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## Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society

### Title

The Three Degrees of Definiteness

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7hx8g41w>

### Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, 40(40)

### ISSN

2377-1666

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### Publication Date

2014

Peer reviewed

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FORTIETH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
**BERKELEY LINGUISTICS SOCIETY**

February 7-9, 2014

**General Session**

**Special Session**

Approaches to the Syntax-Phonology Interface

**Parasessions**

Semantic Theory in Underdescribed Languages  
Language, Inequality, and Globalization

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ISSN: 0363-2946

LCCN: 76-640143

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# Acknowledgments

The Executive Committee of the 40th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is grateful to conference participants, our volunteers, session chairs, and the faculty, all of whom made the event an intellectually stimulating and enriching event. Special thanks go to Paula Floro and Belén Flores, without whose grace and administrative dexterity BLS40 would not have been possible.

Financial support came from the following funders at the University of California, Berkeley.

Department of Linguistics  
Student Opportunity Fund  
Graduate Assembly  
Department of Psychology  
Department of Spanish & Portuguese  
Center for African Studies  
Department of Philosophy  
Anthropology Department  
Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures  
Department of German  
Berkeley Language Center





# Foreword

This monograph contains 28 of the 51 talks given at the 40th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society, held in Berkeley, California, February 7-9, 2014. The conference included a General Session, one Special Session entitled *Approaches to the Syntax-Phonology Interface*, and two Parasessions entitled *Semantic Theory in Underdescribed Languages* and *Language, Inequality, and Globalization*. It was planned and run by all then second-year graduate students in the Department of Linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. The members of the Executive Committee were Sarah Bakst, Herman Leung, Auburn Lutzross, Jonathan Manker, Zachary O'Hagan, Orchid Pusey, Nicholas Rolle, and Katie Sardinha.

The papers contained herein were, upon first submission, edited principally for style by members of the Executive Committee. These edited versions were incorporated by Herman Leung and Zachary O'Hagan into a draft manuscript that was circulated among authors either for their approval or for further editing. Following resubmission, final versions of papers were incorporated by Zachary O'Hagan into the monograph found here. Our goal has been the speedy publication of these proceedings, and as such, certain aspects – e.g., the complete unification of formatting – have been sacrificed. It is our belief that this does not detract from the final publication in any way.

The Executive Committee  
October 2014



## The Three Degrees of Definiteness

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### 1 Introduction

Crosslinguistically, in languages with definite articles, definite articles most frequently appear with common nouns, mass or count (Carlson & Pelletier, 1995).<sup>2</sup> There are cases though where other types of nominals, such as proper names and generic nouns, may also come with a determiner. Such determiners have been treated as semantic expletives that are inserted to satisfy a syntactic requirement, as in Italian and French (Longobardi 1994, among others), or to spell out case morphology, as in the case of Greek (Lekakou & Szendrői 2010). Some examples of these determiners are given below:

- (1) [...] dass die Insekten nicht aussterben können.  
dass die Insekt-en nicht aussterb-en könn-en  
that the.PL Insect-PL NEG become-extinct.INF can-3PL  
'that insects cannot be extinct.' (German)

- (2) I Anna i ylosoloyos  
I Anna i ylosoloy-os  
The.NOM.FEM Anne.FEM the.NOM.FEM linguist-NOM  
'Anne the linguist' (Greek)

- (3) Les dodos sont éteints.  
Les dodo-s sont éteint-s  
The.PL dodo-PL be.PRES.3PL extinct- PL.  
'Dodos are extinct.' (French)

A closer look at the properties of the so-called expletive determiners however reveals some new insights while it raises some important questions that the expletive account cannot address. For example, it is not clear that the determiner is in such cases always a semantic expletive, i.e., that it does not contribute any definiteness to the nominal. In some cases, it can

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1 I am most indebted to Elizabeth Cowper for her constant input and most inspiring discussions. Many thanks also go to my dissertation committee members and the Syntax Project of University of Toronto for their great ideas in earlier stages of this work. This research is partially funded by Elizabeth Cowper, Department of Linguistics, University of Toronto.

2 Abbreviations: PL= plural, NEG= negation, INF= infinitive, NOM= nominative, GEN = genitive, ACC = accusative, FEM= feminine, MASC = masculine, NEU = neutral, PRES= present, PST = past, PRTC = participle, DEF = definite, INDF = indefinite. SPRL= superlative.

only appear with semantically definite nominals, while in others it can also appear with indefinite ones. This suggests that a distinction between these two types of expletive determiners needs to be made, since the former seems to contribute some aspect of definiteness while the latter does not. This distinction is not possible if we take all such determiners to be expletives, while the definite properties of some of the so-called expletive determiners are simply dismissed. Moreover, the expletive determiners that appear to contribute definiteness also show a systematicity in their distribution. True expletives on the other hand, lack this systematicity, being sometimes also optional. This is another important property of definite determiners that clearly supports a definiteness distinction among the determiners, and that cannot be accounted for by the expletive account.

