

LIN6049

Advanced semantics: puzzles in meaning

2024-2025

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Week 2

Definites

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#Is **the book** interesting?

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#Is **the book** interesting?
- (2) [Context description: the school provided parents with two different links to sign up their children for the trip:]
#Use **the link** to sign up

Definites

- (1) [Context description: Jess tells me she has read three books in the last week. I say:]
#Is **the book** interesting?
- (2) [Context description: the school provided parents with two different links to sign up their children for the trip:]
#Use **the link** to sign up
- (3) [Context description: several students came to Fred's office hours. I know that. I say:]
#**The student who came to Fred's office hours** asked some questions about the assignment.

Definites

- (4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.

Definites

- (4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.
- (5) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment. **The student/she** was one of many students to come to Fred's office hours today with questions about the assignment. I guess his assignment instructions were unclear

Definites

- (4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.
- (6) *Two students* came to Fred's office hours today. **#The student** asked some questions about the assignment

Definites

Two uses of *the*:

- (1) **The student who came to Fred's office hours** asked some questions about the assignment
- (4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.

Definites

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Definites

(4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.

How can this use of *the* be described?

In this use, the noun phrase with *the* picks up an individual (a student) that was previously introduced in the discourse (in the preceding sentence), by *a* (*a student*)

Definites

(4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.

(6) *Two students* came to Fred's office hours today. **#The student** asked some questions about the assignment

The student imposes a uniqueness requirement in this use: only one student can have been introduced previously in the discourse

Definites

(4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.

(5) A student came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment. **The student** was one of many students to come to Fred's office hours today with questions about the assignment. I guess his assignment instructions were unclear

There can have been other students who came to Fred's office hours, *as long as they are not previously mentioned*

Definites

(3) [Context description: several students came to Fred's office hours. I know that. I say:]

#The student who came to Fred's office hours asked some questions about the assignment.

In this other use, there can't have been other students who came to Fred's office hours

Definites

Two uses of *the*:

Weak or non-anaphoric: referent is unique in the non-linguistic context

Strong or anaphoric: referent is unique in the linguistic context/in the discourse

Definites

More examples of weak or non-anaphoric *the*:

Definites

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(7) I attended a speech by **the Prime Minister**

Definites

More examples of weak or non-anaphoric *the*:

(7) I attended a speech by **the Prime Minister**

(8) Never look at **the sun** during a solar eclipse

Definites

More examples of weak or non-anaphoric *the*:

(7) I attended a speech by **the Prime Minister**

(8) Never look at **the sun** during a solar eclipse

(9) **The mayor** visited a hospital

(10) Elsa went to **the corner shop** to buy drinks

Definites

Some questions:

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Do definite articles/determiners in other languages also have weak and strong uses?

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What do the answers to these questions suggest about whether English has more than one *the*?

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Some questions:

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What do the answers to these questions suggest about whether English has more than one *the*?

Languages with two definite articles

Languages with two definite articles

Not:

languages that have two or more forms of the definite article depending on gender, number, case

(e.g., Spanish *el* – *la* – *los* – *las*)

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

(Fering: West Germanic, Germany)

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

(Fering: West Germanic, Germany)

(11) Ik skal deel tu **a** **kuupmaan**.

I must down to DEF grocer

‘I have to go down to the grocer.’

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

(Fering: West Germanic, Germany)

(11) lk skal deel tu **a** kuupmaan.
I must down to DEF grocer
'I have to go down to the grocer.'

(12) lk skal deel tu **#di** kuupmaan.
I must down to DEF grocer
'I have to go down to the grocer.'

all Fering examples from Ebert (1971)

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

- (13) Oki hee *an* *hingst* keeft. #**A** **hingst**
Oki has a horse bought DEF horse
haaltet.
limps
'Oki has bought a horse. The horse limps.'

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

- (14) Oki hee *an* *hingst* keeft. **Di** **hingst**
Oki has a horse bought DEF horse
haaltet.
limps
'Oki has bought a horse. The horse limps.'

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

	MASC SG	FEM SG	NEUTER SG	PLURAL
weak article	a	at	at	a
strong article	di	det	det	dön

(Ebert 1971)

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

(15) Peetje hee jister *an* *kü* slaachtet.

Peetje has yesterday a cow slaughtered

Jo saai, **det** **kü** wiar äi sünj

one says DEF_S cow was not healthy

‘Peetje slaughtered a cow yesterday. One says the cow was not healthy’

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

(16) [In a situation with just one dog]

A **hünj** hee tuswark
DEF_W dog has tooth.ache
'The dog has a toothache'

Languages with two definite articles

Fering *a* vs. *di*

(17) **A** **köning** kaam to bischük
DEF_W king came to visit
'The king came for a visit'

Languages with two definite articles

Other Germanic dialects that also have two definite articles that behave in this way

e.g., Cologne dialect, Bavarian, Austro-Bavarian, Viennese...

