

Preposition-Determiner interactions in Eastern Romance

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1 The issue

the definite article in Eastern Romance languages (Romanian, Megleno-Romanian, Istro-Romanian, Aromanian) can have multiple phonological realizations: it can be null in objects of prepositions that assign Acc. case, but it must be overt otherwise.

- (1) *Tricu numt-a, [...] dupî numtî imna ş-drachu*
passed wedding.def [...] after wedding came also-devil.def
'The wedding passed. After the wedding the devil came.' (Arom PP 1996:26)
- (2) *Il s'est assis sur le banc/*banc.*
he refl.is sat on the bench/bench
'He sat on the bench.'

two lexical definite Ds?

- bare Ns are commonly analyzed as existential or generic indefinites in Romance (Longobardi 1994, 2001, 2005)
- if the two Ds (the overt D and the covert one) were independent lexical items in Eastern Romance, we would expect regular DPs to be possibly headed either by the overt D or by the null D, contrary to fact (the null definite article can occur only after Ps).

Q1: why are definite Ds null only in prepositional environments?

micro-variation across Eastern Romance:

- in Romanian simple objects of Ps must be headed by a null D

- (3) *seara rămaseră la preot (Rom)*
evening.def, stayed at priest
'in the evening, they stayed at the priest's house.'
- (4) **seara rămaseră la preot-ul (Rom)*
evening.def, stayed at priest.def
'in the evening, they stayed at the priest's house.'

- in the other Eastern Romance languages the D heading simple objects of Ps can be either null or overt.

(5) *Dusi la preftu acasî* (Arom, PP 1996:200)

went to priest at.home

‘He went to the priest’s house’

(6) *seara, armasirî la preftu-lu’* (Arom, PP 1996:202)

evening.def, stayed at priest.def

‘in the evening, they stayed at the priest’s house.’

Q2: how can we account for ER languages in which definite D can be both null and overt in simple objects of Ps?

Q3: how can we account for Romanian, which only allows null Ds in simple objects of Ps?

2 Previous analyses

Incorporation?

Mardale 2006: definite Ds incorporate into P, a syntactic process which is made possible by the fact that these DPs are reduced.

- definite DPs that are objects of Ps lack KaseP, which would normally be projected in between PP and DP.
- definite DPs that are objects of Ps also lack a NumP: in the presence of NumP, D lowers to Num and gets spelled out on the N which has raised to Num, but if NumP is absent, D incorporates into P.

(7) [_{PP} P [_(KaseP) (Kase) [_{DP} D [_(NumP) (Num) [_{NP} N]]]]]

Problems:

- Mardale’s analysis can account for simple objects of Ps in Romanian, i.e. for strings of the type [P+N] in which the definite D is always null.
- However, Mardale’s analysis cannot be extended to the other Eastern Romance languages in which the definite article can be null on objects of Ps, but it can also be overt.

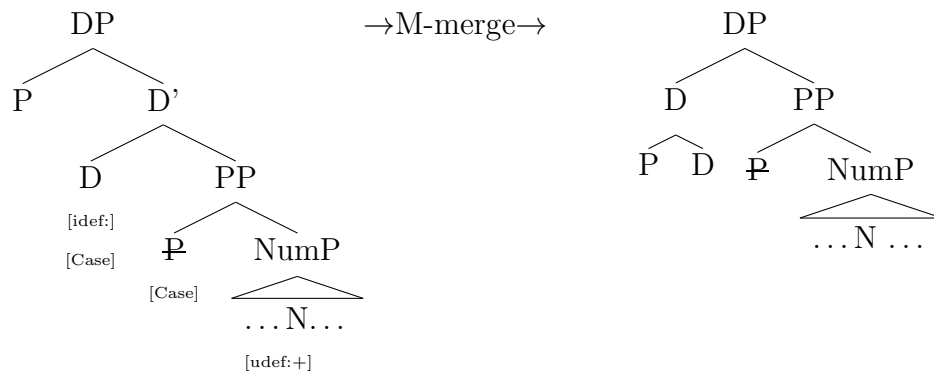
3.3 M-merge

(11) *M-merge*: Definite D m-merges with the closest head in its c-command domain that it enters an Agree relation with.

