

## **THE ASYMMETRIES BETWEEN THE DEFINITE ARTICLE AND DEMONSTRATIVES: A PROCEDURAL ACCOUNT**

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There is a well known tradition in the literature on definite Determiner Phrases (DPs) that concentrates on the asymmetries in the distribution and the anaphoric properties of determiners such as articles and demonstratives. A huge amount of work on the topic has been done on French by linguists like Kleiber, Corblin, Marandin, Maes, Apothéloz, Reichler-Béguelin or De Mulder, and on English by Hawkins, Cornish or Gundel. I will rely essentially on this research tradition, as well as on some version of Accessibility Theory (Ariel (1990), Gundel et al. (1993)).

The aim of my talk is to show that the same semantic notions we invoke to explain the deictic and discourse anaphoric properties of definite DPs are enough to account for the constraints on the distribution of determiners and noun modifiers inside DPs. In this way, a unified account can be provided for the asymmetries between definite articles and demonstratives both inside DPs and in the discourse domain.

1. My **basic assumptions** are the following:

- The semantics of definite determiners is procedural. In Relevance-theoretic terms, determiners impose constraints on explicatures (explicitly communicated propositions): they guide the search for the intended referent, thus constraining the inferential phase of comprehension (Wilson & Sperber 1993:21). In other words, they encode a set of mental processing instructions. This procedural content establishes the role that the conceptual content, or descriptive content, of the noun and its modifiers may have in the interpretation of the DP.
- Definiteness, in its basic and simplest form, is unique identifiability, as Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski (1993), among many others, assume. Definiteness is thus a form of accessibility marking.
  - \* The **definite article** counts as an indication to access a mental representation of the intended referent that is supposed to be uniquely identifiable for the hearer.
  - \* **Demonstratives** are definite determiners and, as such, they encode definiteness, but they crucially differ from articles and pronouns in introducing a more restrictive procedure in the search for the intended referent. There have been several proposals to characterize such a procedure: it has been claimed that demonstratives are used for referents already established in the linguistic or situational context, or that demonstratives must be directly connected to the speech situation (Kleiber), or that they indicate that the referent is familiar or activated for the hearer (Gundel et al.), or that they require their referents to be associated to certain contextual indices (Mulder). I do not intend to offer a

comparative analysis of these proposals. All of them include a common idea: a demonstrative requires the hearer to search for the intended referent relying on some link to the deictic centre, and this is enough to distinguish demonstratives from definite articles, given that articles do not encode any deictic feature. This implies that the constraints imposed by demonstratives on referent identification are stronger, or more specific, than those imposed by the definite article: in fact, the referent must not only be uniquely identifiable, but also contextually familiar or activated (in Gundel, Hedberg and Zacharski's version, which represents the point of view I will adopt).

- Pronouns are determiners (Abney (1987)). Both articles and (third person) pronouns have the same semantics—definiteness as unique identifiability—and they also belong to the same syntactic category. If pronouns and definite descriptions occupy different positions in accessibility scales, this is only due to the presence of descriptive material following articles and its absence with pronouns, but not to a difference in word class. Thus demonstrative pronouns are determiners as well.

2. Given this set of assumptions, we can explore a proposal that has already been widely discussed, at least in the French linguistic tradition in the work of Kleiber, Corblin, Maes, Apothéloz or De Mulder: the idea that the descriptive content of a demonstrative DP, contrary to what occurs in the case of definite descriptions, is not restrictive, nor does it play an essential role in the identification of the intended referent.

