

WHY ROSE IS THE ROSE

Background: In some languages and dialects, proper names in argument positions must appear with a definite article (European Portuguese (1), Pima, some Italian, Spanish, Scandinavian and German dialects, Catalan, Tagalog, etc.). The standard approach to this fact (Longobardi (1994, 1999 et seq.)) has been to treat this so-called *preproprial definite article* as semantically vacuous.

Evidence to the contrary: Cross-linguistic evidence shows that proper names are underlyingly predicates, as common nouns are. Evidence comes from naming constructions (2), where proper names are Case-marked as predicates: either via dedicated predicate case-marking or via Case-doubling, which is a characteristic property of small clauses. The former effect is instantiated by Russian, where predicates are marked Instrumental (Bailyn and Rubin (1991), Bailyn and Citko (1999), etc.), Arabic (Accusative), Hungarian (3) (Dative), etc. The latter is exemplified by Latin and Modern Greek: Case-marking on both NPs in naming (4) and small clause (5) constructions is Accusative with an active ECM verb and Nominative when it is passivized. Further support can be drawn from overt copulas in Korean naming constructions (6). Finally, in languages and dialects where proper names in argument positions must appear with a preproprial definite article, it is omitted in naming contexts, unless the proper name is modified (7). We assimilate this to the known fact that definite NP predicates can lose the article (8) if the NP predicate is inherently true of one individual only (Stowell (1989), Levin (1993)).

Argument proper names: If proper names can be predicates, then in argument positions they are (definite) descriptions (Frege (1983), Russell (1911), Searle (1958), Kneale (1962), Barwise and Cooper (1981), Geurts (1997), etc.), and the preproprial article cannot be viewed as vacuous.

The puzzle: What is the licensing mechanism for the lack of a definite article with proper names in most European languages? And if the preproprial definite article is not vacuous in some languages (1), why is it absent in others?

Proposal: We suggest that the ability to be definite without a definite article is a morphological property of certain (classes of) nouns, not all of which are usually regarded as proper names. In other words, in some languages some nouns can “absorb” the definite article.

Evidence: Proper names often belong to a special morpho-syntactic class, as evidenced by the fact that (a) they have special Case-marking properties in German, Yiddish and Dutch, and (b) the definite article often takes a special form with proper names (Catalan, Northern Norwegian, Tagalog, etc.). We consider the ability to “absorb” the article to be essentially the same as the ability to select a special preproprial article – interestingly, when a proper name is modified, the “missing” definite article reappears (9) and the preproprial article takes on the regular form (7b).

Syntax, morphology, or both? The effect of modification suggests that the ability to license a special definite article or article omission is syntactically conditioned. That the constraint is also morphological is shown by certain word-internal intervention effects. In Swedish, proper names normally appear without a preproprial article, except in hypocoristic uses (10) in some dialects. Inflectional morphology may also act as an intervener, as shown by the fact that pluralized proper names (including *pluralia tantum* names) can force the definite article (11), except when the name is syntactically singular (Borer (2005)). Furthermore, in some Italian dialects, only masculine proper names can be bare. Since gender is a property of a lexical item, the ability to absorb the article is presumably determined by the lexical item. Finally, the fact that some proper names in a lexical category (e.g. country names) may require the definite article (*the Sudan, the Gambia*), while the rest don't, also shows that the ability to “absorb” the definite article is a property of a particular lexical item, which may or may not be generalized to a larger class.

We will use the morpho-syntactic mechanism of m-merger (Matushansky (2005)) to formalize “article absorption”, and provide an analysis for items with mixed properties of article omission, such as days of the week (*this Sunday*). We will show that the alternative analysis (Longobardi (1994, 1999 et seq.)) cannot account for article absorption and runs into difficulties with examples like (9a). Finally, we will argue against a “null definite article” alternative.

- (1) O presidente nomeou a Maria ministra dos transportes
 the-Msg president named-3sg the-Fsg Maria minister of-the-pl transports
The president named Mary the minister of transportation.
- (2) Call/name/christen/baptize me Al. English: naming
- (3) a la'ny- om-at Mari-nak neveztem el Hungarian
 the daughter 1sg-Acc **Mary-Dat** named-1sg PREVERB
I named my daughter Mary.
- (4) a. Filium meum Lucium voco. verb of naming
 son-Acc my-Acc Lucius-Acc call-1sg
I call my son Lucius.
- b. Meus filius vocatur Lucius passive
 my-Nom son-Nom call-Pass-3sg Lucius-Nom
My son is called Lucius.
- (5) a. Ciceronem clarum habent. SC
 Cicero-Acc famous-Acc consider/hold
They consider Cicero famous.
- b. Cicero clarus habetur SC (passive)
 Cicero-Nom famous-Nom consider/hold-Pass
Cicero is considered famous.
- (6) ku-nun caki-uy ttal-lul Miran-i-la-ko pwull-ess-ta. Korean
 he-Top self-Gen daughter-Acc Miran-be-Assertive-Quot call-Past-Decl
He called his daughter Miran.
- (7) a. Va resultar que *(en) Joanet el van anomenar (*en) Jonathan
 go-3sg turn-out that the John-DIM him go-3sg name the Jonathan
It turned out that Johnny had been named Jonathan.
- b. Li diuen *(el/*en) Lord Nelson francés.
 him call-3sg the-PrPr/the Lord Nelson French
They call him the French Lord Nelson.
- (8) a. The Senate nominated/elected/declared Caesar consul. nomination
 b. The queen appointed her lover treasurer of the realm.
- (9) a. *(la) Roma antica di Cesare Italian
 the Rome ancient of Caesar
 b. *(the) Rome of Caesar English (some modifiers don't require the article)
- (10) a. Birgitta – Gittan (Gitta-the)
 b. Margareta – Maggan (Magg-the)
- (11) a. the Clintons
 b. the Alps, the Hebrides

Selected references

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