

LIN6049

Advanced semantics: puzzles in meaning

2024-2025

Luisa Martí

Week 5

Today

General feedback on puzzle 2

Bare nouns, part 1

General feedback on puzzle 2

Describe St'át'imcets *ti...a* using tools provided in class

General feedback on puzzle 2

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What tools are those?

General feedback on puzzle 2

Describe St'át'imcets *ti...a* using tools provided in class

What tools are those?

Denotations + behavior that derives from them

Indef, weak def, strong def denotations

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‘Indef NP VP’

Presupposition: ---

Assertion: $\{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$

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match the patterns you observe in the data to this predicted behavior

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In some languages without articles it is possible to see that grammar wins over pragmatics/communicative pressure

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Akan (last week):

- bare nouns: indef or weak def
- *nó* noun phrases: weak or strong def

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Atara Imere (today):

- bare nouns: indef or weak def or strong def

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Akan (last week):

- bare nouns: indef or weak def
- *nó* noun phrases: weak or strong def

Atara Imere (today):

- bare nouns: indef or weak def or strong def
 - Elsewhere principle at work

Bare nouns, part 1

Frisian, West Greenlandic (next time)

- a completely different kind of bare noun!

Bare nouns, part 1

Some questions for the syntax and semantics of noun phrases cross-linguistically:

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- are bare nouns always NPs? DPs? Is the syntax of Akan bare nouns the same as the syntax of Atara Imere bare nouns?

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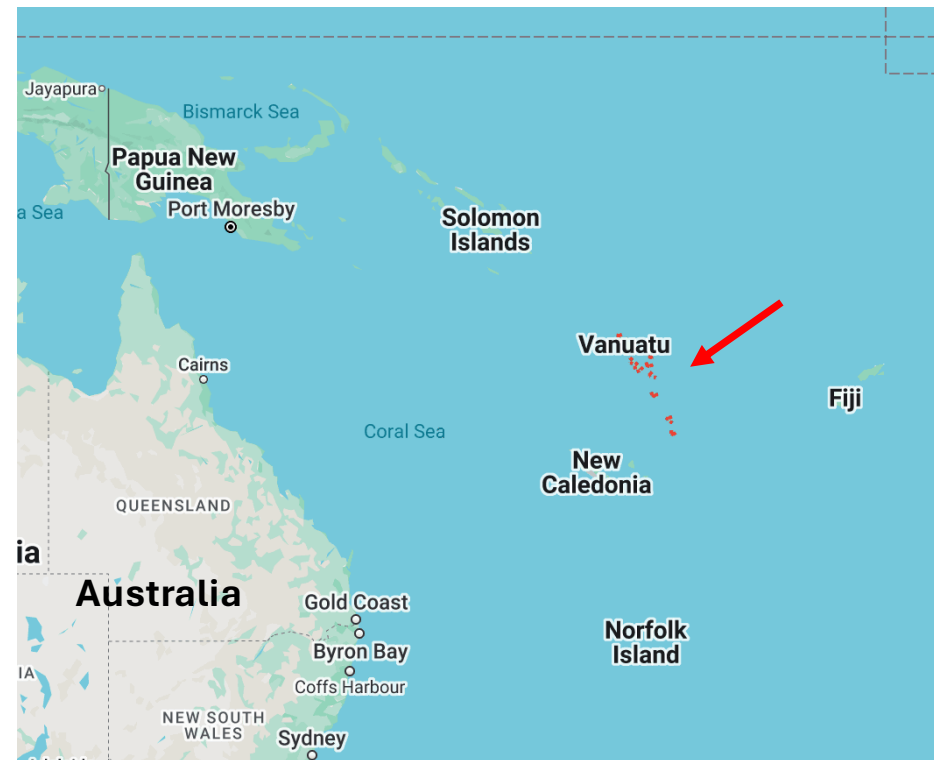
- are bare nouns always NPs? DPs? Is the syntax of Akan bare nouns the same as the syntax of Atara Imere bare nouns?
- does the semantics really imply a DP syntax? Can you get the required meanings from somewhere else?