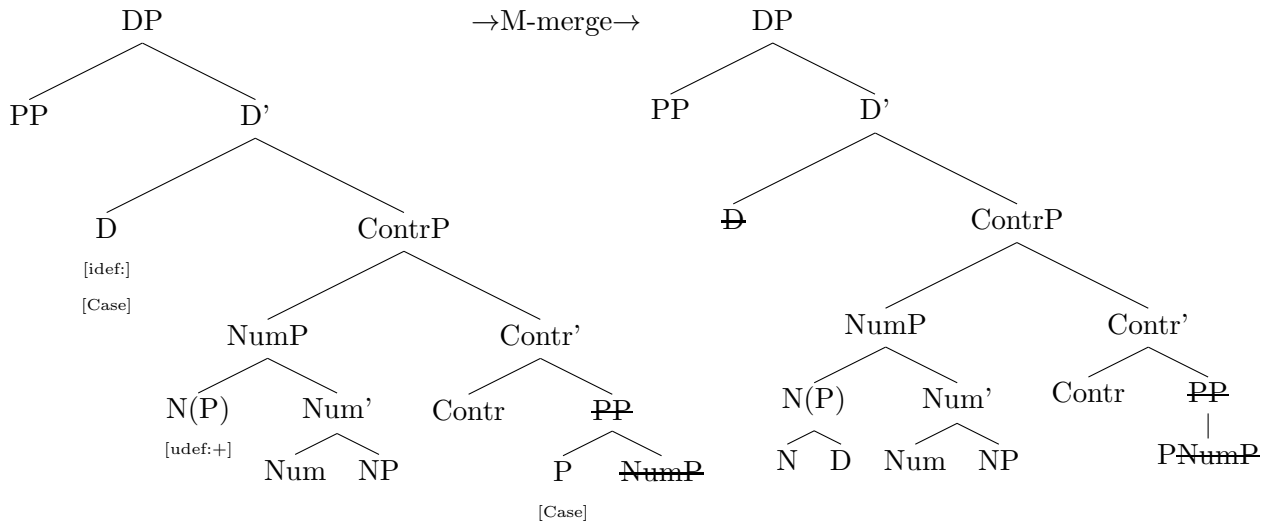
- m-merge reanalyzes two heads as one in the morphological component.
- the input to the m-merge rule consists of two *heads* in a particular relationship–*Agree*

Given that D can enter Agree with P with respect to its [Case] feature and with N with respect to its [def] feature, D could in principle m-merge either with N or with P.

