

## REVIEWS

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**Jila Ghomeshi, Ileana Paul & Martina Wiltschko (eds.),** *Determiners: Universals and variation* (Linguistik Aktuell/Linguistics Today 147). Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009. Pp. x + 247.

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Determiners pose many long-standing puzzles to linguistic theory. From a lexical point of view, it is notoriously difficult to provide a clear and coherent definition of the lexical category of ‘determiners’. From a syntactic point of view, even apparently basic issues like identifying the exact hierarchical position and feature composition of determiners are still far from having an agreed-upon answer. Semantically, cross-linguistic diversity in the use of determiners poses challenges to the attempt to tie the distribution of determiners to semantic factors like definiteness or referentiality. It is in this context that the current volume is framed; rather than proposing simple answers to these issues, it serves to illustrate the extent to which this topic is riddled with unanswered questions.

Based on papers presented in a workshop on determiners held in 2006, this volume contains seven papers (following an introductory chapter by the editors) in which determiner systems from a wide variety of languages are described and analyzed. The book is organized into three parts; the first deals with the feature make-up of determiners and its effects on syntax, semantics and morphology; the second and the third focus mostly on the semantics of determiners from a cross-linguistic perspective.

Following the editors’ introduction, which presents the main research questions that come up throughout this volume, the first part of the book, ‘The features of determiners’, consists of three contributions. In the first chapter, ‘What’s in a determiner and how did it get there?’, Martina Wiltschko compares the feature composition of determiners in three unrelated languages: German, Halkomelem, and Blackfoot. Wiltschko’s main focus is on the fact that the ‘same’ feature can have different properties in different languages. She distinguishes between features that are inherent to the determiner head and those that act as modifiers. The first type is involved in obligatory concord and is always present on determiners (i.e. does not allow underspecification); the second type may be involved in optional concord and is potentially absent. For instance, Wiltschko shows that

determiners in German are always specified for gender, and gender agreement between the determiner and the noun is obligatory; Halkomelem, in contrast, allows a choice between a determiner that is unspecified for gender (and is thus compatible with both masculine and feminine nouns) and a determiner that is specified as feminine.

Wiltschko's formal analysis is based on the distinction between heads and modifiers: she proposes that inherent features merge as heads, while optional features merge as modifiers. Taking this distinction between feature types to be at the level of hierarchical syntax, Wiltschko's analysis treats each feature as a syntactic node rather than as a sub-component of a single D(eterminer) node. Thus, Wiltschko's analysis (developed within the Distributed Morphology framework) clearly distinguishes between 'determiner' and the D position, where the former is the spellout of the content of more than one functional head. The formalization in terms of the structural head/adjunct distinction relies heavily on the theoretical assumptions of the Distributed Morphology framework, but the main insights developed in this chapter could perhaps also be stated in other ways.

The second chapter, 'The proper D connection' by Jila Ghomeshi & Diane Massam, is also concerned with the feature composition of D. Focusing on the distinction between common nouns and proper names as it surfaces in a variety of languages, Ghomeshi & Massam argue that this distinction must be encoded on both N(oun) and D. Their analysis uses several privative (monovalent) features: on N, the features 'name' and 'common' mark proper or common nouns, respectively; while D may be marked with the features 'proper', 'singular' and 'definite'. Using this system of features (in addition to the features 'indefinite' and 'plural' on Num(ber)), the authors account for the (un)grammaticality of a wide range of noun phrase types with and without overt determiners, with either common or proper readings. A significant part of the chapter is devoted to arguing against previous analyses which have attempted to reduce the common/proper distinction to a property of either N or D; Ghomeshi & Massam argue that neither of these alone can account for the entire range of data, and hence features of both heads must play a role in encoding this distinction.

The third chapter, 'Argumenthood, pronouns, and nominal feature geometry' by Elizabeth Cowper & Daniel Currie Hall, addresses the question of determining the categorial status of various types of pronouns. Using a feature-geometric approach and a hierarchy of nominal functional projections, the authors argue that all English pronouns (with the exception of *one*), belong to the category  $\phi$ P, which is associated with person features. Along with DP, this is one of the two projections that are interpreted as arguments of type  $\langle e \rangle$ . Cowper & Hall claim that the semantic distinction between these two projections is that  $\phi$  creates an argument by introducing an index, while D does so by introducing a choice function. Thus, DP

and  $\phi$ P are semantically mutually exclusive; the authors leave open the possibility that these are in fact just two distinct instantiations of a single category. Beneath these, Cowper & Hall assume two predicative projections, NP and #P. Pronouns used predicatively are argued to be generated in N.

Extending the analysis beyond English, Cowper & Hall discuss the status of pronouns in Halkomelem and Shuswap. Adopting a Distributed Morphology framework, they claim that pronouns in Halkomelem are syntactically complex, composed of a D-head carrying gender features and a functional head # carrying person and number. Pronouns in Shuswap, on the other hand, are argued to belong to the predicative category #, which may optionally be turned into an argument by means of an overt or phonetically null determiner. The overall picture proposed is that pronouns may vary not only in their syntactic category, but also in their feature composition. Thus, the proposed analysis gives rise to a more fine-grained typology of pronouns than in many previous works.

The second part of the book, 'The function of determiners', consists of two chapters dealing with what looks like optional determiners. In the first of these, 'From local blocking to Cyclic Agree: The role and meaning of determiners in the history of French', Éric Mathieu examines the status of determiners in Old French, where determiners seem to have been optional. Much of this chapter is devoted to a detailed descriptive summary of the facts of determiner use in Old French. After showing that determiner use in this language cannot be reduced to simple semantic factors such as definiteness or familiarity, Mathieu addresses the theoretical question of how Old French fits into the semantic typology of Chierchia (1998).

