

Definite and Indefinite DPs in a Language with Only One Determiner

Palauan is a Western Austronesian language (VOS, *pro*-drop; spoken by about 15,000 people in Micronesia) which arguably has only one determiner that can introduce an NP complement: *a* (Capell 1949; Josephs 1975, 1997, 1999). The determiner *a* does not encode definiteness. DPs whose heads are *a* can be interpreted as either definite or indefinite; see (1). The distribution of *a* is consistent with its analysis as a determiner if it is true that determiners and pronouns are in complementary distribution (Postal 1966; cf. Abney 1987). In Palauan, *a* cannot co-occur with pronouns as in (2a) or with demonstratives as in (2b). Essentially, *a* introduces any non-predicative nominal constituent (DP) that is not headed by a pronoun or demonstrative. The definiteness ambiguity exhibited in (1) is pervasive in ordinary Palauan speech in all registers, and it is often resolved through contextual clues. Still, it is clear that Palauan DPs may in some cases be construed as unambiguously indefinite or definite.

First, the pivots of Palauan existential sentences must be indefinite (as observed by Milsark 1977 for English), and non-partitive DPs containing the NPI *ngii di* “any” are always indefinite. In (3), the existential construction establishes a new discourse referent (see Karttunen 1969), *a rechad* “the people,” and the DP is interpreted as indefinite since there is no previously established discourse referent for it to refer to. In (4), the DP *a ngii di el meradel* “any orange(s)” is both in the scope of negation and contains the NPI *ngii di* “any,” and it neither establishes a new discourse referent nor refers to a previously established discourse referent. There are simply no oranges to refer to, and the DP cannot be interpreted as definite. The partitive variants of such DPs, which might possibly have definite interpretations, are distinguished by containing a PP embedded within the DP, as in English. See (5).

In order to ensure that a DP is interpreted as definite, the DP may have as its head a pronoun (demonstrative or non-demonstrative), followed by the linker *el*, followed by what would have been the content of the NP — see (7b–d) for examples. I propose that the structure of such DPs is that of (6). That is, what would be the NP complement of the determiner *a* is treated as a (non-restrictive) relative clause introduced by the linker *el* (as are all relative clauses in Palauan). When the demonstratives *tirka* “these” and *tirke* “those” introduce larger DPs, as in (7b–c), they must be followed by the linker *el*, unlike the all-purpose determiner *a*, cf. (7a). If demonstratives were simply determiners that could take NP complements, the obligatory presence of the linker might be mysterious, as it ordinarily introduces modifiers and relative/embedded clauses. But (7d) provides a clue; the pronoun *tir* may also appear in the same position as *tirka* and *tirke*, and it also requires the presence of the linker *el* between it and the rest of the content in the DP. In that case, demonstratives are like pronouns insofar as they are determiners that are unable to select NP complements.

Evidence in favor of this analysis of definite DPs as pronominal DPs with non-restrictive relative clause adjuncts can be found when comparing differences in how plurality is marked on human nouns used in argument DPs versus human nouns treated as predicate nominals. While human plural DPs contain the plural prefix *re-*, human predicate nominals are not marked with *re-* (Josephs 1975, 1997): compare (1, 3–5, 7a) to (7b) and (7d). The fact that the human plural nouns in (7b) and (7d) are not marked with *re-* suggests that they are treated as predicate nominals, while the pronominal D heads pick out the actual referents that bear the properties denoted by these predicates.

- (1) Te omes er a bilis a re-chad.
 3PL see ACC DET dog DET PL-people
 “(The) people see a/the dog.”
- (2) a. Ke olengit er (*a) ngak *pro* ?
 2SG ask ACC (*DET) me (you)
 “Are you asking me?”

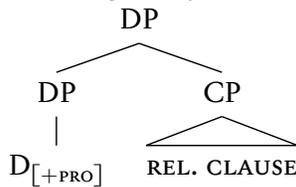
b. **(A) tirke el chad a mla olengeseu er (*a) se el bilis.*
 (*DET) those LINK people TOP have helped ACC (*DET) that LINK dog
 “Those people have helped that dog.”

(3) Ng ngar er ngii a re-chad er a delmerab.
 3SG exist PREP there DET PL-people PREP DET room
 ✓ “There are people in a/the room.” ✗ (“There are the people in a/the room.”)

(4) Ng diak longa a {ngii di} el meradel a re-chad.
 3SG NEG IRR-eat DET {any} LINK orange DET PL-people
 “(The) people are not eating any orange(s).”

(5) Ng diak longa a {ngii di} el ta er a meradel a re-chad.
 3SG NEG IRR-eat DET {any} LINK one PREP DET orange DET PL-people
 “(The) people are not eating any of the orange(s).”

(6) Unambiguously definite DPs have pronominal D heads with relative clause adjuncts:



(7) a. [DP a [NP re-chad]] / [DP a [NP re-sechal]]
 DET PL-people / DET PL-males
 “the people” / “the men”

b. [DP tirka [REL. el chad]]
 these LINK people
 “these people”

c. [DP tirke [REL. el ulsiik a kodell-em]]
 those LINK seeked DET death-your
 “those who wanted to kill you” (*lit.* “those, who were all who seeked your death”)

[*Chedaol Biblia*, Exodus 4:19]

d. [DP tir [REL. el sechal]]
 they LINK male
 “the men” (*lit.* “they, who were male”)

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