In this work, the properties of expletives are addressed from a different perspective, one that explores the possibility that some of them are in fact definite, or rather, as we will see, **partially** definite. In addition to the semantic expletives and the typically definite determiners then, I argue that there is a third type of definite determiner, i.e. those that are underspecified for definiteness. Assuming that definiteness consists of two features, uniqueness and familiarity (Kyriakaki 2011a, b), determiners may spell out both, one, or neither of these features. In effect, three types of definite determiners arise: (i) definite determiners that are fully specified for definiteness, spelling out both uniqueness and familiarity; (ii) underspecified definite determiners, which only spell out familiarity; and (iii) determiners that are unspecified for definiteness, i.e., the true expletives. This type of specification entails that definiteness comes in three degrees: full, partial, and zero definiteness.

Under this view of definiteness, the properties of definite determiners reviewed here are easily accounted for. In particular, fully definite determiners are predicted to exhibit a limited distribution, i.e., they appear with nominals where a unique and familiar entity is picked out. Definite determiners that spell out only familiarity are predicted to exhibit a more flexible distribution. They allow for further restriction and are thus able to appear with other nominals, such as proper names, generic nouns, possessives, and modifying nominals. Finally, zero-specified determiners are predicted to have the widest distribution and can be present even in indefinite DPs. Hence, under this view of definiteness the properties of the determiners straightforwardly follow, while a new, closer view of definiteness is presented.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2.1 starts by examining the case of the Greek definite determiner, previously claimed to be an expletive. The expletive account is argued to miss some of its syntactic-semantic properties. Section 2.2 presents the tests that help us distinguish between true expletives and definite determiners. Based on these criteria, the Greek definite determiner is shown to be definite, though only partially. Section 3 presents the syntactic-semantic account of the three degrees of definiteness. Section 4 presents some crosslinguistic evidence for the three degrees of definiteness and shows how the proposed analysis can straightforwardly account for such cases, as well. Finally, section 5 summarizes the benefits of the proposed account and suggests some intriguing future research directions.

## 2 Expletives or (underspecified) definite determiners

### 2.1 The Greek definite article and the expletive account

In Greek, the definite article is obligatory with various definite nominals. This includes proper names and possessive nominals, as in (4). It is also obligatory with kind-denoting generic subjects and objects, as in (5):

- (4) \*(O) Stratis zítise \*(to) vivlio tu apo \*(tin) Anna.  
 \*(O) Strati-s zítise \*(to) vivlio tu  
 The.MASC.NOM Stratis.MASC-NOM ask.PST-3S the.NEU book.NEU his.GEN  
 apo \*(tin) Anna  
 from the.FEM.ACC Anna.FEM  
 ‘Stratis asked Anna for his book’ (Proper names and possessives)

- (5) \*(I) elefandes latrevun \*(ta) fistikja.  
 \*(I) elefand-es latrev-un \*(ta) fistikj-a  
 The.MASC.PL elephant.MASC-PL adore.PRES-3PL the.NEU.PL peanut.NEU-PL  
 ‘Elephants adore peanuts.’ (Generic subject and object)

Additionally, the Greek definite article can appear more than once in the same nominal, as shown in (6) and (7). In (6), the definite article is each time followed by an **adjective** forming the so-called *polydefinites* (term by Kolliakou, 2004). In (7) the definite article is followed by a modifying **noun**. In Kyriakaki (2011a, b), both of these constructions are argued to involve *restrictive modification by nominals* (RMN, in short), as the article followed by the adjective or the modifying noun is shown to form a nominal that restrictively modifies the head noun.

- (6) \*(To) kenurjo (to) kocino (to) poðilato, \*(to) γριγορο  
 \*(To) kenurj-o (to) kocin-o (to) poðilat-o, \*(to) γριγορ-o  
 The.NEU new-NEU red-NEU bicycle-NEU quick-NEU  
 ‘The new, red, quick bike’ (RMN)

- (7) O kaθijitis o γlossoloyos  
 O kaθijit-is o γlossoloy-os  
 The.MASC.NOM professor-MASC.NOM the.MASC.NOM linguist-MASC.NOM  
 ‘The professor – the linguist (e.g. not the psychologist)’ (RMN)

Overall, the Greek definite article exhibits a remarkable flexibility in its distribution: it is present with all definite nominals, including proper names, generic subjects and objects, and it can also appear more than once in the nominal.

