DP ≠ DefP

keywords: determiners, bare nouns, familiarity, uniqueness

Introduction
In this paper, we examine the syntax and semantics of bare nouns in Lithuanian (Baltic) and Innu-aimun, a dialect of Montagnais (Algonquian) spoken in Labrador, Canada. Like many other languages that lack articles, bare nouns in both Lithuanian (1) and Innu-aimun (2) can receive indefinite or definite translations.

   moose.M.NOM.SG walk.PAST.3D   bird.M.NOM.SG fly.PRES.3D
   ‘A/the moose was walking/walked.’ ‘A/the bird is flying/flies.’
(2) a. Atîk⁵⁷ pimûteu. b. Upau pîneshîsh.
   caribou walkAI.3            flyAI.3 bird
   ‘A/the caribou was walking.’ ‘A/the bird is flying.’

The question is whether these two interpretations are associated with the same or different syntax. The structure of bare nouns has long been controversial. There are at least three possible analyses of bare nouns: (i) when arguments, bare nouns are DPs (Longobardi 1994), (ii) as kind-referring elements of type e (Chierchia 1998), or (iii) as NP predicates (Rullmann & You 2006).

Problem
Crosslinguistically, determiners are associated with different semantics (e.g., definiteness, specificity, deixis). English the is associated with definiteness. The can only be used for familiar (Heim 1988) and unique (Russell 1905) referents. Salish determiners are associated with deixis (Matthewson 1998, Gillon 2009); familiarity/uniqueness are not required for their use. The fact that determiner semantics vary so widely makes uncovering the structure of bare nouns in languages without overt determiners even more difficult. In order to diagnose the presence or absence of D, tests that are sensitive to features that are common to all determiner systems must be used. If languages with overt D can vary with respect to definiteness, then so should languages with covert Ds.

Claim
Lithuanian and Innu-aimun both have DP structure; however, the covert D in each system has different semantics. The covert D in Lithuanian is definite (like English); the covert D in Innu-aimun is not definite (like Salish).

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Further, Lithuanian and Innu-aimun provide us with evidence that arguments are not necessarily associated with determiners cross-linguistically (contra Longobardi 1994). We argue, on the basis of their semantics, that bare nouns in both Lithuanian and Innu-aimun are associated with two different structures, depending on their meaning: NP (when novel) and DP (when familiar).

Data
English the is usually used for familiar referents (Heim 1988) (3); it must be used for unique referents (Russell 1905) (4).

(3) a. I saw a rabbit. (novel) b. I saw the rabbit. (familiar)
(4) a. I met a king. (one of many) b. I met the king. (unique king)
   c. I met some kings. (subset of kings) d. I met the kings. (the entire set of kings in context)

Lithuanian bare nouns can be used for novel or familiar referents (1); however, when the bare nouns are used for a familiar referent, e.g., when arguments of a predicate with an endpoint prefix (5), they must also refer to a unique referent.
(5) Marija paslėpė uogas.
MaryF.NOM.SG pref-hid-3past berriesF.ACC.PL
‘Mary hid the berries.’
Context: berries already introduced; must refer to the entire set of berries (not a subset)

Definiteness is relevant for both English and Lithuanian. However, definiteness is not a universal feature of languages. For example, Skwxwú7mesh (Salish) determiners can be used for novel or familiar referents (6) and need not be used for unique referents (7) (Gillon 2009).

(6) a. Na imesh ta swí7ka.
realis walk DET man
‘A/the man walked.’

b. Na wa sik ta kalaka.
realis IMPF fly DET crow
‘A/the crow is/was flying.’

(7) Mí7 shit-[t]s chexw ta lapát.
come-appl-1sg.o 2sg.s det cup
‘Bring me one of the cups.’ Context: 2 cups in front of hearer

Innu-aimun bare nouns can also be used for novel or familiar referents (2); when the bare nouns are used for a familiar referent they also need not refer to a unique referent (8).

(8) Mâñi kâta-pan miña.
Mary hideTI-3past berries
‘Mary hid (some of) the berries.’ (subset of berries already under discussion)

Other factors In Lithuanian, there are cues that allow the hearer to interpret the bare noun as definite: focus intonation, word order, aspectual prefixes, definitely marked adjectives (Stolz 2008). We argue that these all force a DP structure on the bare nouns. In Innu-aimun, there are no known markers that force a definite translation.

Implications DP structure is universally available, yet it varies cross-linguistically in (i) whether it is overt or covert; (ii) whether its content is the same, e.g., it may or may not be associated with definiteness (contra Lyons 1999).

Word count: 741

References