

LIN6049

Advanced semantics: puzzles in meaning

2024-2025

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Week 4

Definites, part 3

General feedback on puzzle 1

Definiteness in languages with bare nouns

General feedback on Puzzle 1

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Great first attempt at the puzzle, but lots of room for improvement. Here is how

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Three parts to puzzle 1:

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Three parts to puzzle 1:

- develop tests

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Three parts to puzzle 1:

- develop tests
- justify the tests with the data provided

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Three parts to puzzle 1:

- develop tests
- justify the tests with the data provided
- apply the tests to (made up) Fering

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Developing tests

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Developing tests

A determiner D is a strong definite determiner when/if...

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Developing tests

A determiner D is a strong definite determiner when/if...

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

General feedback on Puzzle 1

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

“...it refers to...”

General feedback on Puzzle 1

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

“...it refers to...”

“...it is anaphoric...”

General feedback on Puzzle 1

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

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“...it is anaphoric...”

“...it is like a pronoun...”

General feedback on Puzzle 1

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

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Problems?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

“...**it** refers to...”

“...**it** is anaphoric...”

“...**it** is like a pronoun...”

D itself never refers to anything. [D NP] does

General feedback on Puzzle 1

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If you use “anaphoric”, you have to say what it is to be anaphoric

General feedback on Puzzle 1

A determiner D is a weak definite determiner when/if...

“...it refers to...”

“...it is anaphoric...”

“...it is like a pronoun...”

D itself never refers to anything. [D NP] does

What does it mean to be
“like a pronoun”?

If you use “anaphoric”,
you have to say what it is
to be anaphoric

General feedback on Puzzle 1

The problem of not saying what you mean

The problem of appealing to technical terms/notions without defining them

General feedback on Puzzle 1

The problem of not saying what you mean

D doesn't refer to anything, [D NP] does

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General feedback on Puzzle 1

The problem of not saying what you mean

D doesn't refer to anything, [D NP] does

The problem of appealing to technical terms/notions without defining them

Put those aside. Try again: what is the DP doing?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Beyond this, the main issue was not capturing what the basic property of weak vs strong definites is.
Which brings us to...

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Beyond this, the main issue was not capturing what the basic property of weak vs strong definites is.
Which brings us to...

The problem of not extracting as much information from the examples given as possible

General feedback on Puzzle 1

- (1) [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
- (2) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The student** asked some questions about the assignment.
- (3) *Two students* came to my office hours today. #**The student** asked some questions about the assignment
- (4) *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

General feedback on Puzzle 1

(1) [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

What is the non-linguistic context in the example like?

What is the linguistic context like?

Which *the* is this?

Which requirement of which *the* is violated here?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

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

What is the non-linguistic context in the example like?

What is the linguistic context like?

Which *the* is this?

Which requirement of which *the* is satisfied here?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

(3) *Two students* came to my office hours today. #**The student** asked some questions about the assignment

What is the non-linguistic context in the example like?

What is the linguistic context like?

Which *the* is this?

Which requirement of which *the* is violated here?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

- (4) *A student* came to Fred's office hours. **The₁ student** asked some questions about the assignment. **The₂ 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

What is the non-linguistic context in the example like?

What is the linguistic context like?

Which *the* is this? Same *the* in both instances?

Which requirement of which *the* is satisfied here, in both cases?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Collect your answers into two groups: one group for weak *the*, another group for strong *the*

General feedback on Puzzle 1

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What do they tell us about weak *the*?

What do they tell us about strong *the*?

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Collect your answers into two groups: one group for weak *the*, another group for strong *the*

What do they tell us about weak *the*?

What do they tell us about strong *the*?

Now you can formulate your tests!

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Formulating a test well is hard!

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Formulating a test well is hard!

Be accurate, brief, clear, direct

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Formulating a test well is hard!

Be accurate, brief, clear, direct

Choose your words wisely. Don't rely on additional notions that you then have to explain

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Now you can also justify your tests!

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What you need to do is use what you discovered about examples (1)-(4) to justify each ingredient of your tests

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What you need to do is use what you discovered about examples (1)-(4) to justify each ingredient of your tests

For example, if you found out that whether the context is linguistic or non-linguistic matters, this distinction will be in your tests, and you can show why it matters by showing how it helps to understand the pattern in the examples

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Applying your tests to (made up) Fering

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If you apply tests based on examples (1)-(4), you want to know, with respect to Fering...

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Applying your tests to (made up) Fering

If you apply tests based on examples (1)-(4), you want to know, with respect to Fering...

...what the equivalent of examples (1)-(4) would look like according to your tests!

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Applying your tests to (made up) Fering

You don't know how to say most of the words in (1)-(4) in Fering.
Neither am I asking you to find out...

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Applying your tests to (made up) Fering

You don't know how to say most of the words in (1)-(4) in Fering.
Neither am I asking you to find out...