To account for this kind of flexibility, previous analyses have claimed that the Greek definite article is a semantic expletive (Roussou & Tsimplici 1994, Lekakou & Szendrői 2010). Roussou and Tsimplici (1994), in particular, claim that the Greek definite article is inserted to satisfy the lexical government requirement proposed by Longobardi (1994), and to allow the nominal to function as an argument. They base their claim solely on the fact that the definite article is obligatory with generic nouns, and since for them these are indefinite, the definite article must be an expletive. As they admit though, their analysis also runs into problems. Heavily relying on Longobardi's lexical requirement (1994), they cannot account for why the definite article in generic objects too is also obligatory. Additionally, their assumption that generics are indefinite and therefore the definite article that introduces them is not semantically definite is also problematic. As we will see next, Lyons (1999) argues that generics are definite in a way, denoting a kind that is familiar to us all. If we thus take generics to be definite, their conclusion that the definite article is an expletive cannot be maintained.

In a more recent approach, Lekakou and Szendrői (2010) also take the definite article to be an expletive, basing their claim on the fact that it is used with proper names. They argue that the article is inserted to render the nominal argumental, as well as to spell out morphological case. Looking at polydefinite constructions like in (6), they argue that such constructions are the result of case marking, making the prediction that every language with case marking should exhibit such constructions. However, this account does not show conclusively that the definite article is an expletive. If the Greek definite article were an expletive, inserted only to spell out case, bare arguments should be absent from this language altogether. However, bare arguments are possible (see section 2.2, below). Second, the determiner does not always overtly spell out case, while there are many paradigmatic syncretisms, too. Finally, if the article were inserted only to spell out case, we should be able to find it in indefinite contexts, too, which is not the case (see Kyriakaki 2011a, for a more detailed discussion). In addition, their prediction that every language with case marking should exhibit such constructions cannot be maintained. There are languages with morphological case where the determiner does not appear more than once in the nominal (e.g., German), while there are also languages without morphological case, such as Scottish English, where the determiner can still appear more than once (e.g., *the friend the footballer*). Hence, other factors must be responsible for this phenomenon. Although the expletive accounts discussed here provide some insights about the determiner, they do not support the claim that the Greek definite article is an expletive. Let us now consider whether it is indeed an expletive.

## **2.2 Criteria/tests for expletives**

In order to determine whether a definite article is an expletive or not we first need to establish the criteria or tests that distinguish expletive from non-expletive determiners. In this section I present these criteria, and examine whether the Greek determiner is semantically definite or not.

First, determiners that are semantically definite should not be able to appear in existential indefinite DPs. In the case of expletives, nothing prevents them from appearing in nominals with indefinite readings. This is our first criterion to determine whether a definite article is an expletive. In Greek, the definite determiner is never found in such nominals, rather a bare nominal is used instead:

- (8) Efera                    molivi/            molivja            ke            stilo  
 E-fer-a                    molivi/            molivja            ke            stilo  
 PST-bring-PST.1S        pencil.NEU/        pencil.NEU.PL    and        pen.NEU/ pen.NEU.PL  
 ‘I brought a pencil/ pencils and a pen/ pens.’

Second, a determiner that appears with kind-denoting generics is not necessarily an expletive, since such nominals are partially definite. I take kind-denoting generics to be semantically definite. According to Lyons (1999), the reference to a whole ensemble is what makes generics familiar, and thus must be at least partially definite. More evidence that generics are at least partially definite comes from the fact that indefinite singulars cannot be used as kind-referring terms. Osterhof (2008) provides us with such examples. As can be observed in (9) indefinite singulars cannot be used generically in either German or English. This is another important indicator that generic nominals involve definiteness:

- (9) # Ein dodo ist ausgestorben.  
 Ein dodo ist ausgestorb-en  
 A dodo be.3S PRTC.become.extinct.PST-PRTC  
 # A dodo is extinct.

Similarly, in Greek this is not possible either. The only way to denote kind-denoting expressions is with the use of the definite article:

- (10) # Enas ðinosavros exi eklipsi.  
 Ena-s                    ðinosavr-os                    exi                    eklipsi  
 A-MASC.NOM    dinosaur-MASC.NOM    have.3S                    extinct.INF  
 # A dinosaur is extinct.