(12) D m-merges with P

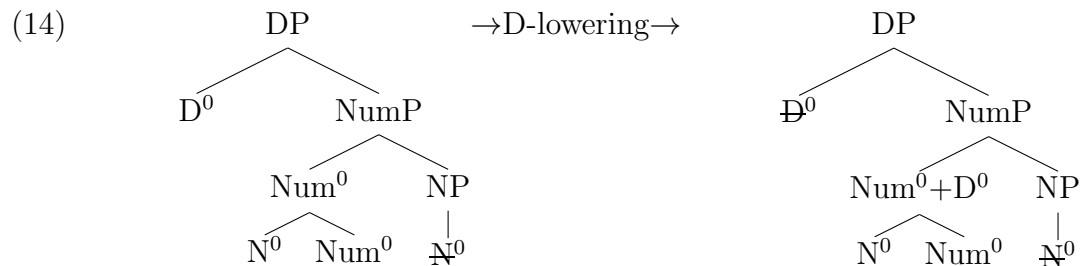


(13) D m-merges with N



The m-merge rule in (11) vs Dobrovie-Sorin & Giurgea’s 2006 ‘D-lowering’ rule

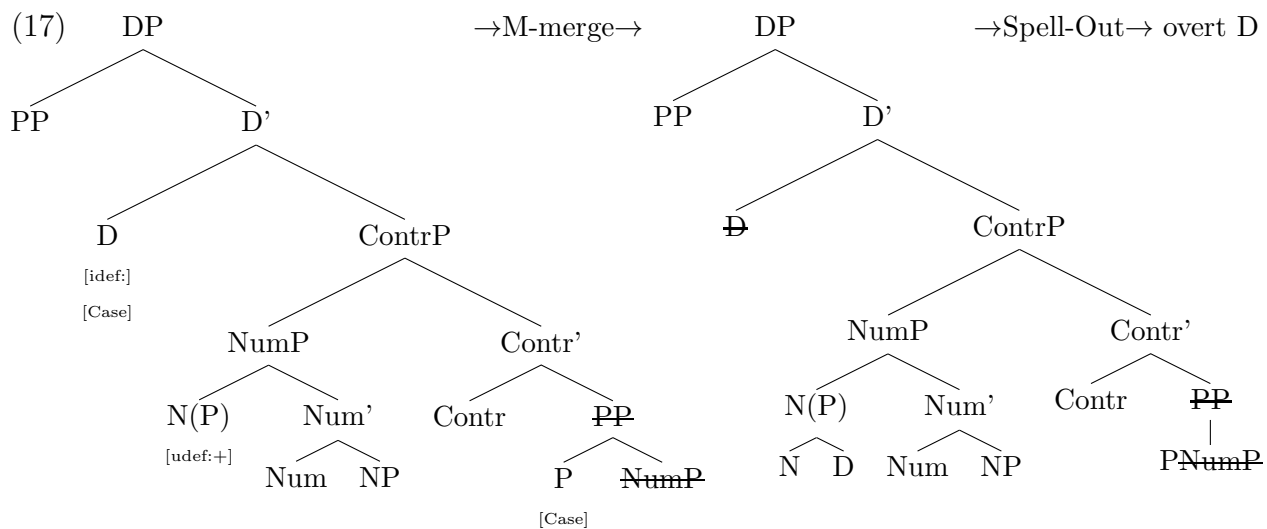
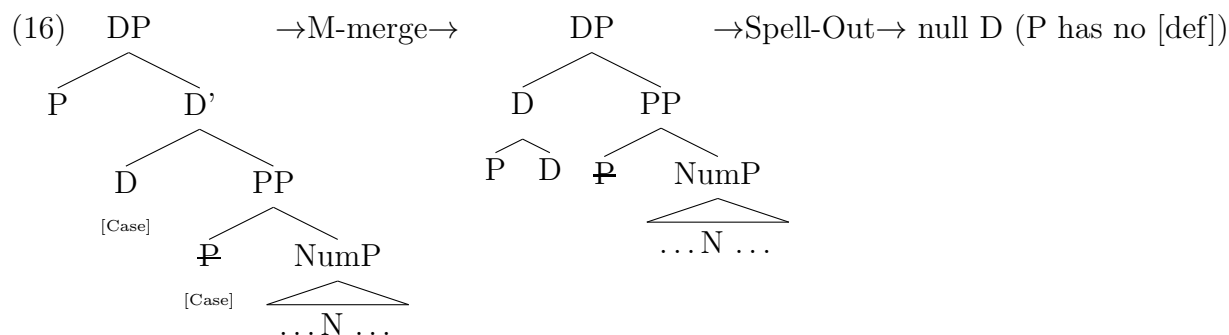
DS & G 2006: definite Ds are subject to a PF rule which lowers the D head to Num. This rule is sensitive to syntactic structure: it attaches a head to the head of its complement.



Just as our m-merge rule in (11), DS & G's 2006 lowering rule is post-syntactic. However, the D lowering rule targets the head of D's complement, while the rule in (11) is based on the linear order of heads at PF. This allows D to m-merge with the head of an XP in the Spec of its complement, for example, rather than strictly with the head of its complement.

