

More on Specificity and Definiteness in English, Turkish and Persian

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1. CLA Paper

Specific/Nonspecific Indefinite Objects in Turkish and Persian

(1) Turkish

- a. Bugün *bir avukat-ı* gör-üyor-um.
today one lawyer-ACC see-PROG-1SG
'I am seeing a (particular) lawyer today.'
- b. Bugün *bir avukat* gör-üyor-um
today one lawyer see-PROG-1SG
'I am seeing a lawyer today (some lawyer or other).'

(2) Persian

- a. Emruz *ye vakil-(i)-o* mi-bin-am.
today a lawyer-I-RA PROG-see-1SG
'I am seeing a (particular) lawyer today'
- b. Emruz *ye vakil* mi-bin-am.
today a lawyer PROG-see-1SG
'I am seeing a lawyer today (some lawyer or other)'

All Definite NPs (even Attributives) are Specific in Turkish and Persian

- **Turkish**

(3) *katil-*(i)* bul-malı -yız
murderer-ACC find-MOD-1PL
'We must find *the murderer* (whoever it is).'

- **Persian**

(4) bayad *qatel-(a)-*(ro)* peyda ko-nim
must murderer-E-RA find do-1PL
'We must find *the murderer* (whoever it is).'

2. The Givenness Hierarchy

Givenness Hierarchy (GHZ 1993): Definiteness entails Specificity

FOC > ACT > FAM > UID > REF > TID
it this/that/this N that N the N indefinite this N a N

- **Type identifiable:** H can associate a type representation with the dog.
(5) I couldn't sleep last night. *A dog* kept me awake.
- **Referential (specific):** H can associate a unique representation with the dog by the time the S has been processed.
(6) I couldn't sleep last night. *This dog next door* kept me awake.
- **Uniquely identifiable:** H can associate a unique representation with the dog by the time the NP has been processed.
(7) I couldn't sleep last night. *The dog next door* kept me awake.
- **Familiar:** H can associate a unique representation with the dog from memory
(8) I couldn't sleep last night. *That dog next door* kept me awake.

Indefinites can have higher statuses

- (9) Look. *A man* is hitting *a dog*./ The man is hitting *a dog*./ *A man* is hitting that dog./ That man is hitting *a dog*. [Gundel et al. 2007]
- (10) I met a student before class. *A student* came to see me after class as well--in fact it was the same student I had seen before. [Hawkins 1991]
- **Heim's novelty condition is a conversational implicature (Q1).**
 - Maxim of Quantity (Grice 1975)
 - Q1: make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange).

Definites do not have to be familiar

- Maxim of Quantity (Grice 1975)
 - Q2: Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.
- **Familiarity is a conversational implicature of definite phrases (Q2).**

(11) *The new curling center at MSU*, which you probably haven't heard of, is the first of its kind. [Abbott 2008]

3. Persian has a Familiarity Marker

Persian: -E is a Marker of Familiar NPs,
Whereas -I is Typically used for
Nonfamiliar NPs:

- (12) *pesar-(a)-ro* did-am.
boy-E-RA saw-1SG
'I saw the boy.' (familiar to hearer)
- (13) *ye pesar-(i)-ro* did-am
a-boy-I-RA saw-1SG
'I saw a boy.' (unfamiliar to hearer)

Persian -I also marks an upcoming relative clause, and can be replaced by -E in familiar contexts

- -E as well as -I can mark a familiar complex NP:

(14) *(un) ketâb-i/a-ro ke bâham tu chapterz did-im* xarid-am
that book-I/E-RA COMP together at Chapters saw-1PL bought-1SG
'I bought that/the book that we saw together at Chapters.'

- Only -I can mark an unfamiliar complex NP:

(15) *ye ketab-i/*a-ro ke tu chapterz did-am* xarid-am
a book-I/E-RA that at Chapters saw-ISG bought-ISG
'I bought a book that I saw at Chapters.'

Persian -E has demonstrative function

- [Speaker and hearer are watching a group of presidents of various countries answering questions on television. Speaker says the following to the hearer.]
- Persian
(16) *Reisjomhur-a-ro* negâ! Be-nazar nârâhat mi-a-d.
president-E-RA look to-appearance upset PROG-come-3SG
'Look at that president! He looks upset.'