- (11) I ðinosavri exun eklipsi.  
 I                                    ðinosavr-i                                    exun                    eklipsi  
 The.MASC.NOM.PL    dinosaur-MASC.NOM.PL    have.3PL                    extinct.INF  
 ‘Dinosaurs are extinct.’



Finally, definite determiners that show a systematic distribution may not be semantic expletives. Definite determiners that lack this systematicity though, and can sometimes be optional, are possibly semantic expletives.

In Greek, the definite determiner appears systematically with all and only definite DPs: count nouns, proper names, possessives and generics. This systematicity suggests that it is inherently definite. In contrast, true expletives lack this systematicity, as in the case of Italian determiners, as we will see next.

Overall, the criteria proposed in this section help us determine whether a definite determiner is an expletive or not. In the case of Greek, the definite article cannot be a semantic expletive, since it never appears with indefinite existential DPs, it is obligatory in all definite nominals, including generics, and it exhibits a systematicity in its distribution. Therefore, we can conclude that the Greek definite article contributes definiteness to the nominal, its flexible distribution also suggests that it is not a typical definite determiner, since it can appear with generics and proper names and it also gives rise to RMN. Since it is not an expletive and it is not a typical definite determiner, then the question is what type of determiner is it? The answer to this is that determiners of this type, which contribute some aspect of definiteness, actually form an intermediate group of definite determiners, what I will call the **underspecified** definite determiners. In the next section, I consider the analysis that accounts for the various degrees of specification of definiteness.

### **3 A definiteness account: The three degrees**

#### **3.1 Essence and structure**

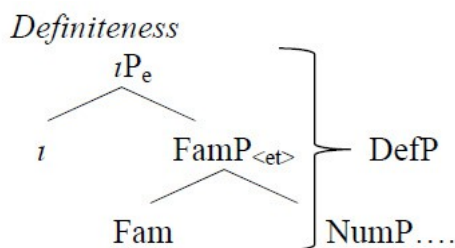
In this section, I argue that definiteness consists of semantic components that map onto distinct syntactic projections. Definite determiners can spell out all, some, or none of the components, giving rise to three degrees of definiteness: full, partial, and zero definiteness.

Crosslinguistically, it has been shown that the familiarity or uniqueness requirement alone does not suffice to pick out a unique individual. For this reason, the context is also argued to play an important role in determining it (Chung & Ladusaw 2004, Giannakidou 2004, among others). Gillon (2006, 2009) for instance offers a semantic analysis where definiteness is decomposed into domain restriction, i.e., the set of elements in the contexts, and the uniqueness presupposition. For her, the former is a universal property of language, while the latter is a language-specific property. Lyons (1999) also gives an account of definiteness arguing that it is not possible to provide a universal semantics for definiteness, since it may vary crosslinguistically. As he explains, the determiner may encode different semantic functions in different languages.

Focusing on languages with definite articles, I will show that determiners can be specified with different definiteness features. Based on previous work on definiteness (Heim 1982, Heim and Kratzer 1998, and Lyons 1999, among others), and relying on previous work from Kyriakaki (2011), I take definiteness to be a functional category, DefP, on a par with tense,

mood, etc., which is active in languages with overt marking. Full definiteness may consist of two features, uniqueness (Heim and Kratzer 1998) and familiarity (Heim, 1982). Depending on the features spelled out by the determiner, these features can map onto two distinct syntactic projections, an iota phrase ( $\iota$ P) for uniqueness, and a familiarity phrase (FamP), as in (12). In languages where the determiner spells out both features, i.e., where the determiner is fully specified for definiteness, definiteness does not decompose. Rather, it remains a DefP. In the case that the determiner only spells out one of the features, familiarity, definiteness is divided between FamP and  $\iota$ P:

(12) The mapping of definiteness in languages with overt marking



According to this mapping, Fam first combines with the nominal and a set of familiar entities is selected. As shown in (12), the resulting nominal is a predicative FamP, as Fam only selects a contextually salient or familiar set of entities. Next, argumental head  $\iota$  is merged and a unique entity is picked out. Interestingly, on the assumption that FamP is predicative, the explanation for why RMN is possible in some languages now easily follows. Modifying nominals are also predicates (Heim and Kratzer, 1998) and thus can combine with FamP via the intersective operation predicative modification. Moreover, since Fam only selects a **familiar set** of entities, we also have an explanation for why definite generics arise: the determiner is a Fam head and thus a familiar set is picked out.<sup>3</sup>

Going back to the Greek determiner, we have seen that it introduces proper names, possessives, and generics, and also combine with RMN. Since these nominals must involve a predicative FamP, and thus exhibit a syntactic-semantic split in their structure, we can conclude that the determiner spells out Fam, i.e., it is an underspecified familiarity head. It does not select a unique individual, but rather a contextually salient set of entities. It can thus appear with all definite nominals.