As the definite determiner instructs the hearer about exactly what kind of contribution the descriptive content of the phrase is to make in the interpretation process, it is not surprising that the contribution made by articles is different from that of demonstratives. In definite DPs, the descriptive content (excluding purely explicative modifiers) is essential to satisfy the requirement of uniqueness imposed by the definite article: it plays a decisive role in the task of identification, because the article itself does not offer any indication about the source of the information that is needed in order to access an adequate mental representation of the referent. In demonstrative DPs, on the other hand, since the procedure encoded by the determiner directs the search for a referent towards activated or familiar entities (in any case, contextually accessible entities), the burden of the need to satisfy uniqueness is not dependent on descriptive content anymore, but on contextual information. In other words, the semantics of demonstratives instructs the hearer to verify uniqueness and identify the intended referent by accessing certain contextual indices, so that the descriptive content of the DP is no longer crucial for identification purposes. Articles and demonstratives therefore activate different procedures for context selection and for the satisfaction of the uniqueness requirement. The crucial difference between articles and demonstratives lies in the way they orient the hearer towards the selection of the context.

As claimed by Ducrot, Corblin, Kleiber and Maes, among others, the role of descriptive content in demonstrative DPs is not really to restrict the range of possible referents, but to “(re)classify” it and to give rise to a number of effects: it describes the referent from a different point of view, maybe quoting words by someone else, introduces new descriptive features, or adds evaluative information (in any case, information that is not relevant for unique identifiability). Some interesting syntactic versions of this hypothesis can

be found in Lyons (1975), Kleiber (1984) and Van Valin & LaPolla (1997), where demonstrative DPs are treated as a particular kind of appositive structures.

In what follows, I want to review some consequences of this proposal for the discourse domain and then extend it to cover certain phenomena that take place inside DPs. I will assume that the procedural distinction between articles and demonstratives is basic as an indication that there are only two types of definite determiners: deictic definites (demonstratives) and non-deictic definites (articles) (see Lyons 1999: 163 for a proposal along these lines). Such a distinction, plus the Principle of Relevance, is all we need to derive the facts about anaphoric relations that accessibility scales try to represent.

3. Now it is time to present **some data** that can illustrate the explanatory power of the preceding observations. First let's have a look at some **discourse-level phenomena**, most of them well described in the literature on demonstratives and anaphora. The examples are from Spanish, and the demonstratives are always the proximity forms *este* and *ese*, but not the distance form *aquel*, which shares most of its uses with the definite article and does not give rise to noticeable differences.

### **Associative anaphora**

As pointed out by Gundel et al. (1993:282), among many others, the difficulty in obtaining associative anaphora readings with demonstratives is due to the fact that referents of associative anaphors (or inferrables) are at most uniquely identifiable, but not familiar or activated. The contrast between article and demonstratives is illustrated in 1):

1) *Es una historia increíble. No quiero contarte el final / ??Es una historia increíble. No quiero contarte este final*

“It is an incredible story. I don't want to tell you {the / ??this} end”

The problem originates in the fact that demonstratives orient the search procedure towards the deictic centre, thus disallowing access to the link between the inferrable and its associated discourse entity. Associative anaphora is not actually impossible with demonstratives, as shown in Gundel et al. (1993) and Apothéloz & Reichler-Béguelin (1999), but this is not the natural way to construe it, due to the risk of increasing processing effort with no corresponding communicative effects.

### **First mention definite DPs**

With a semantic distinction between articles and demonstratives like the one sketched above, we wouldn't expect to have first mention demonstrative DPs (unless they are deictic). First mention uses are very common in definite DPs, given that the article does not require a familiar or activated referent, and that the descriptive content is enough to satisfy uniqueness; but notice that the same descriptive content is unable to license a first mention demonstrative, as shown in 2), because the demonstrative imposes a different way to fulfill the uniqueness condition inherent in definiteness (in this case, a deictic or anaphoric reading).

2) *No conocemos el resultado de las elecciones / ??No conocemos ese resultado de las elecciones*

“We don't know the results of the elections” / ??“We don't know those results of the elections”

The only way to get first mention demonstrative DPs (with descriptive content and distance forms) is to present an entity as if it were familiar for the addressee, strategically appealing to shared experience, even if the referent is not known, as in 3). This use of demonstrative descriptions is quite common, and it is not incompatible with my previous assumptions.