Atara Imere bare nouns

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Atara Imere

- Polynesian
- spoken in Vanuatu
- approx. 4,000 speakers
- my own fieldwork



Atara Imere bare nouns

(1) Lekina **te-sea** i-fare.

EXIST SG-chair LOC-house

‘There is a chair in the house.’

(2) Niirake eetasi, lekina **te-meto** ...

time one EXIST SG-prince

‘Once upon a time, there was a prince...’

Atara Imere bare nouns

(3) **Te-paki** ee-jiro

SG-boat 3SG.NFUT-sink

‘A/the boat sank’

(4) **Te-gata** ee-moe

SG-snake 3SG.NFUT-sleep

‘A/the snake is sleeping’

Atara Imere bare nouns

(5) Au seia **te-gata**.

1SG see SG-snake

‘I saw a/the snake.’

Atara Imere bare nouns

(6) **Te-lipo** ee-maka. **Te-lipo** samaasama.

SG-ghost 3SG.NFUT-appear SG-ghost happy

‘A ghost appeared. The ghost was happy’

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(7) Au seia tagata go **te-fine** paati.
1SG see man.SG and SG-woman party.SG

Au vaanaga soina **te-fine**
1SG speak with SG-woman

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(8) **Te-gaale** ee-sopo

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‘The moon rises’

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Q: how are denotations (indef, weak def, strong def) chosen in Atara Imere?

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A: Elsewhere principle

Atara Imere bare nouns

Q: how are denotations (indef, weak def, strong def) chosen in Atara Imere?

A: Elsewhere principle, which takes precedence over communicative needs!

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from less specified...



...to more specified

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Elsewhere principle:
choose the most
specified denotation
(whose requirements
are satisfied)

...to more specified

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existential construction:
incompatible with
presuppositions
→ indef, ~~weak def~~, ~~strong def~~

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what would be a
non-default
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though one could argue that,
pragmatically, nothing else makes
sense!

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Atara Imere bare nouns

Is there a way to show that it is the Elsewhere principle, and not pragmatics, that is responsible for the strong default interpretation in such examples?

Atara Imere bare nouns

Is there a way to show that it is the Elsewhere principle, and not pragmatics, that is responsible for the strong default interpretation in such examples?

Is there a way to show that grammar prevails over pragmatics/communicative pressure?

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if it was pragmatics that chooses interpretations, then it should choose an indef interpretation here, which we know to be available independently that’s because an indef interpretation would make this example perfectly pragmatically adequate
still, that’s not what’s going on here, since the example is ruled out!

Atara Imere bare nouns

- (10) Te-gata eetasi ee-moe go
SG-snake one 3SG.NFUT-sleep and
te-gata **eetasi** s-ee-moe kee.
SG-snake one NEG-3sg.NFUT-sleep NEG
'One snake was sleeping and one snake wasn't
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Atara Imere bare nouns

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That this doesn't seem to happen is very significant! Language is more than just communication!

Grammar

So, what does the grammar look like?

Grammar

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Elsewhere principle

Grammar

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Elsewhere principle

Choosing a more specified denotation implies that the grammar produces the denotations

Grammar

How does it do that?

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Some options:

- the denotation of nouns varies cross-linguistically

Grammar

How does it do that?

Some options:

- the denotation of nouns varies cross-linguistically
- the syntax of noun phrases varies cross-linguistically

Grammar

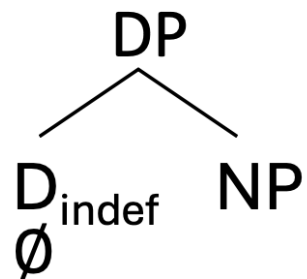
How does it do that?