### 3.2 Heads and nominals

The framework developed in 3.1 gives us the right results but also makes some new predictions. First and foremost, by assuming that definiteness consists of two features, and that these may or may not map onto two distinct syntactic projections, it is automatically predicted that there are at least three types of definite determiners:

<sup>3</sup> See Section 3.2 for more on generics.

(13) Three types of determiners

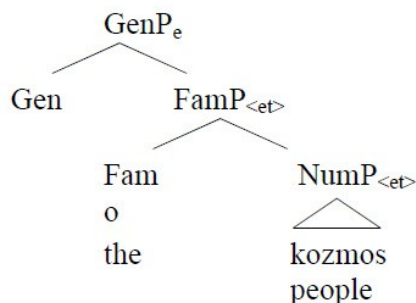
- (i) Determiners that are fully specified for definiteness, i.e., they spell out both features of uniqueness and familiarity
- (ii) Determiners that are underspecified for definiteness spelling out one feature, Fam
- (iii) Determiners that are zero-specified for definiteness spelling out none of the features

In 2.2, we saw evidence for an intermediate degree of definiteness. This is captured in the proposed framework. We thus have three degrees of definiteness emerging: full, partial, and zero definiteness. Full definiteness arises with nominals forming DefPs. Partial definiteness arises with FamPs, and zero definiteness arises with nominals, possibly DPs, whose head is an expletive determiner.

Another consequence is that the distribution of definite determiners can now easily be predicted. Depending on their specification, fully definite determiners are predicted to show a limited distribution. They are Def heads that select a unique and familiar individual. Further restriction on the nominal is thus not possible. Underspecified definite determiners are predicted to show a wider distribution. They are Fam heads and can thus introduce generics, proper names, and possessives. They form predicative FamPs and can combine with RMN. Finally, zero-specified definite determiners do not contribute definiteness, and thus show the most flexible distribution. They are used to fulfill a syntactic/morphological requirement and can be present in various types of nominals, including those with indefinite readings. In section 5, I present examples of each of these types of determiners.

Moreover, definite nominals with a syntactic-semantic split in their D-structure, such as generics, may now involve different semantic components. For example, it was earlier concluded that generics are partially definite involving a familiarity head. However, unlike other definite nominals, a specific entity or set of entities is not picked out here. Instead, a whole set of entities sharing a property is singled out from sets of entities sharing different properties. Generic nominals contain a generic operator, Gen (Carlson & Pelletier, 1995), rather than  $\iota$ . In contrast to  $\iota$ , Gen singles out a set of entities with the specific properties and gives us an argument GenP:

(14) Generic nominals



An important consequence of this proposal is that we can make the prediction that definite plurals are of two types: (i) the **specific definites**, where there is a unique individual/ set of individuals that is selected by means of the iota function; (ii) **generic definites**, where Gen singles out a set of entities with specific properties.

The proposed framework makes the correct predictions about the distribution of definite determiners casting new light on the nature of definiteness. Based on this work, I now consider determiners of other languages that present examples of the three types of definiteness.

## 4 Full, partial, and zero definiteness

### 4.1 Standard English (SE)

In English, I consider the definite determiner *the* and the null D which appears with proper names, possessives, and generics (Longobardi 1994, Ritter 1991, Massam and Ghomeshi 2009, Kyriakaki 2011a, among others).

The SE definite determiner *the* typically introduces common nouns (cf. 15). It does not appear with proper names (cf. 16), and as shown in (17), it cannot appear with plural:

- (15) The professor is giving a lecture.
- (16) \*The Susanna is drawing on the canvas. (\*Def + PN)
- (17) #The beavers are intelligent (#generic interpretation is not possible)

Hence, the definite article *the* appears to be more restricted in its distribution than the Greek definite determiner: it easily combines with count nouns picking out a unique entity, but not with nominals where a familiar entity is picked out, as in the case of proper names and generic nouns.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that *the* is not underspecified and spells out more than just familiarity. Since it combines only with nouns picking out a unique referent, it must be the case that *the* is fully specified for definiteness, spelling out uniqueness as well as familiarity. More evidence for this comes from RMN. As can be observed in (18), nominals headed by *the* cannot have restrictive nominal modifiers, i.e., further restriction on the noun is not allowed.

