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BACK TO UNIQUENESS PRESUPPOSITION

1. Introduction

Works on weak definites are based on examples which can be divided into two groups. The first group comprises complex NPs including a genitive, like example (1a) due to Poesio (1994); the second group includes short NPs involved in constructions which appear similar to idioms, as illustrated in (1b), an example taked from Carlson et al. (2005).

(1)   a. I've got this data from <u>the student of a linguist</u>.
          b. Jacqueline took <u>the train</u> from Paris to Moscow.

These definite NPs are called weak because they don't presuppose the uniqueness of their referent: (1a) doesn't presuppose that the linguist mentioned in the sentence has only one student, and (1b) would be perfectly appropriate in a situation where Jacqueline made a transfer somewhere and

consequently took two trains. But to explain this lack of uniqueness, two different analyses are given in the literature and the issue whether a unique analysis could account for both classes of examples is usually left open.[1]

In this paper, we will defend a unified analysis of weak definites, based on the idea that the weakness of these NPs doesn't come from the determiner, but from the noun, which refers to a type, as opposed to a token. So we claim that there aren't two definite determiners (one weak and one strong) but only one. This thesis is close to Aguilar & Zwarts' proposal who assume that weak definites refer to a kind, but it differs about the semantics of the definite determiner. Our claim is that the definite determiner doesn't trigger a uniqueness presupposition but only a weaker presupposition, in which uniqueness depends on existence. We claim that uniqueness in the case of strong definite NPs and non uniqueness in the case of weak definite NPs are not features inherently encoded in the definite determiner but are derived in context.

This paper is organized as follows. Sections 2 and 3 present a survey of the litterature on weak definites: in Section 2 we review and classify the relevant examples and in Section 3 we present the various analyses and discuss their limits. Finally, we give our own proposal in Section 4 which explains why weak definites and indefinites semantically look alike.

2. Data survey

2.1 Long weak definites

Poesio (1994) introduced the label « weak definites » to refer to definite descriptions (noted DD) which were perfectly appropriate in a context where more than one entity satisfies the description. According to him, weak DDs are always complex DDs, built with a definite determiner, a relational noun and an embedded indefinite noun phrase, as described in (2) and exemplified in (3). He shows that the weak reading disappears in absence of the *of-*complement (4a), when another type of complement replaces the genitive (4b), and when the genitive is strong (4c).

(2)   Def N1 of Indef-sg N2
(3)   a. The village is located on the side of a mountain.
         b. I usually had breakfast at the corner of a major intersection.
(4)   a. John got these data from the student.
         b. John got these data from the student who studies with a linguist.
         c. John got these data from the student of Chomsky.

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[1] Carlson et al. (2006: 179) wrote « We will be discussing instances that usually differ from the examples examined by Poesio and Barker, and will leave unresolved the question of whether their examples should be subsumed under our analysis. »

Barker (2005) has shown that Poesio's constraints are too strong since weak readings may arise in absence of an indefinite in the *of-* complement (5a). He has also extended his investigations to plural weak DDs, as in (5b).

(5)   a. The baby's fully-developed hand wrapped itself around <u>the finger of the surgeon.</u>

       b. The term double crush describes a type of fracture or other injury resulting from being driven over by <u>the two wheels of a car or other vehicle.</u>

The same type of phenomenon exists in French and was studied *inter alia* by Milner (1982), Flaux (1992, 1993) and Corblin (2001). Flaux observes that sentence (6) is ambiguous. The DD may be strong and thus it refers to a particular person, but it may also be interpreted as an attributive DD. In this case, the DD is weak and the Speaker highlights the fact that the person she met has a specific property, the property of being a farmer's daughter.

(6)   J'ai rencontré   la fille   d'un fermier.
       I met   the daughter   of a farmer
(7)   a. J'ai rencontré la fille d'un certain fermier.
           'I met the daughter of a particular farmer'
       b. J'ai rencontré une fille de fermier.
           'I met a farmer daughter'

Corblin added French examples of weak DDs involving a definite genitive, as in (8).

(8)   a. J'ai abîmé <u>l'aile de ta voiture</u>.
           'I damaged the wing of your car'
       b. Le médecin   a plâtré   <u>le bras de Jean</u>.
          the doctor   has plastered   the arm of John
           'The doctor plastered John's arm'

All of these weak DDs are complex, since they embed a *de/of-* complement.