Some options:

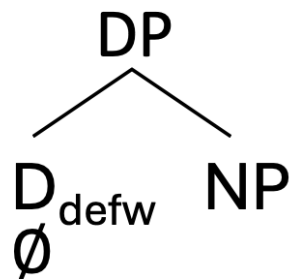
- the denotation of nouns varies cross-linguistically
- **the syntax of noun phrases varies cross-linguistically**

Syntax

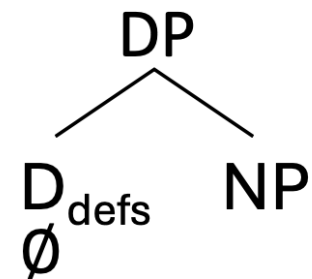
Atara Imere noun phrases



or



or



D_{indef}, D_{defw} and D_{defs} are null (i.e., have no phonology)

Indef, weak def, strong def denotations

'D_{indef} NP VP'

Presupposition: ---

Assertion: $\{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$

'D_{defw} NP VP'

Presupposition: $|\{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\}| = 1$.

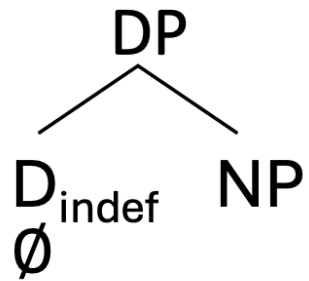
Assertion: $\{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$

'D_{defs} NP VP'

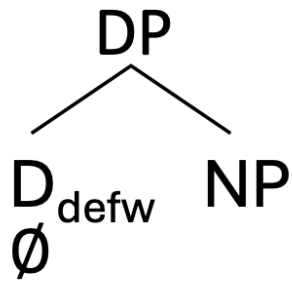
Presupposition: $|\{x: x \text{ is an NP in the discourse situation}\}| = 1$.

Assertion: $\{x: x \text{ is an NP in the discourse situation}\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$

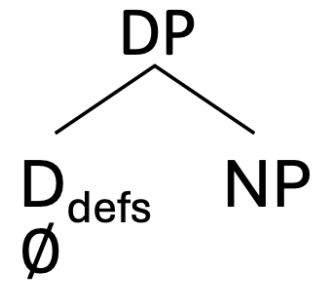
Syntax



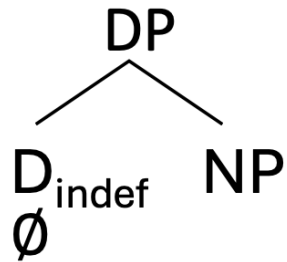
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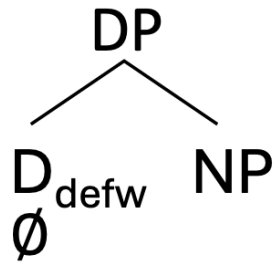
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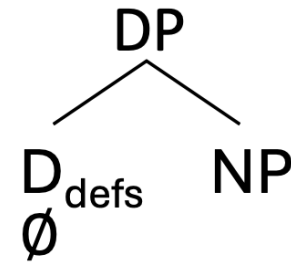
Syntax



or

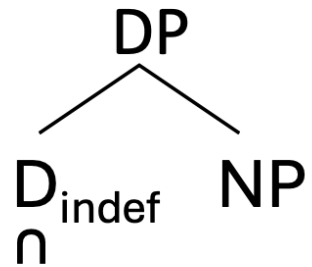


or



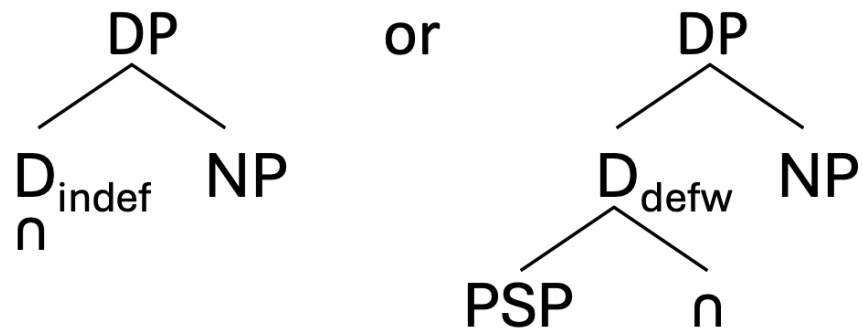
Last week: if there is a distinction between weak and strong definites, the weak definite may be smaller than the strong definite, but never bigger