3.4 Spell-Out

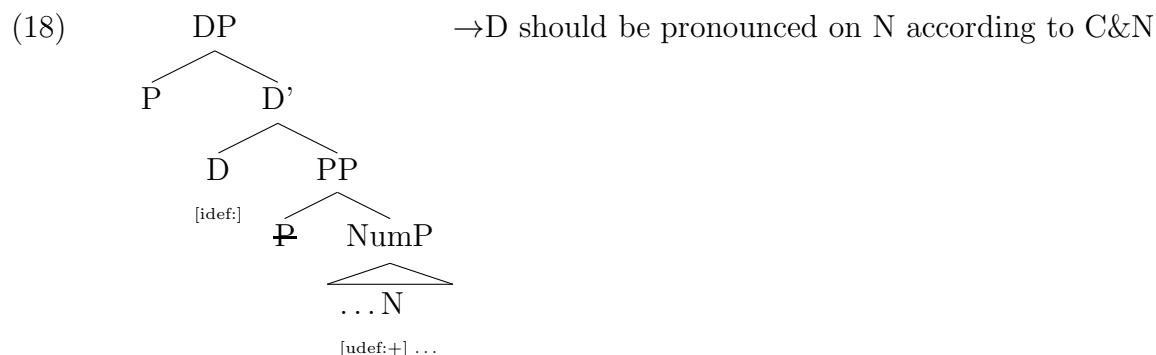
(15) *Spell-Out*: The definite article is spelled out on the head that definite D m-merges with iff that head bears a [def] feature. Otherwise, the definite article is null.



The Spell-Out rule in (15) vs Cornilescu & Nicolae 2011

C&N 2011: the definite article is pronounced on the highest item below D bearing [def]

The differences between our proposal and C&N 2011: m-merge, which is part of our proposal but not of C&N's. What m-merge achieves for our analysis in this paper is the possibility of accounting for the (lack of) spell out of definite articles with objects of Ps.



To sum up: Properties of definite Ds in Eastern Romance:

- Definite D m-merges with the closest head in its c-command domain that it enters an Agree relation with.
- The definite article is spelled out on the head that definite D m-merges with iff that head bears a [def] feature. Otherwise, the definite article is null.

Q1: why are definite Ds null only in prepositional environments?

- P is merged lower than D and higher than N. Thus, P is closer to D than N, and D m-merges with P. Given that P has no [def] feature, the definite article will remain phonologically null.

4 Micro-variation

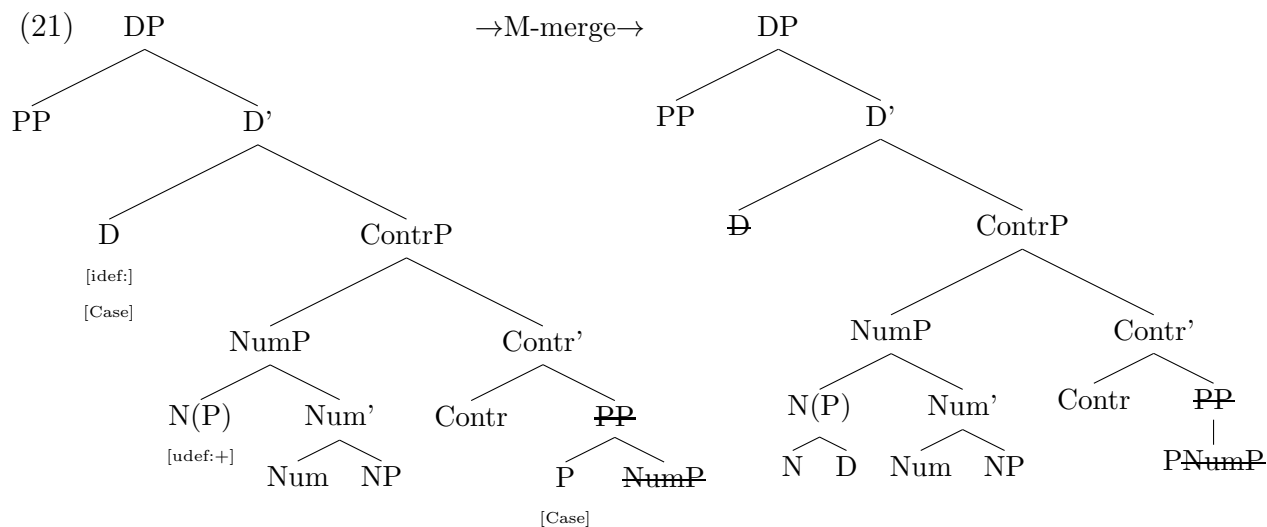
4.1 ER languages in which both null and overt Ds are possible in the context of Ps