2.2 Short weak definites

There is another class of DDs which give rise to weak readings. They were first described by Carlson & Sussman (2005), and then studied by Carlson et al. (2006), Klein et al. (2009), and Aguilar et al. (2011) for English examples, and by Corblin (2011, 2013), Aurnague (2012) and Beyssade & Simatos (to appear) for French. We call them short weak definites, because they contain a determiner followed by a noun, without any embedded complement. The weak reading only emerges when the DD co-occurs with a particular verb or a specific preposition. Nevertheless, these constructions are very productive and it would be inappropriate to assume that they are idioms. By *^{w} we indicate that the weak reading is not available.

(9)   a. He went to the hospital.   *ᵂ He went to the building.
        b. I'll read the newspaper.   *ᵂ I'll read the book.
        c. You should see the doctor.   *ᵂ You should see the nurse.

The test used in the literature to check whether the weak reading is available is based on VP ellipsis: only the weak reading gives rise to a sloppy interpretation, as in (10a).

(10)   a. Anna read the newspaper and John did, too.
             (not necessarily the same newspaper)
        b. Anna read the book and John did, too.
             (necessarily the same book)

Corblin and Aurnargue focus on weak definites associated with the preposition "à" in French. Corblin (2011) studies a subclass of weak definites he calls "telic definites", in which the DDs co-occur with location verbs and animate subjects (see (11a-b)). Aurnague (2012) has discovered new examples associated to "routine sociale" (he borrows this expression to Vandeloise (1987)), built with the verb *être / to be* and in which an object (and not a place) is associated with an activity (see (11b-c)).

(11)   a. Pierre va à l'école.
            Pierre goes À the school
            'Pierre goes to school'
        b. Pierre {va / est} à la plage.
            Pierre {goes /is} À the beach
            'Pierre goes/is at the beach'
        c. Pierre est au piano.
            Pierre is À the piano
            'Pierre is playing piano'

Beyssade and Simatos (to appear) show examples of weak definites associated to body part nouns, in sentences expressing inalienable possession in French. They also study lexical restrictions on verbs or prepositions associated with the weak reading of these DDs (13).

(12)   Jean s'est cassé le bras / la jambe / le doigt.
        Jean REFL broke the arm / the leg / the finger
        'Jean broke his arm / leg / finger'
(13)   Marie a levé / #lavé le bras.
        Mary raised / washed the arm
        'Marie raised / washed her arm'

All these weak DDs are short: they are reduced to a definite determiner followed by a noun, without any complement. Note however that weak readings only emerge in combination with certain verbs or prepositions.

3. Analyses and their limits
We find in the literature three different hypotheses to explain weak readings. The first one, elaborated to account for long weak DDs, is based on syntax and assumes that weak and strong DDs are associated with two different syntactic analyses. The two other hypotheses have been proposed to account for short weak DDs, and these proposals rely on a semantic ambiguity attributed either to the definite determiner or to the noun.

3.1 Hypothesis 1: two different syntactic forms
Such an analysis has been proposed *inter alia* by Dobrovie-Sorin (2001) and Barker (2005). We summarize Barker's proposition here. The idea is that an NP such as (14) is syntactically ambiguous and may be associated with two different structures, depending on whether the noun is interpreted as a relational or non relational noun. In the first case, the non relational noun combines with the genitive complement and the whole combines with the determiner (as in (15a) which gives rise to the strong interpretation of the NP associated with a uniqueness presupposition). In the other case, the relational noun combines directly with the determiner, and the whole combines with the *of*-complement as in (15b) which gives rise to the weak interpretation. (15) makes explicit the two ways of composing the meaning of the definite description (14): $f = [[the]]$, $g = [[corner]]$, $h = [[of the intersection]]$ and $f \bullet g$ indicates the functional composition, which is distinct from functional application noted as usually by $f(g)$.

(14)   the corner of the intersection
(15)   a. $f(g(h))$ = the (corner (of-the-intersection))
        b. $(f \bullet g)(h)$ = (the corner) (of-the-intersection)