Syntax



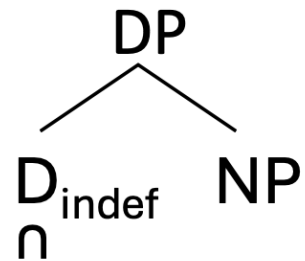
$n = \{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$ (assertion)

Syntax

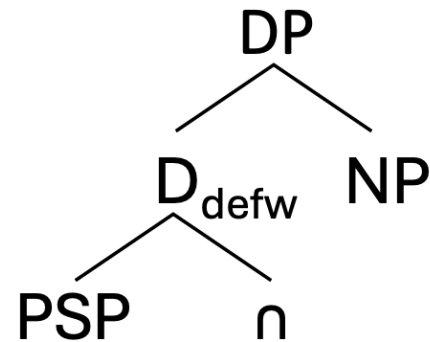


$n = \{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$ (assertion)
 $PSP = |\{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\}| = 1$ (presupposition)

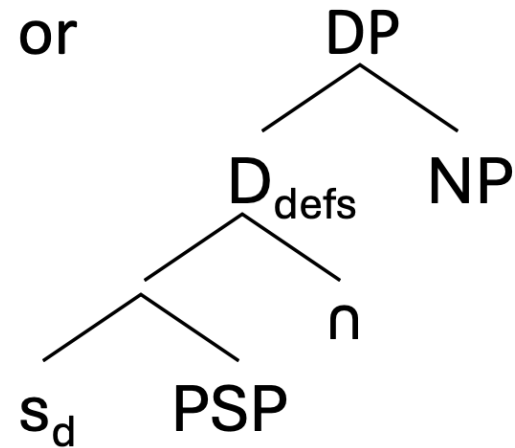
Syntax



or

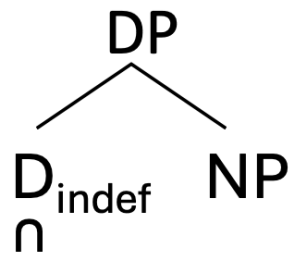


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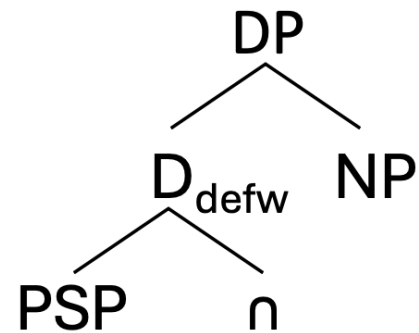


$n = \{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\} \cap \{x: x \text{ VPs in } s\} \neq \emptyset$ (assertion)
 $\text{PSP} = |\{x: x \text{ is an NP in } s\}| = 1$ (presupposition)
 $s_d = \text{discourse situation}$

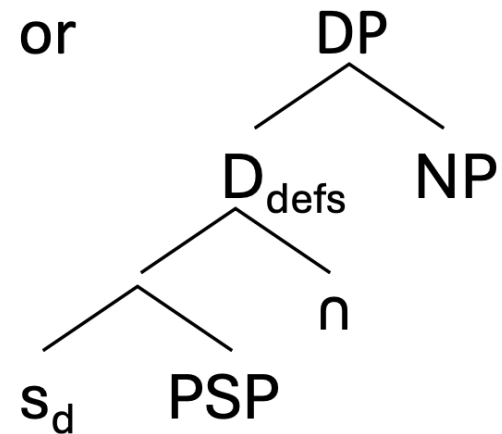
Syntax



or



or



Atara Imere: cannot see the differences, all Ds unpronounced
Akan: pronunciation sensitive to presence of s_d (nó)

Summary

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Languages without articles can express the same meanings that languages with articles do

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The Elsewhere principle (grammar) wins over pragmatics/communicative pressure

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The Elsewhere principle (grammar) wins over pragmatics/communicative pressure

Syntax can be taken to reflect this

Coming up

Week 6: no class, individual meetings

Sign up: link in week 6 folder in QMPlus

Prepare for the meeting!

Then reading week (week 7)

Then more bare nouns (week 8)