...but you do know how to say enough words in Fering from the
examples discussed in week 2!

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Applying your tests to (made up) Fering

Use the examples from Fering from week 2. If you have an example with the word “horse” instead of the word “student”, fill in whatever is missing with English but try to reproduce examples (1)-(4), with all their features, using this mix of English and Fering

General feedback on Puzzle 1

Applying your tests to (made up) Fering

Use the examples from Fering from week 2. If you have an example with the word “horse” instead of the word “student”, fill in whatever is missing with English but try to reproduce examples (1)-(4), with all their features, using this mix of English and Fering

Then say, depending on whether you used *a* or *di*, what your tests predict for such examples, and why

General feedback on Puzzle 1

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Then say, depending on whether you used *a* or *di*, what your tests predict for such examples, and why

DONE!

Definites in languages with bare nouns

- Do definite articles/determiners in other languages also have weak and strong uses?
- Do all languages have definite articles/determiners?
- Do all languages have articles/determiners?
- What do the answers to these questions suggest about whether English has more than one *the*?

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Definites in languages with bare nouns

Arguments:

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Bare noun phrases can have definite readings

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→ implications for our analysis of the syntax and semantics of bare noun phrases

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if a language expresses weak vs. strong definiteness differently, the weak definite tends to be smaller than the strong definite

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if a language expresses weak vs. strong definiteness differently, the weak definite tends to be smaller than the strong definite

→ implications for our analysis of the morphosyntax of noun phrases

Bare nouns

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Bare nouns

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(5) I saw [_{NP} **students**] in the library studying for an exam

(6) I saw [_{NP} **Physics students**] in the library studying for an exam

English bare nouns

English bare nouns

(5) I saw **students** in the library studying for an exam

English bare nouns

(5) I saw **students** in the library studying for an exam

English not a particularly great language to look at if we're interested in definiteness in the absence of articles/determiners: English bare nouns are only indefinite, and only plural nouns are allowed bare

English bare nouns

- (5) I saw **students** in the library studying for an exam
 \approx I saw some students in the library studying for
 an exam

English bare nouns

(5) I saw **students** in the library studying for an exam

≈ I saw some students in the library studying for
an exam

(7) *I saw **student** in the library studying for an exam

English bare nouns

(5) I saw **students** in the library studying for an exam
 \approx I saw some students in the library studying for
 an exam

(7) *I saw **student** in the library studying for an exam

Interesting in its own right—could be a topic for your
final assignment. But not useful for us today!

Akan bare nouns

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Akan

- Niger-Congo, Kwa
- southern Ghana
- many speakers



Akan bare nouns

- (8) Mè-tò-ò èkùtú.
1SG-buy-PST orange
'I bought an orange.'

Akan bare nouns

(8) Mè-tò-ò èkùtú.
1SG-buy-PST orange
'I bought an orange.'

(9) Mè-tò-ò àtààdéé bí ñnórà.
1SG-buy-PST dress INDEF yesterday
'I bought a dress yesterday'

Akan bare nouns

- (10) Mè-tò-ò àtààdéé bí ñnóra.
1SG-buy-PST dress INDEF yesterday
Àtààdéé nó yé fè.
dress DET COP nice
'I bought a dress yesterday. The dress was nice'

Akan bare nouns

(11) Mè-tò-ò àtààdéé bí ñnóra.
1SG-buy-PST dress INDEF yesterday

#**Àtààdéé** yé fè.
dress COP nice

Intended: 'I bought a dress yesterday. The dress was nice'

Akan bare nouns

(12)	Dùá	bí	sì	m̀pómá	nó	àkyí,	nà
	tree	INDEF	be.on	window	DEF	behind	and
	̀n-nòmáá	m̀mìè̀nsá	sí	só ...	m̀-màríamáá	nó	
	PL-bird	three	be.on top	PL-boy	DEF		
	nyìnáá	hù-ù	à-nòmáá	bí			
	all	see-PST	SG-bird	INDEF			

‘There is a tree behind the window, and three birds are sitting on it. All the boys saw a bird.’

Akan bare nouns

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	tree	INDEF	be.on	window	DEF	behind	and
	̀n-nòmáá	m̀mìè̀ǹsá	sí	só ...	m̀-màrí máá	nó	
	PL-bird	three	be.on top	PL-boy	DEF		
	nyìnáá	hù-ù	à-nòmáá	#nó			
	all	see-PST	SG-bird	DEF			

Intended: ‘There is a tree behind the window, and three birds are sitting on it. All the boys saw the bird.’