...but also, actually, standard German

Languages with two definite articles

Prepositions and definite articles sometimes contract in standard German:

vom: von ('by') + *dem* ('the')

im: in ('in') + *dem* ('the')

zum: zu ('to') + *dem* ('the')

Languages with two definite articles

Prepositions and definite articles sometimes contract in standard German:

vom: *von* ('by') + *dem* ('the')

im: *in* ('in') + *dem* ('the')

zum: *zu* ('to') + *dem* ('the')

But there is more to it than that. The meaning of, e.g., *vom* and *von dem* is different

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(18) Der Empfang wurde **vom Bürgermeister**
DEF reception was by.DEF mayor
eröffnet
opened
'The reception was opened by the mayor'

(all standard German data from Schwarz 2009)

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(19) Der Empfang wurde **#von dem Bürgermeister**
DEF reception was by DEF mayor
eröffnet
opened
'The reception was opened by the mayor'

(all standard German data from Schwarz 2009)

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(20) Armstrong flog als erster **zum** **Mond**

Armstrong flew as first.one to.DEF moon

‘Armstrong was the first one to fly to the moon’

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(21) Armstrong flog als erster **#zu dem Mond**

Armstrong flew as first.one to DEF moon

‘Armstrong was the first one to fly to the moon’

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(22) Das Buch, das du suchst, steht **im**
DEF book that you look.for stands in.DEF

Glassschrank

glass.cabinet

‘The book that you are looking for is in the glass cabinet’

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(23) Das Buch, das du suchst, steht **#in dem**
DEF book that you look.for stands in DEF

Glassschrank

glass.cabinet

‘The book that you are looking for is in the glass cabinet’

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(24) In	der	New Yorker	Bibliothek		gibt	es	<i>ein</i>	<i>Buch</i>	über	
	in	DEF New York	library		exists	it	a	book	about	
Topinambur.		Neulich war		ich	dort	und	habe	#im	Buch	
topinambour		recently was		I	there	and	have	in.DEF	book	
nach	einer	Antwort		auf	die	Frage	gesucht,		ob	
for	a	answer		to	DEF	question	searched		whether	
man	Topinambur	grillen	kann							
one	topinambour	grill	can							

‘In the New York public library there is a book about topinambour. Recently I was there and searched in the book for an answer to the question of whether one can grill topinambour.’

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

(25) In	der	New Yorker	Bibliothek		gibt	es	<i>ein</i>	<i>Buch</i>	über	
	in	DEF New York	library		exists	it	a	book	about	
Topinambur.		Neulich war		ich	dort	und	habe	in dem Buch		
topinambour		recently was		I	there	and	have	in DEF book		
nach	einer	Antwort		auf	die	Frage	gesucht,		ob	
for	a	answer		to	DEF	question	searched		whether	
man	Topinambur	grillen	kann							
one	topinambour	grill	can							

‘In the New York public library there is a book about topinambour. Recently I was there and searched in the book for an answer to the question of whether one can grill topinambour.’

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

When contraction of P with the definite article is available...

...contracted definite article: weak

...uncontracted definite article: strong

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

When contraction of P with the definite article is available...

...contracted definite article: weak

...uncontracted definite article: strong

So, standard German has the two definite articles, but the difference only shows up in certain environments (where contraction with P is in principle possible)

Languages with two definite articles

Standard German

	MASC SG	FEM SG	NEUTER SG	PLURAL
nominative	der	die	das	die
accusative	den	die	das	die
dative	dem	der	dem	den
genitive	des	der	des	der

Languages with two definite articles

So:

- standard German has two definite articles
- one can tell the difference only in cases where contraction with a preposition is in principle possible
- in addition, the two articles inflect for gender, number and case

Languages with two definite articles

Other languages that also distinguish weak from strong definiteness:

Akan (Niger-Congo, Ghana)

Mauritian Creole (French-based creole, Mauritius)

Hidatsa (Siouan, North and South Dakota, USA)

Mangarayi (Australia)

...

Back to English

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- *the* has two uses
- we could say *the* is ambiguous

Back to English

- English *the* is sometimes weak and sometimes strong
- *the* has two uses
- we could say *the* is ambiguous
- what Fering or German do with two different forms of the definite article, English does with one form

To do this week

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Puzzle 1, which can be found in the week 2 folder on QM+

If submitting for feedback, submit next week

If submitting for assessment, submit on 28 April

See syllabus for more information

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Obligatory and optional readings for this week can also be found in the week 2 folder. All references for data and ideas this week can be found in the obligatory reading, Schwarz (2019)