

A new kind of definite: Uniqueness, salience, and the Bulu determiner *-tè*

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Overview: Definite NPs are generally assumed to encode uniqueness implications, although there is disagreement about how to characterize the relevant domain of uniqueness (Russell 1905, Kadmon 1990, Roberts 2003, Elbourne 2013). In Bulu (Bantu, Cameroon), definite NPs with the determiner *-tè* display a different pattern of acceptability across contexts than any type of English definite NP. In this paper based on original fieldwork, I argue that differences in acceptability exist because NPs with *-tè* encode uniqueness in a novel domain: *the set of discourse referents (DRs) that are salient to the addressee*. I develop a presuppositional account of the uniqueness implication of *-tè* and propose including sets of salient DRs, relativized to each interlocutor, in current models of a discourse context.

NPs with *-tè* vs. English definites: The use of an NP with *-tè* requires a weakly familiar, unique antecedent (Author et. al. to appear), like an English definite (Heim 1982, Roberts 2003). However, NPs with *-tè* have different felicity conditions than any kind of English definite NP, as shown in (1)-(6). (1)-(2) differentiate NPs with *-tè* from English definite descriptions. Depending on one's theory of definiteness, the uniqueness domain of a definite description is assumed to be individuals in the world (Russell), individuals familiar to the speaker (Kadmon), weakly familiar DRs (Roberts), or individuals in a minimal situation (Elbourne). The sun is unique in all of these domains, and *the sun* is generally acceptable out of the blue. However, uniqueness in these domains is not sufficient to license the use of *vïän tè* 'the sun.' (The agreement prefix on *-tè* is often null.)

(1) *Context: Abondo is sitting on a bus when a stranger sits down beside him. The man says*

- a. #*vïän tè wáfàj dön* b. {The sun/?that sun/#it} is bright today.
sun TE shines today (where *it* is interpreted as the sun)

Intended: 'The sun is bright today.'

A context in which *vïän tè* 'the sun' is acceptable out of the blue is given in (2).

(2) *Context: minimally different from (1), in that the stranger opens a curtain to let in sunlight*

- a. *vïän tè wáfàj dön* = (1a) b. {The sun/?that sun/#it} is bright today.

(2) shows that *vïän tè* 'the sun' is acceptable when the speaker knows that the sun is perceptually prominent for the addressee. Following Roberts (2003), perceptual prominence is just one factor that increases the salience of a DR. Others include topicality, relevance to an individual's goals, recency of mention, and grammatical function in previous utterances. (1)-(2) show that an NP with *-tè* differs from an English definite description by requiring an antecedent that is salient, not merely unique.

(3)-(4) differentiate NPs with *-tè* from English pronouns, which presuppose the existence of a unique maximally salient antecedent (Roberts 2003, 2005).

(3) *Context: I say to you:* Yesterday I saw two men and a woman at the farm. One of the men had black hair. The other man had white hair. The man that had black hair was white. The man that had white hair was black.

- a. #*fàm tè èmbá ékòbò fùlàsí* b. {?The man/that man/he} was speaking French.
man TE AUX speaking French.

'The man [just mentioned] was speaking French.'

In (3), two DRs satisfying the descriptive content of *fàm tè* 'the man,' are introduced. Both are being discussed in the discourse and therefore are salient, and *fàm tè* 'the man' is unacceptable. In contrast, *he* is acceptable, taking as its antecedent the maximally salient DR corresponding to the subject of the preceding sentence. (3) shows that uniqueness among maximally salient DRs (i.e. via maximal salience) is not sufficient to license the use of an NP with *tè*.

As in (3), in (4) two DRs satisfying the descriptive content of *fàm tè* 'the man' are entailed to exist by the context. However, only one is under discussion. Both *fàm tè* 'the man' and *he* are acceptable.

- (4) *Context: I say to you: Yesterday I saw two men and a woman at the farm. One of the men had black hair.*
- a. **fàm tè** èmbá ékòbò fùlàsí = (3a) b. {?The man/that man/he} was speaking French.

Although the context entails the existence of two DRs satisfying the descriptive content of *fàm tè* ‘the man,’ only one is the topic of the discourse and thereby salient. That DR is the maximally salient DR compatible with the descriptive content of *he*, and it is also unique among all salient DRs in satisfying the descriptive content of *fàm tè* ‘the man.’

(5)-(6) illustrate the importance of an individual’s goals for the salience of a DR relative to that individual. In both examples, the kind ‘stump’ is mentioned in the context. The acceptability of *ékùt é-tè* ‘the stump’ varies with the relevance of stumps to the addressee’s goals. Contrasting (5a) and (6a) is the point here; the (b) examples are additional evidence of divergence from English definites.

- (5) *Context: Maliki is telling me about what he does at his house. He cuts down trees, he digs up stumps, he mows the grass, he plants bushes, he rakes leaves, he digs up rocks, etc. I say: Yesterday I cut down a tree.*

- a. #**ékùt é-tè** émbà ànón b. {The stump/?that stump/#it} was big.
 stump AGR-TE was big (where *it* is interpreted as the stump)
 ‘The stump was big.’

- (6) *Context: Sara is a photographer and she is making a book of pictures of tree stumps. Fred tells her: Yesterday I cut down a tree.*

- a. **ékùt é-tè** éná ànón b. {The stump/?that stump/#it} is big.
 stump AGR-TE is big (where *it* is interpreted as the stump)
 ‘The stump is big.’

(1)-(6) show that an NP with *-tè* requires a unique antecedent among the DRs salient to the addressee.

Analysis: Following the conceptualizations of context in Stalnaker (1978), Lewis (1979), Kamp (1981), and Heim (1982), a context c is modeled as a tuple consisting, minimally, of four elements: $\langle I, C, D, t \rangle$, where I is the set of interlocutors, including at least a speaker, s , and an addressee, a ; C is the common ground, a set of propositions; D is the set of weakly familiar DRs; and t is a time. Following Stalnaker, C contains information about the (purported) belief states of the interlocutors. To that is added information about what is salient to each interlocutor, i.e. the DRs she is paying attention to. *Sal* defines a relation between an interlocutor and a DR entailed to be salient to that interlocutor. Salience/attention depends on at least the factors discussed above.

- (7) Given a context c , $Sal(i \in D_c, \alpha \in I_c) \leftrightarrow C_c$ entails that i is salient to α at t_c

The meaning of *-tè* in (8a) is a function from a context, c , and a property, P , denoted by the common noun argument of *-tè*, to the unique DR in c that is entailed to have property P and to be salient to the addressee. The felicity condition associated with *-tè*, that its antecedent is unique among DRs salient to the addressee, is given in (8b) and represented in (8a) by the ι operator.

- (8) a. $-tè =_{def} \lambda c. \lambda P. \iota i \in D_c [P(i) \wedge Sal(i, a_c)]$
 b. The use of an NP with *-tè* is felicitous in c iff
 $\exists i \in D_c [P(i) \wedge Sal(i, a_c) \wedge \forall j \in D_c [(P(j) \wedge Sal(j, a_c)) \rightarrow j = i]]$

Analyzing the meaning of Bulu *-tè* requires incorporating sets of salient, weakly familiar DRs into current models of context. No extant theory of definiteness can provide an empirically adequate analysis without this addition (or an analogous one in terms of situations). The analysis also supports the claim that the unifying feature of definites is a uniqueness implication, and argues that crosslinguistic differences between definites are due to differences in uniqueness domains. Most importantly, it shows that languages partition the referential space differently—that felicity conditions for definites, pronouns, etc. are language specific rather than crosslinguistically uniform.