- 3) *Era una de esas noches que animan a pasear*  
“It was one of those nights that make one feel like going for a walk”

### **Non-identifying information in anaphora**

A natural prediction of the main hypothesis I am adopting is the felicity of demonstrative DPs with discourse-new (non-identifying) descriptive content in environments where the insertion of a definite article is unnatural. As indicated by the examples, a demonstrative is chosen when the descriptive content would not ensure the adequate selection of the discourse antecedent if preceded by the article:

- 4) *El velociraptor observa con atención. {??El / Este} asesino de cinco metros...*  
“The velociraptor stares attentively. {The / This} five-meter-long murderer...”
- 5) *El ganador del premio es Ángel Martínez, de Salamanca. {??El / Este} empleado de banca de cuarenta años...*  
“The winner of the prize is Ángel Martínez, from Salamanca. {The / This} forty year old bank employeee...”

This explains why it has often been said that the descriptive content in a definite DP has to be “presupposed” in some sense, i.e. it must given or familiar, while there is no constraint of this kind on the use of demonstratives.

### **Context change**

Another observation that one can find in the literature on anaphora is the claim that demonstratives are context changing devices, in the sense that they are typically used to change the perspective or the frame for interpretation, locating entities that are not the most salient or accessible discourse topics, and giving raise to discontinuity effects in referential coherence. Gundel and Mulkern (1998:26) illustrate the kind of focus shift associated to demonstratives with example 6):

- 6) *...going on back from the kitchen then is a little hallway leading to a window, and across from the kitchen is a big walk-through closet. On the other side of **that** is another little hallway leading to a window...*

According to Gundel and Mulkern, “the demonstrative *that* is most naturally interpreted as referring to the closet rather than the entity currently in focus, the kitchen. If *that* were replaced by *it*, on the other hand, the kitchen would be the only possible referent”. The demonstrative pronoun, thus, implicates a focus shift, and again we find the opposite behaviour in pure definiteness markers (non-deictic elements like the definite article or the pronoun *it*). Demonstratives seem to indicate that the search for the intended referent will be costlier than it would be if the determiner were non-deictic, because the hearer will be compelled to deviate from default contextual information and pay attention to some relevant situational indices. As De Mulder (1997) puts it, this means that in a certain sense the procedure encoded by demonstratives resets the context. Focus shift phenomena are the

result of such a resetting of the context, which is ultimately an effect of the procedural semantics of demonstratives and the basic distinction between two types of definiteness.

4. All the phenomena I have discussed until now involve the forms and interpretations that definite and demonstrative DPs exhibit in discourse. Now let's consider the **internal structure** or the **syntax** of DPs. The examples include a variety of distributional differences between articles and demonstratives within the structure of the DP. Again we find consistent asymmetries between articles and demonstratives, and we can account for them with the same notions already exploited in the preceding section.

### **Evaluative modifiers**

One of the predictions that can be derived from the basic hypothesis on the role of descriptive content is that non-identifying or non-uniqueness-inducing modifiers will give rise to anomalous DPs when preceded by the definite article, while demonstratives will be perfectly natural with this kind of modifiers. The examples in 7) show that the prediction is in fact borne out.

- 7a) *?la película malísima / ?el espectáculo magnífico / ?el libro excelente*  
“the awful film” / “the magnificent show” / “the excellent book”
- b) *esa película malísima / este espectáculo magnífico / ese libro excelente*  
“that awful film” / “this magnificent show” / “that excellent book”

Due to their evaluative nature, adjectives like *malísimo*, *magnífico* and *excelente* are unable to provide a criterion to isolate the intended referent, so the descriptive content in the examples in 7a) cannot be understood as restrictive or identifying. But with the definite article the descriptive content has to play a crucial role in the satisfaction of uniqueness, as already mentioned. Hence, the resulting DPs sound odd. On the contrary, the demonstrative DPs in 7b), containing the same adjectival modifiers, are perfectly natural, as one should expect if the descriptive content is no longer essential to guarantee uniqueness in this case.