What are the semantic interpretations associated to (15a-b)? Barker explains that in the standard case, where the head noun of the DD is not a relational noun, as in the case of *the man*, a successful use of the DD is one that guides the attention of the listener to reliably pick out the intended individual. *The man* refers to the man the Speaker is talking about (not the woman, not the dog) and the DD fails to refer when there are more than one man in the context. So, in the case of the strong reading of (14), the noun *corner* combines first with the *of*-complement *of the intersection* and a successful use of the DD *the corner of the intersection* is one that guides the attention of the listener to reliably pick out the intended corner. *The corner of the intersection* refers to the corner the Speaker is talking about and the DD fails to refer when there are more than one corner of the intersection salient in the context.
Analogously, in the case where the noun is a relational noun, as in (15b), it combines with the definite determiner and refers to the unique relation that the Speaker is talking about. In (14), it is the corner relation and not another spatial relation such as the top relation or the middle relation. Indeed, there are many different kinds of relations that could be used to characterize one aspect of the intersection. Barker (2005: 110) writes « A successful use of a definite description, then, is one that provides enough information for the listener to reliably pick out the intended kind of object. What the speaker has

in mind is a unique, specific relation, and that specificity is what the definite determiner is marking. » The relational noun *corner* defines a relation which is unique. The fact that this relation associates several elements with the genitive complement is not a problem. On the contrary, it explains the weak interpretation. Since there are always several corners in an intersection, the idea is to consider the class of these corners and to forget the differences between them, which become irrelevant in this context.

   To conclude, Barker proposes to account for the difference between weak and strong readings in syntactic terms. According to him, the definite determiner is not semantically ambiguous. On the contrary, it always triggers a uniqueness presupposition. In the case of weak readings, there is still uniqueness, but not uniqueness of reference. Rather, what is unique is the contrastive selection of one relation over another. This analysis is attractive, but it can apply only to long DDs, including both a relational noun and an *of-*complement. It seems difficult to transpose it to explain weak readings of expression like *read the newspaper* or *go to the beach*[2].

3.2 Hypothesis 2: a determiner ambiguity
Another hypothesis to account for weak readings is to postulate that there are two distinct definite determiners, one which conveys a uniqueness presupposition, and one which doesn't convey any meaning and can be analyzed as an expletive element.

   This hypothesis has been defended by Carlson et al. (2009) for short weak DDs[3]. They assume that weak definites « form a distinguished class of (apparent) definite descriptions on their own that shares a semantics with (at least) bare count singulars, and probably not with definites. » (Carlson et al., 2006: 179). So they propose to analyze weak definites as a case of semantic incorporation, and to justify their proposal, they highlight several properties shared both by weak DDs and incorporated NPs: 1) both are non-specific rather than specific in import, 2) both are interpreted as narrow-scope indefinites, showing no scoping interactions with other logical operators in the same sentence, 3) both convey a number-neutral interpretation, which is an existential interpretation and never a generic one. Furthermore, weak definites and bare singulars never occur in the same context (*go to school / *^{w} go to the school, *^{w} listen to radio / listen to the radio*). This analysis in terms

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[2] In in this volume, Carlson et al. propose a new analysis a weak readings in which they claim that a weak definite would have a different compositional structure as the strong definite. In expressions like *read the newspaper,* the definiteness would not be associated with the NP, but it would be associated with the V-N (or Prep-N) combination and it would express something like a "familiar" type of activity, one whose cultural currency is independently established and encoded into the grammar in this way. To the extent to which this proposal relies on the claim that there are two ways of composing semantic structures, it could be viewed as a possible way to extend Barker proposal to short weak DDs. But Carlson et al. assume that weak and strong definites have the same syntactic structure, which is not the case in Barker's proposal.

[3] A comparable hypothesis has been defended by Milner (1982) to account for long weak DDs, such as *le fils d'un paysan / the son of a farmer*. Milner assumes that « sometimes, forms which are morphologically definite behave syntactically and semantically as indefinites » (Milner, 1982: 357). Nevertheless, his explanation is different since according to him, the indefiniteness is transmitted from the genitive complement to the whole NP.

of incorporation explains both the lack of the uniqueness presupposition (number neutrality) and the semantic enrichment of meaning, which is a very typical feature of incorporated structures.

To conclude, Carlson and al. assume that there are two definite determiners: on the one hand, the standard definite article which triggers the uniqueness presupposition and on the other hand an expletive article. This analysis is attractive but it leaves open different issues: why are weak DDs used at all in English, as opposed to simply using a bare singular and how to account for lexical restriction associated with weak DDs? Moreover, if the determiner is ambiguous, each occurrence of a DD should give rise to two readings, a strong and a weak, which is clearly not the case.

3.3 Hypothesis 3: a noun ambiguity

The last hypothesis to account for weak readings relies on the idea that nouns are ambiguous and may denote either objects or kinds. It has been elaborated by Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2011) to account for short weak DDs, such as *the hospital* in the VP *go to the hospital*. The main idea is that weak definites in these expressions do not denote specific objects but instantiations of specific kinds. To account for the lexical restrictions and the semantic enrichment which characterize weak readings, Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts make use of a two place predicate, notated U, which refers to the stereotypical events associated with the noun. Following Parsons (1990), they consider that sentences describe events and they propose to account for the two readings of (16) as in (17).