- (18) a. \*The professor the linguist is taller than the professor the biologist (\*RMN)
- b. \*The professor {the linguist/the genius/the athlete}

In this example, the head nominal *the professor* cannot further combine with the restrictive modifying nominal *the linguist*. The definite article *the* selects a unique entity and therefore, further restriction is not possible. In contrast to the underspecified Greek article, we can now conclude that SE *the* is not underspecified for definiteness. Rather, it is fully specified for both

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4 As shown next, this contrasts with null D where a unique referent is not necessarily picked out (c.f. *ø Jill my friend, not my cousin*).

uniqueness and familiarity. SE *the* constitutes thus our first example of a fully specified definite determiner.

Turning to SE null D, definite nominals that come with it are proper names, possessives, and generics:

- (19) Ø *Susanna* is drawing on the canvas.
- (20) Ø John saw *his cousin* drawing on a canvas.
- (21) Ø *Dinosaurs* became extinct 40,000 years ago. (Carlson, 1977)

In contrast to SE *the*, null D shows a more flexible distribution: i.e., it can appear with proper names, pronominal possessives, and generics which primarily involve familiarity. This type of distribution strongly suggests that null D is not fully definite, but only underspecified for it, spelling out familiarity. Familiarity heads may also combine with RMN. As shown below, RMN is indeed possible providing further evidence that null D spells out only Fam:

- (22) I saw my cousin Abigail (not Shanna)
- (23) My neighbor the doctor/the genius
- (24) John the professor is taller than John the doctor.

English thus presents us with two types of definite determiners: (i) *the*, a fully specified definite determiner, spelling out both uniqueness and familiarity; (ii) null D, an underspecified definite determiner, spelling out only Fam.

## 4.2 Italian

It has been previously claimed that the Italian definite article is a semantic expletive (Vergnaud and Zubizarreta 1990, and Longobardi 1994). Italian argumental nouns obligatorily have a determiner, usually the (in/)definite article, a quantifier, or a demonstrative. Bare count nouns in argument positions are not allowed, as also shown in (25) below (see Longobardi (1994) for more on this):

- (25) \*(Un/Il) grande amico di Maria mi ha telefonato.  
 Un / Il grand-e amic-o di Maria mi ha  
 A.INDF/ The.MASC.DEF great-MASC friend-MASC of Maria me have.3s  
 telefon-ato.  
 call.PRT  
 (A/ The) great friend of Maria has called me up. (Longobardi, 1994: 4)

Generic nouns in Italian also come with a determiner, the definite one. As Brugger (1993) also argues, definite generics are in fact the only way to denote kinds:

(26) \*(I) castori sono intelligenti.  
 \*(I) castor-i sono intelligent-i.  
 The.PL beaver-PL be.3PL intelligent-PL  
 ‘Beavers are intelligent.’ (Brugger, 1993: 12)

(27) I montanari adorano i montanari  
 I montanar-i adorano i montanar-i  
 The.PL highlander-PL adore.3PL the.PL highlander-PL  
 ‘Highlanders adore highlanders.’ (Brugger, 1993: 13)

Proper names on the other hand occur freely without a determiner. However, alternations between the presence and the absence of the article are possible (Longobardi, 1994: 15):

(28) (Il) Gianni mi ha telefonato  
 Il Gianni mi ha telefonato  
 The.DEF John me has.3SG call.PRTC  
 ‘John called me up.’

(29) Il mio Gianni ha telefonato OR Gianni mio ha telefonato  
 Il mio Gianni ha telefonato Gianni mio ha telefonato  
 The.DEF my John have.3SG call.PRTC John my have call.PRTC  
 ‘My John has called.’

To conclude, the Italian definite article is obligatory with arguments and generic nouns. On the other hand, it is optional with proper names. To account for this distribution, Longobardi (1994) has argued that the Italian definite article is a semantic expletive. This conclusion easily follows from the theory developed in this work. Based on the criteria presented in section 2, the Italian definite article clearly lacks the necessary systematicity, since it is obligatory in some contexts but optional in others. We can further confirm this possibility by checking whether it also appears in indefinite contexts. If the Italian determiner is truly an expletive, we should be able to find it in such contexts. Indeed, Zamparelli (1992: 8) provides us with such an example. As shown below, the Italian definite article can appear in existential indefinite contexts. Notice further that there is no definiteness restriction even in clearly existential contexts:

(30) C’è {Gianni / il mio cane} in giardino.  
 C’ é {Gianni/ il mio cane} in giardino.  
 There be.3s Gianni / the.MASC mio.MASC dog in garden  
 \*There is {John / my dog} in the garden

- (31) [...]In cantina ci sono[i topi] e sotto il lavello vivono [gli scarafaggi]  
 In cantina ci sono [i topi] e sotto il  
 In basement there be.3PL the.PL mouse.PL and under the.MASC  
 lavello vivono [gli scarafaggi]  
 sink.MASC live.PL the.PL cockroach.PL  
 ‘There are mice in the basement and cockroaches under the sink’.
- (32) Che fai per mestiere? Fotografo [gli uccelli]  
 Che fai per mestiere? Fotograf-o [gli uccelli]  
 What do for living.INF photograph.1S [the.PL bird.PL]  
 ‘What do you do for a living? I photograph birds.’