Notice that the oddness in 7a) disappears when the modifiers are prenominal as in 8a), because prenominal adjectives are interpreted as appositive or non-restrictive in Spanish. The same happens in 8b), as a consequence of the insertion of an additional restrictive modifier (a relative clause) that satisfies the requirements imposed by the definite article:

- 8a) *la malísima película / el magnífico espectáculo / el excelente libro*
- b) *el espectáculo magnífico que ofrecieron los bailarines de la Compañía Nacional*  
“the magnificent show that the National Company dancers offered”

### **Superlatives and uniqueness-inducing modifiers**

Some kind of asymmetry between articles and demonstratives is to be expected as well with typical uniqueness-inducing modifiers, as the mirror image of the first prediction mentioned. Maybe the clearest manifestation of the divergent behaviour of the two types of definites in this case is to be found with superlatives, as shown in 9).

- 9) *el hombre más sabio del pueblo / \*ese hombre más sabio del pueblo*  
“the wisest man in the village” / “that wisest man in the village”

It is a well known fact that superlative DPs are possible only with the definite article, and not with demonstratives. As observed by Hawkins (1978), the superlative construction

is one of the strongest uniqueness indicators: in 9), for instance, there is only one man who can be the wisest man in the village. Hence, in superlative DPs it is the descriptive content that is responsible for uniqueness, and the article has to be inserted obligatorily. But this is also the reason why demonstratives cannot appear in superlative constructions: recall that they give rise to a non-identifying, non purely restrictive reading for the descriptive content, as it is the contextual or situational indices that must provide a justification for uniqueness. I am claiming that the source of the ungrammaticality of *\*ese hombre más sabio del pueblo* is essentially the clash between two different ways to satisfy uniqueness. This account relies, obviously, on the procedural characterization of definite determiners I am assuming here.

One might wonder why other types of uniqueness-inducing modifiers, like restrictive appositions, do not produce the same kind of strong ungrammaticality as superlatives. In fact, the restrictive modifiers we find in the examples in 10) are not odd with demonstratives: the interpretation of the DP simply differs from the one we obtain with the definite article (the crucial point is that again the modifiers are not the source of uniqueness when there is a demonstrative). I think that the acceptability of the examples is simply due to the fact that these modifiers are still compatible with the deictic or anaphoric readings triggered by demonstratives, while superlatives reject them and require the definite article as a purely formal definiteness marker.

- 10a) *la letra H / esta letra H*  
 “the letter H” / “this letter H”
- b) *la ciudad de Salamanca / esta ciudad de Salamanca*  
 “the city of Salamanca” / “this city of Salamanca”
- c) *el hecho de que llueva / este hecho de que llueva*  
 “the fact that it is raining” / “this fact that it is raining”

When the modifiers are preceded by some degree quantifier (as in comparative constructions), we find the opposite pattern, as expected: definite DPs are odd because the modifiers do not contribute efficiently to referent identification, but demonstrative DPs are acceptable. The explanation is the same we relied on in 7).

- 11a) *?el hombre más sabio que su hijo / este hombre más sabio que su hijo*  
 “the man wiser than his son” / “this man wiser than his son”
- b) *??el hombre tan sabio / ese hombre tan sabio*  
 “the man so wise” / “that man so wise”
- c) *?el viaje {muy / bastante / demasiado} peligroso / ese viaje {muy / bastante / demasiado} peligroso*  
 “the {very / quite / too}dangerous journey” / “that {very / quite / too}dangerous journey”

### “Quantified clauses”

The Spanish definite article can be used as a quantifier in certain emphatic constructions, so-called “quantified clauses”, illustrated in 12) and 13); in these cases definite DPs lose most of their referential and anaphoric properties, as can be appreciated in the English glosses.