(19) (a) *Dusi la preftu acasî* (Arom/Arvantovlaxica, PP 1996:200)
 went to priest at.home
 ‘He went to the priest’s house’

(b) *seara, armasirî la preftulu’* (Arom/Arvantovlaxica, PP 1996:202)
 evening.def, stayed at priest.def
 ‘in the evening, they stayed at the priest’s house.’

- (20) (a) *seara* *rămaseră* *la* ***preot*** (*Rom*)
 evening.def stayed at priest
 ‘in the evening, they stayed at the priest’s house.’
- (b) **seara* *rămaseră* *la* ***preotul*** (*Rom*)
 evening.def stayed at priest.def
 ‘in the evening, they stayed at the priest’s house.’

propose that overtly definite objects of Ps include an additional periphery projection (Contr(ative)P), compared to bare objects of P.



The presence of ContrP allows the heads that D enters Agree with, i.e. P and N, to get reordered: N gets to be closer to D than P, given that the Contr head attracts NumP to its Spec. Hence, D will m-merge with N and will be spelled out on N according to our analysis.

if ContrP is present, then D is overt

4.1.1 Justification for ContrP

items bearing a [c] feature within DP

if a subconstituent within the DP bears an uninterpretable [c] feature, the DP must contain a head with a matching [c] feature in its left periphery, i.e. a Contr head.

the interpretive effect of [c]: the presence of [c]/ContrP correlates with a **uniqueness** interpretation of the whole DP

- Contrast introduces a set of alternatives and a partition within this set between the alternative that is picked and the alternatives that are excluded (Rooth 1992, Krifka 1993, etc.). Contr guarantees ease of identifiability for the referent

- a definite DP containing ContrP is interpreted as referring to an individual/set of individuals that are uniquely identifiable in a discourse situation.
- definite DPs that include ContrP have an overt D, therefore DPs with overt D are interpreted as uniquely identifying their referents

Two theories of definiteness: Uniqueness vs Familiarity

- Under **uniqueness** based theories, definite descriptions are used to refer to things that **can be uniquely identified in a particular context or situation** (Russell 1905, Lewis 1979, Kadmon 1990, Roberts 1993, Gundel et al 1993, etc.).
- **Familiarity** based theories argue that definite descriptions refer to individuals that are in some sense familiar to the discourse participants (Heim 1982, 1983, Green 1989, Roberts 2003, etc.).

uniqueness and familiarity play distinct roles in the analysis of definiteness and thus both theories are needed.

- objects of Ps with an overt definite D uniquely identify their referent
- objects of Ps with a null definite D are interpreted as familiar

what we are NOT claiming: that overtly definite objects of Ps always refer to individuals that have a unique referent in an immediate or general situation (‘the Sultan’ or ‘the sun’) while objects of P headed by null Ds are always anaphorically linked to a previously mentioned DP.