The examples in (30-32) clearly show that the Italian definite article is a semantic expletive. Hence, unlike other types of definite determiners, such as those of English and Greek, the Italian definite determiner can be optional, but it can also head nominals with existential indefinite readings. We can therefore conclude that the Italian definite determiner constitutes a case of a zero-specified definite determiner.

In conclusion, so far we have seen examples of all three types of definite determiners: (i) a case of a fully definite determiner exemplified by the SE definite article *the*; (ii) a case of underspecified familiarity determiners exemplified by the Greek definite article; (iii) and finally a case of a true expletive exemplified by the Italian definite determiner. Next, I look at two more examples with underspecified definite determiners, previously argued to be semantic expletives.

### 4.3 German

The German definite article is expected to be semantically closer to English than to Greek. However, this is not exactly the case. The German definite article shows variety in its distribution depending on the location. In Northern Germany it appears to behave more like SE *the*, in that its use is mostly commonly restricted to common nouns. Elsewhere though, and especially in the south, the definite article shows more flexibility in its distribution.

Beginning with proper names, in Northern Germany they do not typically take a determiner, although determiners are increasingly used in colloquial speech (Durell, 2002). In the south proper names typically come with a determiner, and as shown by Moltmann (2013), it can be obligatory and can be further modified by an adjective:

- (33) Man darf \*(den) Kailash nicht besteigen.  
 Man darf \*(den) Kailash nicht besteigen.  
 One may.3S the.MASC.ACC Kailash.MASC NEG climb.INF  
 ‘One is not allowed to climb Kailash.’
- (34) \*(Der) Kailash ist heilig.

\*(Der) Kailash ist heilig.  
 The.MASC.NOM Kailash.MASC be.3S sacred  
 ‘Kailash is sacred.’

- (35) \*(Der) einflussreiche Goethe  
 \*(Der) einflussreiche Goethe  
 The.MASC.NOM influential Goethe  
 ‘The influential Goethe’

German also exhibits definite generics, as well as bare generics. Interestingly, Brugger (1993:4) argues that definite generics are the only way in German to denote kinds, and that bare plurals only denote a subspecies. When a kind-level interpretation is required, only definite plurals are felicitous. As shown in (36) for instance, the kind-level predicate *aussterben* ‘become extinct’ is infelicitous with the bare plural, but, as shown in (37), it is felicitous with definite plurals.

- (36) #dass Dinosaurier dabei sind auszusterben.  
 #dass Dinosaur-ier dabei sind auszusterben  
 that dinosaur-PL thereby.ADV be.3PL become.extinct-INF  
 ‘that dinosaurs are becoming extinct’

- (37) dass die Dinosaurier dabei sind auszusterben  
 dass die Dinosaur-ier dabei sind auszusterben  
 that the.NOM.PL dinosaur-PL thereby.ADV be.3PL become.extinct-INF  
 ‘that the dinosaurs are becoming extinct’

The definite article in Mid/Southern Germany shares properties with English null D and Greek D in that: (i) it accompanies generics; (ii) it introduces proper names, and (iii) it does not appear in existential indefinite contexts. However, it does not appear to allow RMN, though appositives seem to be possible, as shown in (38):

- (38) [...] als das Kind – das jüngste von sechs – zu schreien und atmen begann.  
 als das Kind das jüng-ste von sechs zu schrei-en und  
 when the.NEU child the.NEU young-SPRL from six to shout-INF and  
 atm-en begann  
 pant-INF start.PST.3S  
 ‘When the child – the youngest one among the six – started shouting and panting.’

The Mid/Southern German definite article introduces generics to denote a property of kinds, and it allows for modification, while it also appears to be obligatory with proper names. We can therefore conclude that it functions like an underspecified Fam head. In Northern



Germany on the other hand, the definite article shows a limited distribution, as it typically appears with common nouns. I assume that it forms a fully definite article, though it seems to be undergoing a change, becoming underspecified. Future research will show whether this is the case.

