

Crosslinguistic Notions of (In)definiteness *

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Abstract

We argue that both Russellian and Heimian definites exist in natural languages. Our account captures both the commonality and difference between the two. Further, we suggest that the Russellian/Heimian distinction extends to indefinites too.

1 Introduction

One morning, Alice tells (1) to her husband, John, who doesn't read newspapers. Her use of *the president* is dependent on the uniqueness of president in the fixed domain she is talking about (i.e. the U.S. politics situation). Let's call it a *Russellian domain* (R-domain) and such a use of definite description *Russellian definiteness* (R-definiteness).

(1) Hey John, the president resigned!!

In the evening John describes a scene he saw in the afternoon with (2). Clearly, the described scene contains at least two dogs, thus the uniqueness of dogs on which his use of *the dog* is dependent is not w.r.t. the scene as a whole, but rather w.r.t. a domain dynamically constructed by his first sentence. Let's call such a domain a *Heimian domain* (H-domain) and such a use of definite description *Heimian definiteness* (H-definiteness).

(2) I found a dog on the lawn. The dog was biting another dog.....

An R-domain r is something out there, not necessarily within our comprehension in its totality. An H-domain h is the part of such an r which is known, or already familiar, to the conversation participants, which grows as the conversation proceeds. Then, assuming the lattice-theoretic ontology of [1], we say the denotation of a definite description is $\max(d, p)$, where \max is a function that maps an R- or H-domain d and a property p to the maximal individual which has p in d ; the uniqueness, then, follows from the singular morphology of the NP.

The Russellian/Heimian distinction (hereafter, the R/H distinction) is a result of the choice of the domain (cf. [2]). Regarding such domains as

resource situations in the situation semantic sense, we argue for the significance of the R/H distinction for English and other languages.

2 Inclusiveness

H-definiteness is named after [3], which reduces definiteness to familiarity. We formulate familiarity in terms of domains (situations), while [3] formulates it in terms of individuals (*file cards*). Here, [4]'s *inclusiveness* analysis is formulated as the maximality function *max*. For example, in (3), *the boys* refers to the three boys the speaker met.

(3) I met two boys at 10:00. I met another at 11:00. The boys were.....

This is only natural, since the H-domain contains three boys when *the boys* is uttered.¹

3 Accommodation

Cases like (1) could offer a problem for reduction of definiteness to familiarity, since the president wasn't introduced explicitly in the discourse beforehand; hence [3]'s appeal to *accommodation*. However, we want to have some characterization of when accommodation is or isn't possible.

In our view, "accommodated" definites are simply R-definites. (1) is a case in point; John knows that there is only one president in the U.S., so he only has to identify the R-domain (the U.S. politics situation). In contrast, in (2), it isn't part of Alice's knowledge that the H-domain (the witnessed scene), or some other R-domain, contains a unique dog, hence the oddity of starting with (2').

(2') I found the dog.....

The two kinds of definiteness can interact (*associative use*). In (4), the first sentence constructs an H-domain, which contains a car *x*. It is part of common knowledge that a car has a unique fence, so it is known that *x* has a unique fence in its car situation, which is an R-domain (cf. [5]). This is why *its fence* is felicitous. In contrast, if *x* wasn't initially introduced in the Heimian way, we wouldn't have no clue as to which car's *car situation* is used as resource; hence, starting the conversation with the second sentence of (4) is infelicitous.

(4) I saw a car. Its fence was.....

4 Crosslinguistic ranges of definiteness

While *that president* can't replace *the president* in (1), *that dog* can replace *the dog* in (2). Here we follow [6], [7] and [8] in treating both *the P* and *that P* (and proper names etc.) as definite descriptions. This means that, in explaining the replacement fact, we can't appeal to something like

the description/direct-reference distinction; rather, we have to explain it as commonalities and differences between two kinds of descriptions.