(16)   John goes to the hospital.

(17)   a. $\exists e[\text{go-to}(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e)=\text{john} \wedge \exists x[\text{hospital}(x) \wedge \text{Goal}(e)=x]]$

        b. $\exists e[\text{go-to}(e) \wedge \text{Agent}(e)=\text{john} \wedge \exists x_i[R(x_i,\text{hospital}_k) \wedge \text{Goal}(e)=x_i$

          $\wedge\ U(e,\text{hospital}_k)]$

(17a) represents the strong reading, in which x refers to an object (a hospital), while (17b) corresponds to the weak reading, in which 'hospital$_k$' refers to the kind 'hospital' and x_i refers to an object, here an instantiation of the kind 'hospital'. x_i is not necessarily a hospital known by the Speaker or the Hearer, but it is a concrete hospital, not the abstract kind 'hospital'.

The predicate U in (17b) is used to account for the lexical restrictions and the semantic enrichment associated with weak readings. The idea is that $\lambda e[U(e,\text{hospital}_k)]$ is the set of all stereotypical events for hospitals. If the intersection of this set and the set of all go-to events is not empty, then there is an event e such that e is a go-to event and in e a hospital is used in its stereotypical function. One of the stereotypical functions of a hospital is to cure patients. So in (17b), $U(e,\text{hospital}_k)$ indicates the semantic enrichment associated with the weak reading.

The second role of this predicate is to account for lexical restrictions of weak readings. Many verb-noun associations never give rise to weak readings, simply because there is no overlap between the set of events associated with the verb and the stereotypical events associated with the kind-referring noun. For example, *paint the hospital* doesn't allow a weak reading because there is no intersection between the set of stereotypical events for hospitals and the

set of painting events.

This analysis also explains why weak definites are compatible with sloppy interpretations in case of VP ellipsis: the weak DD doesn't refer to an object which has to be the same in the main clause and in the ellipsis, but to an instantiation of a kind, which may vary.

Even though this analysis is very attractive, it nevertheless faces at least three problems. First, it seems difficult to assume that in case of weak readings associated with body part nouns such as (12), the NPs *John's leg* and *Mary's arm* refer to kinds. Second, Anscombre (2012) shows that the list of expressions in French built with weak DDs referring to body parts is very long and includes lots of metaphorical expressions (see (18)), in which it would be *ad hoc* to assume that the body part noun is used in a stereotypical way. The meaning of these expressions is often not compositional but the use of a weak DD including a body part noun is very regular.

(18)   ne pas lever le petit doigt, tenir la jambe, avoir la main leste, avoir à l'œil, avoir l'œil, retirer une épine du pied, se mettre le doigt dans l'oeil, faire la sourde oreille, avoir l'oreille fine, tendre / prêter l'oreille, avoir la dent dure, froncer le sourcil, avoir le cheveu rare, lever le coude...

And finally, we don't see how to extend this analysis to account for the long weak DDs of the type *the student of a linguist* or *the son of a farmer*. How to use the predicate U to account for the difference between weak and strong interpretations here?

To conclude this survey of analyses concerning weak definites, I would like to insist on two points: first, all of them have been elaborated to account for one class of weak definites and it seems difficult to extend them to account for the other class of weak definites. Furthermore, they miss a important property of weak definites, shared both by short and long weak definites, which is that they are used in contexts where they are interpreted as attributive descriptions rather than referential descriptions.

4. New proposal

Our proposal is articulated around two ideas: (i) the claim that the uniqueness presupposition of DDs has to be replaced by a weaker presupposition, in which uniqueness depends on existence and (ii) the claim that in weak DDs the definite article combines with a noun phrase (N0 or N') which is interpreted as a type-referring noun, not as a token-referring noun.

4.1 Back to the uniqueness presupposition of the definite determiner

The idea that DDs presuppose the existence and the uniqueness of their referent has been regularly discussed. There are at least four types of context in which DDs don't presuppose either the existence or the uniqueness. The first case corresponds to attributive DDs, which occur in predicate position, as in (19).

(19)   1000 is the biggest even number.

There is no biggest even number. So if the DD was associated with a

presupposition, (19) should exemplify a presupposition failure and the sentence should be neither true nor false. But (19) is clearly false. So one can claim that in (19) the DD doesn't presuppose the existence of its referent.