(22) uniquely identifiable referent, overt D

s-nu te-aspari ni di sultan-lu
 SBJ-neg CL.ACC.2sg-fear.2sg neither of sultan.def

‘Don’t be afraid even of the Sultan’ (Arom, Căndroveanu 1977:214)

(23) uniquely identifiable referent, null D

ișeri nafoari [...] la soari.
 got.out.3pl outside [...] at sun

‘they got out in the sun’ (Arom, PP 1996:244)

(24) anaphoric use, null D

Tricu numta, [...] după numtă imna ș-draclu
 passed wedding.def [...] after wedding came also-devil.def

‘The wedding passed. After the wedding the devil came.’ (Arom, PP 1996:26)

(25) anaphoric use, overt D

Duși la cafene, la cafenelu tsi ira Yiani.
 went to coffee.house, at coffee.house.def there was Yiani

‘He went to the coffee house. At the coffee house there was Yiani.’ (Arom, PP 1996:66)

both theories (the uniqueness theory and the familiarity theory) can account for all the uses of the definite article

- there are several ways in which an individual can be familiar: it is typically by being anaphorically linked to an old referent, but an individual can be interpreted as familiar also by being perceptually accessible to the discourse participants, or by being ‘globally familiar in the general culture’ (Roberts 2003:304).
- there are several ways in which an individual is uniquely identifiable: either by being accessible in the immediate or general situation, or by being anaphorically linked to a uniquely identifiable antecedent, i.e. the only referent that was previously introduced in the discourse and which meets the descriptive content of the DP.

what we ARE claiming:

- objects of Ps with overt definite Ds are interpreted as uniquely identifying their referent, whether by being accessible in the immediate or general situation, or by being anaphorically linked to a uniquely identifiable antecedent
- objects of Ps with null definite Ds are interpreted as familiar, either by being anaphorically linked to an old referent, by being perceptually accessible to the discourse participants, or by being ‘globally familiar in the general culture’

This pattern is similar to what has been observed in standard German (Schwartz 2009) where familiarity and uniqueness are expressed by two different forms of the definite article (the strong one and the weak one).

One argument in support of the proposal that overtly definite Ds are correlated with a uniqueness interpretation: objects of Ps that are modified, or contain a complement always have an overt D. Modifiers and complements add properties and restrict the reference of the N and thus increase the identifiability of the referent of the DP.

- (26) *iárna* *nâ dispuneám* *cu óli* *tu lócurli* *cáldi*
 winter.DEF us go.down with sheep.DEF in places.DEF warm
 ‘In the winter, we would take the sheep down, towards the warm places.’
 (Arom, Saramandu 2007:121)

4.2 Romanian

Question (iii): how can we explain the fact that Romanian does not allow overtly definite objects of Ps, in contrast with all the other Eastern Romance languages?

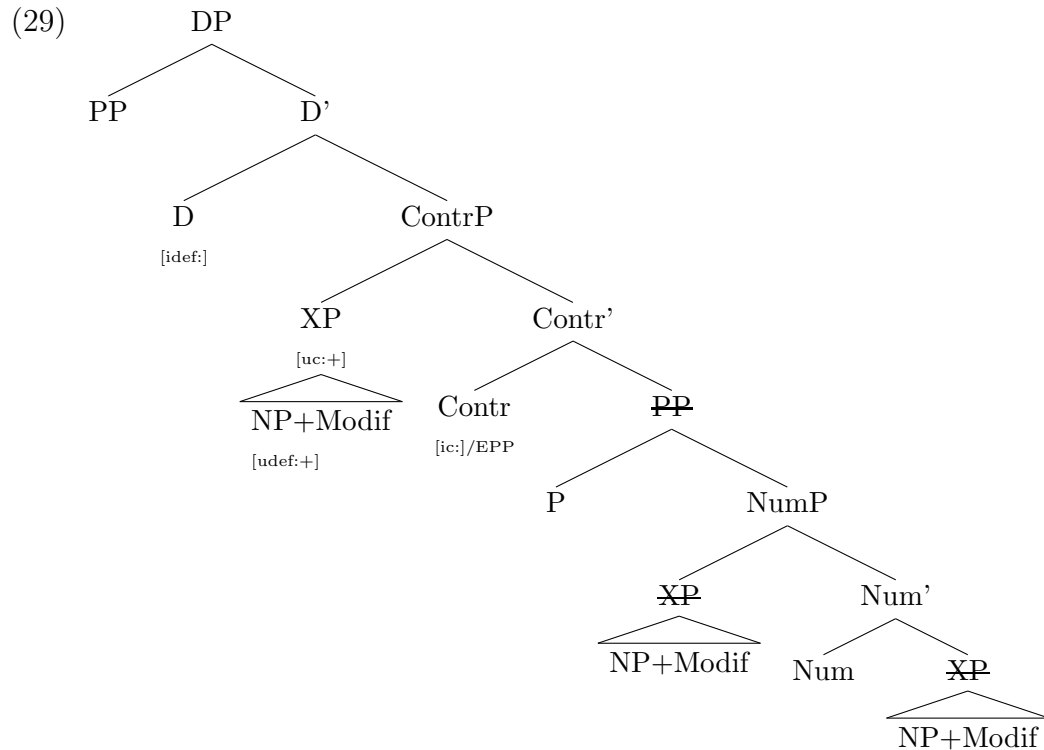
- (27) *Maria se* *uită* *către soare* / **către soare-le*.
 Maria CL.refl looked towards sun / towards sun.def
 ‘Maria looked towards the sun’