My proposal here is that *that P* requires an H-domain while *the P* is compatible either with an H- or R-domain. The replacement fact about (1)–(2) follows from this proposal; *the* and *that* partially overlap in meaning (see also [9]).

Seen from this perspective, some languages appear to mark the R/H distinction overtly. For example, in Japanese, *inu* can appear either with or without an article, depending on the context (*inu* roughly means *dog*). The article *sono* can attach to *inu* only when it is used as an H-definite. Thus, *sono* can't attach to the translation of *the president* in (1), while *the dog* in (2) can be translated into *sono inu*. Thus, *sono* corresponds to both *that* and the Heimian *the*.²

Further, I suggest that Japanese is not the only such language. For example, consider the examples (5)–(8) of Bavarian ([10], p. 69; originally from a paper by Hannes Scheutz) of Bavarian; *da* is Russellian and *dea* is Heimian (we assume that names are R-definites).³

- (5) Da/*Dea Kare is kema.
'Karl has arrived.'
- (6) Da/*Dea Kini is gschtoabm.
'The King has died.'
- (7) Da/*Dea Schnaps is daia.
'Schnaps is expensive.'
- (8) I hab a Bia un Schnaps bschdait. Dea/*Da Schnaps war daia.
'I have ordered a beer and a schnaps. The schnaps was expensive.'

5 Extension to indefinite descriptions

If indefinite descriptions are to be analyzed in terms of existential claims on a given domain (i.e. *resource situation*), then we will expect the R/H distinction is applicable to indefinites too. When an R-domain is chosen, *a boy* is to refer to an arbitrary boy. In contrast, if an H-domain is chosen, it is to refer to one of the boys already introduced in the discourse.⁴

The distinction overtly marked in Turkish noted in [12] can be viewed as such a case. [12] attempts to capture this distinction by stipulating two kinds of *discourse referents*. In contrast, with the R/H distinction, we need no such new stipulation.⁵

6 Conclusion

In our analysis, H-definiteness is regarded as familiarity of H-domains, instead of familiarity of individuals; the latter is derivative from the former (also note that R-definites are also "familiar" in a sense; it is only that

Heimian familiarity, but not Russellian familiarity, is sensitive to discourse dynamics). Our move from individuals to domains is in line with [14]'s situation semantic arguments for the notion of *resource situation* (although not necessarily with his generalized-quantifier analysis of (in)definites).

From the considerations in the previous sections, we conclude that the Russellian/Heimian distinction is something too significant to miss.⁶

Notes

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¹In principle, a single conversation can involve two or more H-domains; each H-domain is part of some or other R-domain. However, the hearer can't finely distinguish them without a good clue, in which case she only assumes one big H-domain subsuming all these small H-domains, as in (3).

²Here we are only saying that H-definites are explicitly so marked in the grammar by *sono*; we don't intend here to analyze bare nominals in Japanese, which can mean not only R-definites but also indefinites and generics, and further, for some speakers, H-definites in addition.

In a more extensive study we will have to say that *this* in English and *kono* and *ano* in Japanese are also overt markers of H-definiteness (in fact, some Heimian uses of *the* translate to *kono* rather than *sono*).

³[10] cites a paper by Karen Ebert and says that Frisian also follows this pattern (p. 69). On the other hand, [11]'s data, also cited in [10], of Indonesian could also be interpreted as exhibiting a similar contrast (bare nominals vs. those with *itu* or *-nya*, the former of which is a demonstrative corresponding to *that* according to [11]).

Both [10] and [11] view the distinctions in terms of genericity. I can't examine their positions in this paper (cf. n. 2).

⁴Put in [7]'s terms, the R/H distinction for an indefinite then resides in whether its *role* should be assumed in an R-domain or an H-domain.

⁵[13] observes that similar contrasts are overtly marked in German and Dutch etc. in terms of linear order. I have nothing interesting to say about this here.

⁶Due to lack of space I can't discuss [15] or the technical details of the present analysis (quantification over situations, *novelty* of indefinites, etc.).

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