Coppock and Beaver (2012) have found another type of context in which a DD is appropriate although it doesn't seem to presuppose the uniqueness of its referent. It is the case where the definite determiner is combined with an exclusive such as *sole* or *only*.

(20)   a. John is the sole/only author.
        b. John is not the sole/only author.
        c. Is John the sole/only author?

If (20a) asserts that there is a unique author, (20b) implies that there are more than one author and the question (20c) can be addressed only if the Speaker considers the possibility that there are more than one author. So, at first glance, (20a-c) don't presuppose the uniqueness of the referent of the DD. It is even the contrary, and Coppock & Beaver claim that constructions in (20) illustrate an anti-uniqueness effect. But if we analyze these examples more cautiously, the uniqueness of the DD *the sole author* is not problematic in itself. In one sense, it is even tautological: to be the sole N means to be unique as N. What is problematic is the existence of *the sole author*: (20b) asserts that there is no author, but only co-authors, and (20c) addresses the issue of the existence of an author.

Corblin (2001) provides other examples, in French, which challenge the uniqueness presupposition usually attributed to DDs. Examples (21) are easily interpretable and they imply that Pierre has two friends, and not only one.

(21)   a. Un ami de Pierre vendit sa voiture à un autre de ses amis. L'ami de Pierre
           partait au Canada et ne pouvait emporter sa voiture.
           A friend of Pierre sold his car to another of his friends. Pierre's friend was
           moving to Canada and could not take his car with him.
        b. Un ami de Pierre vendit sa voiture à un autre de ses amis. L'ami de Pierre
           en fut satisfait.
           A friend of Pierre sold his car to another of his friends. Pierre's friend was
           satisfied with it.

Finally, all examples of weak definites listed in §2 also challenge the uniqueness presupposition.

To account for all these examples, we assume, with Coppock and Beaver[4], that DDs don't trigger uniqueness presupposition, but only a weaker

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[4] They claim that « Both the definite article and the indefinite article are fundamentally identity functions on predicates, without any existence implication. The existence component of a definite or indefinite description comes into play when it is used referentially [...] The two articles differ only in that the definite article presupposes weak uniqueness. » (ibid: 2)

presupposition, in which uniqueness is dependent from existence. But we recast their proposal, in order to account for the case of weak DDs, and to introduce the difference between types and tokens. So we substitute to (22) the formulations given in (23): (23a) and (23b) are equivalent, (23b) is the contrapositive of (23a).[5]

(22)   The DD 'the N' presupposes that if there is a N, then there is only one N.

(23)   a. The DD 'the N' presupposes that if N refers to a token, then if there is a
            N, there is only one N.
         b. The DD 'the N' presupposes that if there are more than one N, then N
            doesn't refer to a token.

4.2 The derivation of weak and strong readings

We assume that weak and strong DDs are not associated with two different syntactic analyses: in both cases, the *of*-complement modifies the common noun and the whole is specified by the definite determiner. We also assume that there is only one definite determiner, which conveys the same meaning and the same presupposition. Our claim is that the difference between weak and strong readings comes from the noun interpretation. In contexts where there is more than one token which satisfies the property denoted by N' (N or N and its complement), N' has to be interpreted as expression which refers to a type. So to speak, it is a case of coercion.

Strong readings correspond to cases where the existence of the referent of the DD is given in context by the assertion of the event. Since the event exists, the various participants of this event, which are realized as arguments in the sentence, also exist. The uniqueness effect directly derives from the combination of the assertion of existence with the weak uniqueness presupposition given in (23).

Weak readings correspond to cases where there isn't a unique token which the DD can refer to. The weak interpretation results from the application of the weak uniqueness presupposition in such a context. Since it is well-known that a car has more than one wing, a woman has more than one arm and an intersection has more than one corner, we can derive from (23b) that the DDs in (24) don't refer to tokens. The only way to interpret them is as type-referring expressions.

(24)   a. I damaged the wing of a car / of your car.
         b. Marie s'est cassé le bras
            'Mary broke her arm'
         c. I usually had breakfast at the corner of a major intersection.

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[5] (23a) is a formula of type 'p → (q → r)'. Consequently, its contrapositive is of type '¬(q → r) → ¬p' which is equivalent to '(q ∧ ¬r) → ¬p'. Since 'q ∧ ¬r' means that there is a N and there isn't only one N, (23b) doesn't tell anything about cases where there is no N. The change made in presuppositional content triggered by a DD doesn't affect the case where there is no token N, which is analyzed as a usual case of presupposition failure.