4. Definites do not Need to be Familiar

Unfamiliar Definites

- Turkish

(17) *komşu-m-a* *ait* *ol-an* *köpek* *ben-i* *uyu-t-ma-dı*.
neighbor-1SG-DAT belong be-NMN dog I-ACC sleep-CAUS-NEG-PAST
'The dog (FAM/UNFAM) that belongs to my neighbor kept me awake.'

- Persian

(18) *sag-i/*e* *ke* *maal-e* *hamsay-am-e* *man-o*
dog-I/*E REL belonging-EZ neighbor-POSS:1SG-BE:3SG PRO:1SG-RA
bidar *negah* *daasht*.
awake keep held:3SG
'The dog (UNFAM) that belongs to my neighbor kept me awake'

Unfamiliar Definites: Superlatives

- Turkish (Görgülü 2009)
(19) okutman *bul-abil-diği en zor alıştırma-ı* ver-di
instructor find-MOD-NMN most hard exercise-ACC give-PAST
- Persian
(20) ostad *saxt-tarin tamrin-(i)-(ro) ke tun-est*
instructor difficult-SUP exercise-I-RA REL can-PAST-3SG
peyda kon-e daad.
find do-3SG give:PAST-3SG
- 'The instructor assigned *the most difficult exercise he could find*.

Unfamiliar Definites: Ordinals

- Turkish (Görgülü 2009)

(21) Cem *ilk gör-düğü araba-yı* beğen-di

John first see-NMN car-ACC like-PAST

- Persian

(22) Jân *avval-in mâshin-(i)-ro ke did* kosh-esh umad

John first-DEF car-I/E-RA that saw good-3SG came

'John liked *the first car that he saw*.'

4. Specific Determiners in Salish

Deictic D-determiners in Salish

- Salish languages have a set of articles that encode deictic distinctions but that can introduce new entities as well as refer to familiar entities.
- They have been well described in Matthewson 1999 (St'át'imcets) as well as Gillon 2006 (Skwxwú7mesh), who calls them “deictic D-determiners.”

(23) Chen-t wa í-7imesh. Chen kw'ách-nexw *ta mixelh*.

Isg.s-pst impf redup-walk 1sg.s look-tr(lc) det bear

‘I was walking. I saw a bear.’

Ta mixelh na mi ch'ich'áy-s-t-ts-as

det bear rl come redup-follow-cause-tr-1sg.o-3erg

‘The bear followed me.’ [Gillon, p. 83]

Salish deictic D-determiners seem to fit onto the Givenness Hierarchy under REF, i.e. Specific.

- Can be used for all cognitive statuses at least referential:

| | FOC | ACT | FAM | UID | REF | TID |
|-----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| Sechelt <i>te</i> N | 4 | 5 | 6 | 2 | 7 | |
| English <i>the</i> N | 30 | 95 | 47 | 108 | | |
| Chinese \emptyset N | 12 | 17 | 14 | 49 | 2 | 10 |

(Sechelt data from Ronald Beaumont. 1985. “The Beaver” story; English and Mandarin data from GHZ’s 1993 corpus studies.)

- Q2 at work in all three languages:
 - Don’t give more information about cognitive status than necessary.

5. Ways of Defining Specificity Formally

Formal semantic theory of deictic D-determiners in Skwxwu7mesh (Gillon 2006): Domain Restriction

- $[[ta]] = \lambda P f(\lambda x [P(x) \wedge C(x)])$
 - The determiner combines with an NP predicate P, which is intersected with a contextual set C that serves to restrict the domain of the model down to just those entities that are relevant in the context.

Formal semantic theory of deictic D-determiners in Skwxwumesh (Gillon 2006):
Choice Functions

- $[[\text{ta mi}\underline{x}\text{alh}]] = \mathbf{f}(\lambda x[\text{bear}'(x) \wedge C(x)])$
 - The choice function f picks out a particular referent for the DP from the set of contextually relevant bears.
 - Choice function analyses have been posited by Matthewson 1999 for St'át'imcets, and Kelepir 2001 for Turkish accusatives.

Choice functions and scope

- Chen kw'ách-nexw ta mixalh.
1sg.s look-tr(lc) det bear
'I saw a bear.'

