

The Underlying Unity of Reference and Quantification

The mapping of nominal arguments to semantic interpretation exhibits a certain amount of intriguing empirical variation across languages; it has become increasingly clear, at least since Longobardi (1994), that a good deal of such polymorphy depends on a major parametric divide, separating two types of languages: certain languages (e.g. Romance, but also Classical and Modern Greek, Bulgarian, Arabic (Fassi-Fehri 2003)...; henceforth 'strong D' languages) exhibit overt association of nouns functioning as referential constants (proper names and referential generics) with D (either by overt N-to-D raising, e.g. of proper names, or by an arguably expletive article), others do not (e.g. English, but also probably the rest of Germanic, Celtic...; 'weak D' languages). From a number of scattered observations it can be suspected that a roughly analogous phenomenon arises with respect to another semantic property of DPs, namely definiteness: in certain constructions of some languages, but crucially not in the closely comparable constructions of others, the definite reading of nominal arguments seems to depend on the overt association of some morphosyntactic material (presumably carrying along the features of a definite operator) with D (fronting to D° or SpecD). Compare the following contrasts:

- (1) a. Semitic Construct State (N-Gen-AP) vs. Germanic Saxon Genitive (Gen-AP-N) (Longobardi 1996)
- b. Semitic Construct State (N-Gen-AP) vs. Celtic Construct State (AP-N-...Gen) (cf. Rouveret 1994)
- c. Rumanian (N+def-AP) vs. Scandinavian (...AP-N+def) enclitic definiteness suffixes
- d. Bulgarian (AP+def-N) vs. Icelandic (AP-N+def) definiteness suffixes in the presence of APs
- e. Classical Greek Genitive (Art-Gen-Adj-N) vs. Germanic Saxon Genitive (Guardiano 2003)

Such cases will be illustrated in some detail. Consider, now, that strong D languages as defined above seem to significantly coincide with those where definiteness-bearing nouns or adjectives are overtly fronted to the D area, while in supposedly weak D languages, *ceteris paribus*, no such process appears. In other words, the distribution of definiteness-triggered and reference-triggered raising operations tends to be typologically syncretic.

We will thus argue for the following descriptive generalization and show that the behavior of a wide variety of definite descriptions can be derived by virtually the same axioms (principles and parameters) independently needed to account for the pattern of referential nominal expressions:

- (2) Definiteness operators are overtly associated with D iff referential constants (nouns) are

Therefore, the syntax of reference and that of definiteness seem crosslinguistically governed by a single parameterization, pointing to the underlying uniformity of the two phenomena. The analysis will be further generalized by suggesting that the same parametric pattern applies to other types of quantificational arguments, leading to the conclusion that at least in certain languages the D position is the unique locus for individual denotation, overtly closed by either a referential constant (a noun) or a quantificational operator.

Finally, it must be noticed that the most classical manifestation of definiteness marking, namely the non-enclitic definite article, such as English *the*, appears to escape such parameterization: its distribution seems very similar *mutatis mutandis* in e.g. Italian and English, and probably also other languages of either type. We will thus propose, in agreement with Bernstein (2005), that the so-called definite article is not a lexical manifestation of the

category 'definiteness' but rather of other inflectional categories independently related to the position usually labeled D.

If these hypotheses are correct, it can be concluded that the parameterization of the interpretive properties of D first put forth in Longobardi (1994) (or, cast in different terms, in Chierchia 1998) to account for the semantic mapping of bare nouns and proper names is responsible for crosslinguistic distinctions in a much larger class of nominal constructions.

References

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