Various consequences follow from the present proposal. First, in contexts where weak readings appear, definites and indefinites may alternate without any change in meaning. The point is that what is true for a type is also true for at least one token which instantiates that type. So if the sentence including a weak DD is true, the same sentence in which an indefinite description replaces the DD will be true, too.

Second, weak DDs have a flavor of genericity. Indeed, in contexts where weak readings appear, there are more than one token which satisfies the DD and the definite determiner is used to shift from tokens to the type which groups tokens together and presents them as indistinguishable. In order to build a type, the Speaker erases the differences between the various tokens, she makes as if they were irrelevant. The same process is used to shift from tokens to kinds: a kind groups together tokens whose differences are deleted to highlight the property they all have in common: their belonging to the kind. Types and kinds share the property to have instances, to be structured in taxonomies, and not in lattices. But the difference is that kinds are built in the lexicon, while types are built in the syntax.

Third, one can observe that there are other contexts in which a definite description is used to refer both to a type and to several tokens. This is the case of NPs built with *same* as in (25). (25) is ambiguous, and may mean either that there is one T-shirt (as token) that John and Mary wear successively, or that they wear two different T-shirts (as tokens) and that they are two tokens of a same type of T-shirt.

(25)   John and Mary wear the same T-shirt.

And finally, it appears that contexts where weak DDs occur are exactly contexts where the principle « maximize presupposition » applies[6]. Each type, exactly as each kind, is a maximal element since it refers to a singleton. The use of a definite determiner is obligatory because the use of an indefinite would give rise to the anti-presupposition that there are more than one referent for the DD, which would imply that the DD doesn't refer to a type. We can draw a parallel between the contrasts given in (26a), due to Heim (1991) and (26b). The indefinite description in (26b) is out with a type-interpretation. It can only be interpreted as referring to a token, with a partitive meaning corresponding to « one of the students of a particular linguist ».

(26)   a. * a father of the victim / the father of the victim
         b. * a student of a linguist / the student of a linguist

5. Conclusion
To summarize, we have argued for two main ideas: (i) that the definite article only contributes a weak uniqueness presupposition, where uniqueness

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[6] *Maximize Presupposition* is a pragmatic principle according to which among the expressions which convey the same asserted content, but differ only with respect to their presupposition, the Speaker has to choose that expression which has the strongest presupposition compatible with the context and the common knowledge (cf Heim 1991, Schlenker 2012, Amsili & Beyssade 2010).

depends on the existence; (ii) that weak DDs are used to refer or to name types.

We have shown that the definite determiner is licensed (and even often obligatory) in contexts the Speaker wants to shift from tokens to types. She presents the differences between tokens as irrelevant and uses the noun in order to refer to a type.

The weak uniqueness presupposition hypothesis accounts for the fact that strong definites presuppose existence and uniqueness, that weak definites don't presuppose uniqueness of tokens, and that attributive definites (in predicate position) don't presuppose existence.

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Abstract

While it is usually assumed that definite descriptions presuppose the existence and the uniqueness for their referent, there are lots of counter-examples, in which either the existence or the uniqueness isn't presupposed. Among them are weak definites, which can be divided into two classes: (i) the short weak definites such as *the train* in the VP *take the train* and (ii) the long weak definites such as *the student of a linguist* in the sentence *this data comes from the student of a linguist*. A unified analysis of these two classes is proposed, based on the claim that nouns in weak definite descriptions refer to types and that the definite determiner triggers only a weak uniqueness presupposition, in wich the uniqueness depends on the existence.

Keywords

Definite description, indefinite, token, type, uniqueness, presupposition

Résumé (French)

Alors qu'on dit en général que les descriptions définies présupposent l'existence et l'unicité de leur référent, il existe un nombre important de contre-exemples, pour lesquels soit l'existence, soit l'unicité du référent n'est pas présupposée. C'est le cas en particulier des définis faibles, dont on montre qu'ils se divisent en deux classes : les courts comme dans *prendre le train* et les longs comme dans *Cela vient de l'étudiant d'un linguiste*. Nous proposons une analyse unifiée de ces deux classes de définis faibles qui repose sur l'idée que le nom réfère à un type et que le déterminant défini ne déclenche qu'une présupposition d'unicité faible, où l'unicité du référent est conditionnée à son existence.

Mots-clés

Description définie, indéfini, token, type, unicité, présupposition