- $\exists f$ [SPEAKER(c) saw $f(\lambda x[\text{bear}'(x) \wedge C(x)])$]

- Existentially binding the choice function variable at the top of the sentence or leaving it a free variable can explain why specific DPs can escape islands and tend to take maximally wide scope.
- Free choice-function variables (Kratzer 1998) would seem to be a good way to capture the notion that in using a specific DP, the speaker “has a particular entity in mind”.

6. Specificity is not “Having a Particular Entity in Mind”

Truth value judgments do not depend upon the identity of the entity satisfying a specific NP

- St'át'imcets (Matthewson 1999)

- Context: Rose goes to the store and asks the salesperson for a copy of the book *False Crow*. The salesperson gives her a book in a bag, and Rose pays for it. When she gets home, she tells her daughter:

(24) tecwp-kán **ta púkw-a**
buy-1SG.SUBJ DET book-DET
'I bought a book.'

When uttering (24), Rose thinks that the book she bought was *False Crow*. But when she opens the bag, she finds out that the salesperson made a mistake and she really bought a book by Ray Kinsella, not *False Crow*.

Was her statement in (24) wrong?

Consultant's comment: "No. I did buy a book. I paid for it."

- Turkish: (Enç 1991)

(25) Ali ***bir piyano-yu*** kiralamak istiyor

Ali one piano-ACC to-rent wants

‘Ali wants to rent a certain piano’

“Suppose that (25) is uttered in a context where it has been established that Ali has decided to take home two of the pianos in a showroom. He decides that he can afford to buy one and rent the second. He does not care which one he buys or which ones he rents. In those circumstances (25) could still be true.”

De Dicto Specifics

- As soon as the NP is restricted by ‘in his class’, specificity marking in Turkish and Persian is obligatory, whether or not John “has a particular girl in mind”, i.e. cares which girl.
- Turkish de dicto specifics:

(26) a. John **bir kız** öp-mek isti-yor

John one girl kiss-INF work-PROG

‘John wants to kiss a girl’ (de dicto)

b. John **bir kız-ı** öp-mek isti-yor

John one girl-ACC kiss-INF work-PROG

‘John wants to kiss a girl’ (de re)

(27) John **sınıf-ın-da bir kız-*(ı)** öp-mek isti-yor

John class-GEN-LOC one girl-ACC kiss-INF work-PROG

‘John wants to kiss a girl in his class’ (de re/de dicto)

- Persian de dicto specifics:

(28) a. Jân mixâd *ye doxtar* be-bus-e.

john wants a girl SUB-kiss-3SG
'John wants to kiss a girl.' (de dicto)

b. Jân mixâd *ye doxtar-o* be-bus-e

john wants a girl-RA SUB-kiss-3SG
'John wants to kiss a girl.' (de re)

(29) a. Jân mixâd *ye doxtar-i-o az kelâs-esh* be-bus-e

john wants a girl-I-RA from class-POSS:3SG SUB-kiss-3SG
'John wants to kiss a girl in his class.' (de re, de dicto)

b. Jân mixâd *ye doxtar-i az kelâs-esh-o* be-bus-e

john wants a girl-I from class-POSS:3SG-RA SUB-kiss-3SG
'John wants to kiss a girl in his class.' (de re [preferred], de dicto)

- **Specificity seems to have to do essentially with domain restriction.**

8. Defining Definiteness Formally

Uniqueness rather than familiarity theories: e.g. Gillon 2006

- Definite article: domain restriction + assertion of uniqueness
- $[[\text{the}]] = \lambda P \max(\lambda x [P(x) \wedge C(x)])$

9. Conclusion: Relating Specificity to Definiteness in Terms of the Givenness Hierarchy

How to Relate Gillon's 2006 theory to the Givenness Hierarchy

- Formal definitions of cognitive statuses
 - REF: Domain restriction (+ choice function)
 - UID: Domain restriction + Assertion of uniqueness
- Skwxwu7mesh and St'át'imcets deictic D-determiners align under REF.
- English indefinite *this* aligns under REF, definite article *the* aligns under UID, determiner *that* aligns under FAM.
- Turkish ACC aligns under REF.
- Persian -RA aligns under REF, -I aligns under REF or TID, -E aligns under FAM.

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Acknowledgements

- SSHRC Grant # 410-2007-0345 to Nancy Hedberg and Juan M. Sosa.
- Donna Gerdts, for drawing our attention to Carrie Gillon's dissertation.