Akan bare nouns

Summary so far:

- bare nouns: indefinite
- *nó* noun phrases: weak or strong definite; uniqueness presupposition when strong ((12)-(13))

Akan bare nouns

Coming up:

- bare nouns: indefinite **or weak definite**
- *nó* noun phrases: weak or strong definite; uniqueness presupposition when strong ((12)-(13))

Akan bare nouns

- (14) [Context: Afia is sitting on a bus, when a woman she doesn't know sits down beside her. The woman says:]

Àwìà (nó) ré-bò ènné
sun DEF PRG-hit today
'The sun is shining today'

Akan bare nouns

(15)[Context: Yesterday was the Ghanaian national day and there were a lot of celebrations in Accra. Your friend asks you whether you saw anyone famous. You say:]

Mè-hù-ù **ɔmanpanin** **(nó)**

1SG-see-PST president DEF

‘I saw the president’

Akan bare nouns

(16) [Context: there is a new teacher at a school. A colleague is explaining to him how everything works. This is the beginning of the conversation, and the colleague explains to the new teacher:]

Headmaster **(nó)** bé-má wò timetable

headmaster DEF FUT-give 2SG timetable

‘The headmaster will give you a timetable’

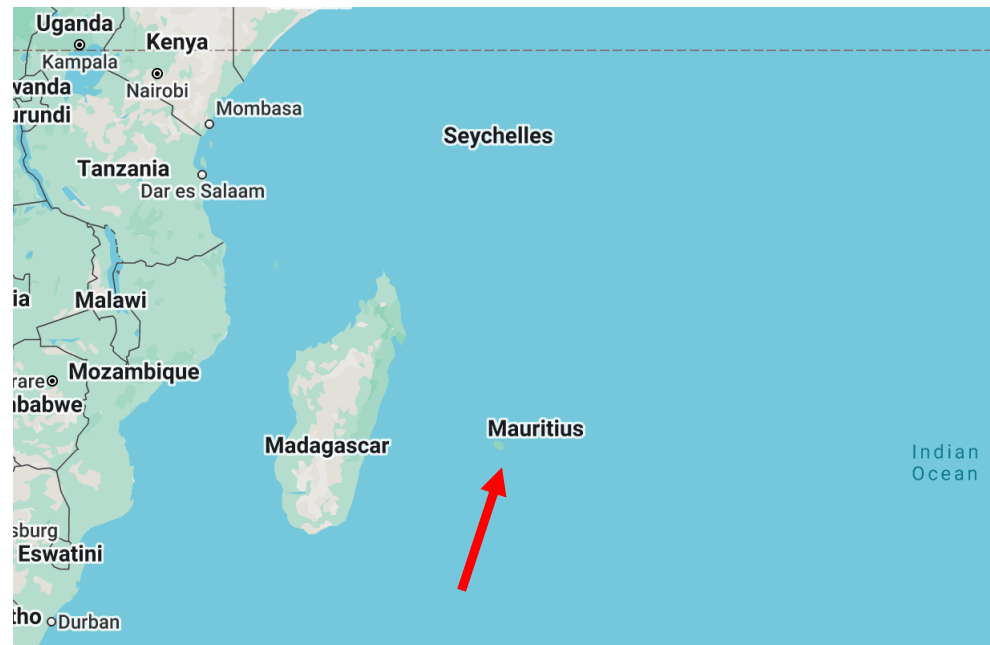
Mauritian Creole bare nouns

Mauritian Creole

French-based creole

Mauritius

many speakers



Mauritian Creole bare nouns

- (17) **Later** turn otur **soley**
 earth revolve around sun
 'The earth revolves around the sun'

- (18) Enn garson ek enn tifi ti pe lager.
 one boy and one girl PST PROG argue
Garson **la** ti paret an koler
 boy DEF PST appear in rage
tifi **la** ti res kalm
 girl DEF PST stay calm
 'A boy and a girl were arguing. The boy seemed furious, the girl stayed calm.'

Taking stock

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Bare nouns can be weak definites

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→ the expression of weak definiteness does not require an overt determiner/article

Taking stock

Bare nouns can be weak definites

→ the expression of weak definiteness does not require an overt determiner/article

What does this mean for the syntax of definite noun phrases?

Taking stock

In the languages we've seen, if there is a distinction between weak and strong definites, the weak definite may be smaller than the strong definite, but never bigger

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German: contracted (smaller!): weak
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Akan: null (the smallest!): weak
nó: weak or strong

Mauritius Creole: null: weak
la: strong

Taking stock

In the languages we've seen, if there is a distinction between weak and strong definites, the weak definite may be smaller than the strong definite, but never bigger

Fering:

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

Taking stock

In fact, this continues being the case when you look at more languages

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Cross-linguistically, weak definites tend to be smaller than strong definites

Taking stock

In fact, this continues being the case when you look at more languages

Cross-linguistically, weak definites tend to be smaller than strong definites

What does this mean for the morphosyntax of weak vs. strong definites?

Next week

Not all bare nouns are created equal!