Mathieu's main claim is that determiners in Old French were not truly optional, but rather that they served a discourse function of marking focus, as well as being sensitive to phonological/metric requirements. The main use of determiners in Old French, according to Mathieu, was to focalize the noun phrase. Under this analysis, it is argued that Old French does not really pose a counterexample to Chierchia's Blocking Principle. Finally, the paper provides a detailed syntactic analysis within the Minimalist framework, in which the diachronic change from having syntactically optional determiners to the obligatory status of determiners in Modern French is claimed to follow from the morphological loss of agreement features on N.

Keren Tonciulescu's contribution, 'Kinds of predicates and reference to kinds in Hebrew', addresses a similar issue – the apparent optionality of definite articles in Modern Hebrew kind-denoting singulars. Like Mathieu, Tonciulescu focuses on the theoretical problem posed by apparently optional determiners to Chierchia's (1998) proposed universals. Tonciulescu shows that the alternation between a definite-marked singular and a bare singular

in Hebrew depends on three factors: the reference of the noun phrase (kind- versus object-denoting), its syntactic position (subject versus object), and the selectional requirements of the verb/predicate. Tonciulescu claims that the basic semantic type of bare singulars in Hebrew is as kind-referring expressions of type  $\langle e \rangle$ ; other types are derived using either a definite article or covert type-shifting operators. The role of the determiner in this analysis is either to introduce a massifying function or to add a singularity presupposition. Thus, Tonciulescu claims that even cases of apparent optionality of a determiner are compatible with Chierchia's theory.

Part III, 'Definiteness and beyond', consists of two chapters which challenge the common view that determiners are associated with the semantic notion of definiteness (see e.g. Lyons 1999). Carrie Gillon's chapter, 'The semantic core of determiners: Evidence from  $S_{kwxwú7mesh}$ ', compares the semantics of  $S_{kwxwú7mesh}$  determiners to that of English determiners, showing that the former, unlike the latter, are not associated with definiteness. Gillon demonstrates that this is true regardless of whether definiteness is defined using familiarity or uniqueness:  $S_{kwxwú7mesh}$  determiners make neither of these distinctions, but rather express deixis.

According to Gillon, the unifying semantic property of determiners in these two languages ( $S_{kwxwú7mesh}$  and English) is domain restriction. For English, uniqueness in the context is the relevant sort of domain restriction introduced by the definite article. In  $S_{kwxwú7mesh}$ , different determiners restrict the domain in different ways to previously mentioned entities. Thus, Gillon claims that the universal core function of determiners is not to express definiteness but to anchor their referents to the discourse.

Finally, Ileana Paul's contribution, 'On the presence versus absence of determiners in Malagasy', focuses on the semantics of determiners in Malagasy. Paul shows that, on the one hand, overt 'definite/specific' determiners in Malagasy in positions that require a determiner are not always associated with uniqueness or familiarity; and on the other hand, bare nominals in positions that disallow determiners can be interpreted as either definite or indefinite and may take wide scope. Thus, it seems as though Malagasy determiners cannot be characterized as encoding definiteness. Despite these facts, Paul claims that the Malagasy 'definite' determiner indeed encodes familiarity. Apparent counterexamples, in her analysis, follow from the interaction with other factors which arise in environments that either require or disallow bare nominals. Paul concludes that the traditional view of determiners as encoding definiteness should be weakened to include only familiarity, not uniqueness.

The true value of a collection like this is in whether it is able to provide a picture that goes beyond the individual analyses of its different chapters.

Reading through the articles in this volume, one cannot help but feel a certain amount of confusion by the degree of variability displayed by the 'simple' and small class of determiners. This aspect of the book is, in my opinion, a good thing, as it reflects the true state of affairs in this field. Given the clearly defined research questions and the relatively narrow syntactic domain over which they are defined, one would perhaps expect a clear and unified picture to emerge. Yet despite, or perhaps thanks to, the clearly presented data and analyses collected in this volume, it is hard to ignore the extent to which core issues still remain unresolved. To give one concrete example, both Gillon and Paul provide compelling evidence for their respective answers to what looks like essentially the same question, namely, what is the core universal semantic content of determiners; yet the different languages that these two authors consider lead to two different, if somehow related, answers. Similarly, the three articles in the first part of the book each propose an explicit and coherent characterization of the feature content of D; yet these different characterizations, which are all well argued for, are in some cases incompatible with each other. These differences of opinion are signs of a healthy research field, and I consider it to be a real virtue of this volume that it manages to bring together such diversity in a way that makes it possible to try and consider what it would take to resolve these theoretical conflicts. I find this collection to be very successful in this respect, and the editors' overview in the introductory chapter greatly contributes to sharpening these issues.

Overall, this book is highly recommended to anyone interested in the syntax, semantics or morphology of determiners, or DPs in general. Beyond the specific theoretical analyses proposed by the authors, the wealth of cross-linguistic data, mostly from non-Indo-European languages, makes this book an excellent resource for researchers working in a variety of theoretical frameworks. I believe that the main contribution of this volume is in the thorough and explicit way in which it demonstrates the extent to which simplistic views of determiners, often taken for granted in the linguistic literature, fail to capture the actual complexity of the facts.

## REFERENCES

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