Alexopoulou & Folli (2010) – whereas nominals in predicate position do not, see (1b).

- (1) a. O kathijitis eftase protos.
the teacher arrived first
'The teacher arrived first.'
b. O Janis ine kathijitis.
the John is teacher
'John is a teacher.'

A complication to this picture arises from polydefinites, namely cases of adjectival modification where both the noun and the adjective feature its own definite determiner, as in (2d). Despite the attention polydefinites have received in terms of e.g. deriving in the morphosyntax the occurrence of multiple determiners, the compositionality problem and its repercussions for definiteness in Greek have not thus far been taken into consideration.

As noted by a.o. Alexiadou & Wilder (1998), Kolliakou (2004), Campos & Stavrou (2004), one of the properties of polydefinites that set them apart from monadic definites (i.e. 'regular' attributive modification inside a definite DP) is that adjectives in polydefinites are necessarily interpreted restrictively. The following context, adapted from Kolliakou (2004:269) illustrates this. (The broader context for (2) is that B has been considering a golden pen, a silver pen and a golden brooch as presents, and that A is aware of all this.)

- (2) a. A: Ti pires tu Jani ja ta christujena?
what took.2SG the John.GEN for the christmas
'What did you get John for Christmas?'
b. B: (Tu pira) tin asimenia pena.
him.GEN took.1SG the silver pen
'(I got him) the silver pen.'
c. A: Ti pires tis Marias?
what took.2SG the Maria.GEN
'What did you get for Maria?'
d. B: (Tis pira) tin chrisi tin pena/tin pena ti chrisi.
her.GEN took.1SG the golden the pen/the pen the golden
'(I got her) the golden pen.'

The felicitous use of the polydefinite in (2d) requires that there exist at least two pens, only one of which is golden. If there was a unique pen (which happened to be golden), it would be impossible for the adjective to be interpreted restrictively, and the polydefinite would be infelicitous. This is what goes wrong in (3):

- (3) i dilitiriodis (#i) kobres (Kolliakou 2000:274)
the poisonous the cobras

From the point of view of the encoding of definiteness, polydefinites are thus quite mysterious: although they come with the familiar definiteness effects of (monadic) definites – (2d) does after all pick out a unique entity, which is a pen and golden –, the multiple definite determiners they involve do not seem to be bringing about these effects. Arguably, neither definite determiner in (2d) is interpreted as such: the one on the noun cannot be, given the prior mention in (2b) of another pen; but neither is the one on the adjective, since the golden pen need not be (and in the given context isn't) the unique contextually salient golden entity.

We propose a radical view of definiteness in Greek, which accounts in a coherent way both for polydefinite and for monadic definite constructions in the language: the overt definite determiner is never semantically real. Greek definiteness is contributed by a null

operator residing in a functional head Def, which selects and thus scopes over the (possibly complex) DP (cf. Zeijlstra's (2004) proposal for negation in negative concord languages). The overt definite determiner is in D, and denotes the identity function. In this, monadic definites are no different from polydefinites. Polydefinites involve complex DP's whose daughters are DP's themselves (Lekakou & Szendroi 2007, 2010). Those smaller DP's, in virtue of being headed by expletive D's, are predicate-denoting. This enables set intersection to take place among the sub-parts of polydefinites (cf. Heim & Kratzer's 1998 predicate modification rule). The restrictive interpretation of adjectives in polydefinites is derived if Lekakou & Szendroi (*op.cit.*) are right in assuming that the adjective is modifying a null noun in one of the two DP's. In the context of (noun) ellipsis, adjectives are known to be interpreted restrictively (e.g. Branco & Costa 2006) – put differently, (noun) ellipsis imposes a disanaphora requirement on non-elided material (Williams 1997). Modulo noun ellipsis, polydefinites are on this account (cf. Kolliakou 2004) closely related to close appositives, which too involve the restrictive interpretation of one definite DP on another, as in (4).

- (4) a. o aetos to puli b. to puli o aetos
 the.MASC eagle the.NEUT bird the.NEUT bird the.MASC eagle
 ‘the eagle that is a bird (as opposed to the eagle that is a symbol)’

A conceivable alternative, to posit ambiguity in the Greek determiner, i.e. to propose that in Greek polydefinites and close appositives, one of the determiners is real and the other is semantically expletive, would be ill-advised. First, this move receives no independent support in the language. The determiners in polydefinites are identical to each other and to those appearing in monadic definites and proper names. Unlike Catalan, Greek has no morphologically distinct preproprial determiner; nor does any distinction of the type discussed for Bavarian by Schwarz (2009) exist in this language. Secondly, such an account would both under- and over-generate, since, given the freedom in word order of polydefinites (see (2d)), it is impossible to predict which determiner would be real and which one would be expletive. Similar considerations apply to an analysis that would take one determiner to spell out D and the other to spell out a different head in the functional domain of NP (as in e.g. Campos & Stavrou 2004, Ioannidou & den Dikken 2009).

In the remainder of the talk we address the issue of the (apparent) referential contribution of the definite article (Longobardi 1994). Following Heycock & Zamparelli (2005), we show that the situation is more complex than meets the eye: at least in some languages, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the number of definite articles and the number of referential entities.

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