- 12) *Me pregunto la cara que pondrá / \*Me pregunto esta cara que pondrá*  
 “I wonder what face he will put on” / “I wonder this face he will put on”
- 13) *No sabes lo que le gustan los gnocchi / \*No sabes eso que le gustan los gnocchi*  
 “You don’t know how much s/he likes gnocchi” / “You don’t know this much he likes

gnocchi”

Demonstratives are absolutely ruled out in “quantified clauses”, and again this is an effect of the two different kinds of definiteness we have distinguished: the definite article represents pure definiteness without deictic features, which allows even quantified readings like the ones in 12) and 13), as well as bound variable readings, while demonstratives represent the deictic version of definiteness, the one where uniqueness is dependent on some link to the deictic centre. This situational anchoring of demonstratives guides the search for activated or familiar referents, thus blocking the possibility of having a quantified or non-referential reading.

### **Non-referential readings**

Another consequence of the restrictive procedure that demonstratives introduce is the absence of non-referential readings (i.e. non-specific or predicative readings), as noted by Hawkins (1978). The examples in 14) and 15) show the relevant asymmetries in non-specific DPs with subjunctive relative clauses and non-referential DPs with a Negative Quantifier inside, respectively:

- 14) *Te contaré el cuento que tú elijas* / \**Te contaré ese cuento que tú elijas*  
“I will tell you the story that you choose” / “I will tell you that story that you choose”
- 15) *No me enseñaron la foto de ningún sospechoso* / \**No me enseñaron esta foto de ningún sospechoso*  
“I was not shown the photo of any suspect” / “I was not shown this photo of any suspect”

Definite DPs may be assigned non-referential readings because the uniqueness requirement encoded by the article does not preclude the hearer’s access to the mental representation of a hypothetical or non-existent entity. Demonstratives, on the contrary, are incompatible with any indication of non-specificity or non-referentiality in the descriptive content (for instance, subjunctive relative clauses or negative polarity items as in 14) and 15)) because that would be inconsistent with their deictic features. The basis for the explanation is the same I resort to in the preceding cases.

5. I have tried to show how an adequate characterization of the linguistic meaning of definite determiners as procedural content allows us to give a unified account of all the asymmetries between articles and demonstratives both inside DPs and in the discourse domain, both when the use reflects the available contextual information and when the use “creates” the context introducing new implicit assumptions or producing accommodation processes. On one hand, this approach offers an explanation for facts that at first sight appear to be purely “syntactic”, but happen to be simple consequences of the semantics of determiners. On the other hand, it provides us with criteria that may be of some help when trying to determine the extent to which a demonstrative has become a definite article in its grammaticalization process. Finally, another welcome result of adopting this perspective is that it sheds light on a particular issue in the organization of accessibility scales like Ariel’s or Gundel et al.’s: the position of both demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative descriptions between pronouns and definite descriptions, as a sort of middle accessibility markers. I think that the approach I have sketched allows us to explain why the hierarchies are the way they are, at least with respect to demonstrative expressions. If the role of descriptive content is

far less decisive with deictic definiteness than with “pure” definiteness, we should expect that its presence does not strongly modify the anaphoric properties of the DP in the case of demonstratives, but we would expect just the opposite situation with articles/pronouns; in fact that is what accessibility hierarchies show, with pronouns on one end of the scale and definite descriptions on the opposite end, due to the crucial effect of the descriptive content on accessibility marking. Demonstrative pronouns and descriptions, on the contrary, are adjacent.

What is at stake here is the possibility to motivate accessibility hierarchies and reduce them to the interaction of two basic ingredients: the procedural semantics of definite determiners, and general pragmatic mechanisms. The scales should not be considered as primitives of a theory of anaphora resolution, then, but simply as statistical generalizations derived from the interaction of linguistic semantics and inferential processes. Far from being the explanatory principles for anaphoric relations, they need to be explained in terms of simpler and more fundamental notions. But this is a topic I will not be able to address here...

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