#### 4.4 French

In French, nominal arguments typically come with a determiner, either definite or indefinite. Bare arguments are generally not allowed (Chierchia, 1998: 355):

- (39) \* J'ai mangé biscuits avec mon lait.  
 \*J' ai mangé biscuit-s avec mon lait.  
 I.1s have.1s eat.PRTC cookie-PL with my.MASC milk  
 'I ate cookies with my milk.'

Since French disallows bare arguments we might expect proper names to take a determiner. However, this is not the case. Proper names do not come with a determiner, except for exceptional cases, such as names of rivers, countries, e.g. *la Seine*, *la France* (see Matushansky (2006), for more).

In the case of generics though, as in Italian, they obligatorily come with the definite article (cf. Krifka et al. 1995: 68). As shown below, the determiner must be definite:

- (40)>(\*Des) Dodos sont éteints.  
 >(\*Des) Dodos sont éteints.  
 (INDF.PL) Dodo-PL be.3PL extinct-PL

- (41) Les dodos sont éteints.  
 Les dodos sont éteints  
 The.PL Dodo-PL be.3PL extinct-PL  
 'Dodos are extinct.'

Hence, the French definite article does not appear with proper names, but it is obligatory with generics. The question we need to consider then is whether the French definite article is an expletive or an underspecified Fam. It may not be a fully definite determiner, since it can appear with generics, which contain FamP but not *ɪ*P (see also Lyons 1999). To determine whether the French article is a semantic expletive, as in Italian, we can check whether it is compatible with existential indefinite readings. In this case too, Zamparelli (1992: 23-24) provides us with the corresponding example. As shown in (42) and (43), the French definite article is not compatible with indefinite readings. For such readings, the indefinite article is used:

- (42) Dans l' évier, il y a {?les/ des} souris, et sous le frigo

Dans l' évier, il-y-a {?les/ des} souris, et sous le  
 In the sink, exist the.PL.DEF/ some.PL.INDF mice and under the  
 frigo vivent {?les/ des} cafards  
 fridge live.3PL the.PL.DEF/ some.PL.INDF cockroaches  
 'In the sink there are mice and under the fridge live cockroaches.'

- (43) [...] je ne bois pas {\*le/ de} café.  
 je ne bois pas {\*le/ de} café  
 I NEG drink.1S NEG the.MASC.DEF/ some.MASC.INDF coffee  
 'I do not drink coffee.' (in the context of 'I do not drink coffee any more')

In conclusion, the French definite article is infelicitous in existential indefinite contexts, and it systematically appears with generics. Although it does not appear with proper names, it does not behave as if it lacks definiteness altogether. Rather, it must be underspecified for it, denoting familiarity.

## 5 Conclusion

In this work I explored the possibility that some definite determiners claimed to be expletives are partially underspecified for definiteness. This means that determiners are of three types: fully, partially, and zero-definite determiners. This type of specification of definiteness shows that definiteness can be of three degrees: full, partial, and zero definiteness. The crosslinguistic analysis presented here straightforwardly accounts for their syntactic-semantic properties. Definite determiners that are fully specified for definiteness are correctly predicted to show a more limited distribution. An example of this type of definite determiner is SE *the*. As such, its limited distribution follows. It picks out a unique, familiar individual and thus further restriction is not possible.

On the other hand, further restriction with underspecified definite determiners is predicted to be possible. Underspecified definite determiners select a familiar set and thus this set can be further restricted. A clear example of such a determiner is the Greek definite article. This determiner spells out Fam and its flexible distribution now easily follows: it can introduce various definite nominals, as well as combine with RMN.

Finally, semantic expletives are the third type of definite determiners that we can find cross-linguistically. They are completely unspecified for definiteness, i.e., they spell out neither of the features of definiteness. The Italian determiner is such an example. As a true expletive, its zero specification for definiteness enables it to appear in various contexts, including existential indefinites, as well as to be optional as well.

Hence, by assuming that definiteness comes in three degrees, the properties of the determiners are accounted for. Determiners spelling out all features of definiteness exhibit a limited distribution, while those spelling out fewer or no features exhibit a more flexible distribution.

This work also offers new insights about the essence and mapping of definiteness, but also provides us with some new intuitions about the notion of expletives. By reviewing the expletive account, the necessary criteria are set that help us distinguish between the expletive and underspecified determiners. Moreover, the proposed analysis of definiteness provides an alternative view to the expletive account, one that does not dismiss the semantic contribution of a definite determiner altogether. Rather, it recognizes that specification of definiteness can come in three degrees.

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