- the Num head in Romanian does not bear a [c] feature, hence, there is no ContrP in the DP and the definite D m-merges with P and is null.
- Simple objects of Ps in Romanian are thus interpreted as familiar.

Modified objects of Ps always contain an overt definite D in Romanian, just as in the other ER languages.

- (28) (a) *în centru-l vechi (Rom)*
 in center.def old
 ‘in the old center/town’
- (b) **în centru vechi (Rom)*
 in center old
 ‘in the old center/town’

Objects of Ps that are modified contain a ContrP (which triggers a uniqueness interpretation). However, the head that bears [c] is not Num, but the head of the XP that contains the modifier/complement.



5 Conclusions and consequences.

- (i) null definite D and overtly definite D have the same morpho-syntactic features in ER;
- (ii) the suffixation of the definite D on N in ER is not the result of an Agree relation that D establishes with items within the DP. An Agree based account predicts possible interactions of the realization of the definite article with syntactic domains/ phases/ phase head properties and it opens up the possibility of explaining why in some ER languages D is sometimes hosted by all the potential hosts (multiple Agree)
- (iii) the ‘blocking’ role of P on the overt realization of D was accounted for by the syntax of Ps and by two post-syntactic rules, a morphological m-merge rule and a phonological Spell-out rule. D m-merges with the closest head it Agrees with and D is spelled out overtly on the head that D m-merges with, on condition the latter agrees with D in [def]. Otherwise D is null. When D m-merges with P it remains null because P bears no [def].
- (iv) the fact that in some ER simple objects of Ps can be headed either by an overt D or by a null D is related to the presence of a periphery projection within the DP–ContrP, which is in turn related to the features of Num. If Num bears a [c] feature, ContrP is projected, D m-merges with N and the D is overt; if Num does not bear a [c] feature, no ContrP is projected, D m-merges with P and the D is null. Semantically, overt Ds map into a referent that is uniquely identifiable, whereas covert Ds head DPs that are interpreted as familiar. Thus, ER offers evidence that uniqueness and familiarity play distinct roles in the analysis of definiteness.
- (v) our analysis can explain why D is always overt in the presence of modifiers and N-complements. Modifiers and complements are licensed by functional categories marked as [c]. Hence a ContrP is always present in objects of P that contain modifiers/complements, the D is always overt, and the DP gets a uniqueness interpretation. This is supported by the fact that modifiers and complements render the reference of the DP more easily identifiable.
- (vi) the m-merge rule and the Spell-Out rule yield the correct outcome not only for objects of P, but also for regular DPs which are not objects of P. According to these rules, definite D must always be spelled out on N in regular definite DPs because in the absence of P, D enters Agree with only one item in the DP, i.e. with N, and hence D will be spelled out on N in these cases.

Selected References

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