The third person is present: An argument from determiners in generic statements

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1 Introduction

- Third person is the absence of person/has no person features (Kayne 2000, Adger & Harbour 2007, Béjar & Řezáč 2003, Harley & Ritter 2002, Kratzer 2009)

- Third person is fully represented (Nevins 2007, 2011, Harbour 2016, Ackema & Neeleman 2018, Grishin 2023)

Main point

A "distance" effect with determiners in generic expressions supports the view that third person differs from the absence of any person specification.

- Difference between an overt determiner and no (or covert) determiner is indicative of presence vs. absence of person features due to concomitant semantic effect.

2 Some background on generic expressions

2.1 Definite plural in Romance vs. bare plural in Germanic

- Generic predication involves semantically a kind as its argument. Kind readings are compositionally constructed by applying an ι-operator to a plural nominal (Chierchia 1998, Dayal 2004a, Longobardi 1994).

- Languages differ with respect to the expression of kinds/generics.

- In Romance (Chierchia 1998), but also Greek, the definite determiner must appear overtly in generic statements (Alexiadou et al. 2007, Lazaridou-Chatzigoga & Alexiadou 2019).

(1) a. *(Oi) glossólogoi agapáne tis glósses.   *Greek*
     the linguists love.3PL the languages
     'Linguists love languages.'

     b. *(Las) linguistas aman los idiomas.   *Spanish*
     the linguists love.3PL the languages
     'Linguists love languages.'

- In contrast, in Germanic, an overt definite determiner is generally not used to express genericity (but cf. Farkas & De Swart 2007, Alexiadou 2022).

(2) a. Linguistinnen lieben Sprachen.   *German*
     linguists love.PL languages
     'Linguists love languages.'

     b. Linguists love languages.   *English*

2.2 Optional definite plurals in Germanic

German

- For German, it is reported that an overt determiner is optionally possible in generic expressions (3) (Brugger 1994, Longobardi 1994, Krifka et al. 1995, Dayal 2004b, Schaden 2012).

(3) (Die) Bieber bauen Dämme.   *German*
     the beavers build dams
     'Beavers build dams.'   (Longobardi 1994: 653)

- The empirical results from experimental investigations are however inconclusive: Barton et al. (2015) seem to support the optionality, Czypionka & Kupisch (2019) point towards bare plurals as the single option.

English

- For English, it has likewise been claimed that the definite article is an option that becomes obligatory under certain conditions (Farkas & De Swart 2007, Alexiadou 2022), like with de-adjectival nouns (4).

(4)   *(The) slow are left behind. (Alexiadou 2022: 34)

3   The 'distance' effect with definite plurals

English

- Acton (2019) observes for English that definite plurals trigger a "distance" effect where the speaker "deemphasiz[es] their membership in the group" or "emphasiz[es] their nonmembership" (Acton 2019: 38). In (5b), the definite article therefore seems to trigger an additional inference distancing the speaker from the kind.

(5)   *The distance effect with definite plurals* (Acton 2019: 37, 51)

   a.   Americans love cars. ↝ *The speaker may or may not consider themself to be an American.*

   b.   The Americans love cars. ↝ *The speaker is not an American or wishes to express distance from Americans.*

German

- For German, Driemel et al. (2022) tested speakers' preference for different DPs (definite plurals, bare plurals, definite singulars, indefinite singulars) in a variety of generic contexts.

- They found that in all but one context bare plurals are considered the best option (contra Barton et al. 2015 and pro Czypionka & Kupisch 2019's findings).

- In the context that suggests speaker distance, the definite plural and the bare plural are equally good candidates (6).

(6)   *Generic, speaker distance context:*
There is a place in town where people meet for a drink and a chat after work. As there are federal elections coming up soon, a lot of the discussions and debates revolve around politics. Yesterday, one guest seemed very upset and continuously complained that "voting is meaningless because ...

   a.   Politiker   tun doch sowieso, was sie   wollen nach der Wahl.
        politicians do PRT anyway what they want   after the election
        'Politicians do whatever they want after the election anyway.'
        ↝ *The speaker may or may not consider themself a politican.*

   b.   Die Politiker   tun doch sowieso, was sie   wollen nach der Wahl.
        the politicians do PRT anyway what they want   after the election
        'The politicians do whatever they want after the election anyway.'
        ↝ *The speaker is not a politician or wants to express distance from politicians.*

Greek and Spanish

- No comparable 'distance' effect is observed. Generic statements with definite plurals always leave open whether the speaker is or is not a member of the group denoted by the plural DP.

(7)   a.   Oi glossólogoi agapáne tis glósses. *Greek*
           the linguists   love.3PL the languages
           'Linguists love languages.'
           ↝ *The speaker may or may not consider herself a linguist.*

      b.   Las linguistas aman   los idiomas. *Spanish*
           the linguists   love.3PL the languages
           'Linguists love languages.'
           ↝ *The speaker may or may not consider herself a linguist.*

Summary: In languages that generally employ bare plurals in generic expressions, the use of the definite article gives rise to the implication that the speaker is not or does not wish to identify themself as a member of the kind.

4   An analysis

4.1   In a nutshell

- We suggest that the distance inference arises from the fact that the definite determiner is explicitly specified for third person in German and English whereas the zero determiner is underspecified (8).

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(8) a. *der, die, das, …* ↔ [+DEF, 3rd person, NUMBER, GENDER]

  b. *the* ↔ [+DEF, 3rd person]

  c. Ø ↔ [+DEF]

- Kinds can freely combine with Ds that bear person information or not.

- This leads to two different outcomes.

  1. If they combine with 3rd person information, at PF this will lead to a realization where the definite determiner is present because it realizes 3rd person and definiteness and is thereby more specific than the zero-determiner (9).

(9)
```
            DP
          /    \
         D      NP
    ⎡ +DEF    ⎤    /\
    ⎣ 3rd person⎦  Americans
      �  ✖         [+PL]
     the   Ø
```
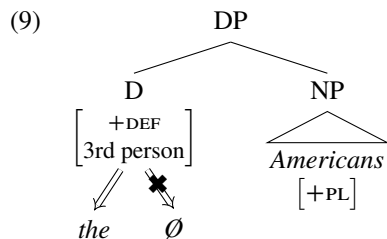
  2. If the kind does not combine with a D that bears person features, then the zero realization of D is inserted (10). The overt version no longer fulfils the Subset Principle.

(10)
```
            DP
          /    \
         D      NP
     [ +DEF ]    /\
      ✖  sd    Americans
     the   Ø     [+PL]
```
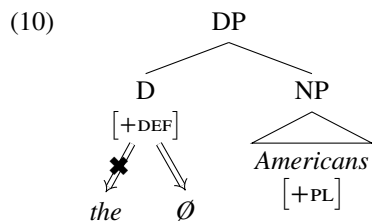
- At LF, the presence of 3rd person features will be interpreted as negating the alternative 1st and 2nd person interpretations. The absence of 3rd person will leave open the actual person interpretation of the DP.

4.2 Cross-linguistic variation

- There are languages, like Greek, Spanish and Italian, where the determiner is always overt and does not trigger a distancing effect (11).

(11) a. *(Oi) glossólogoi agapáne tis glósses.*   *Greek*
      the linguists   love.3PL the languages
      'Linguists love languages.'

  b. *(Las) linguistas aman   las idiomas.*   *Spanish*
      the   linguists love.3PL the languages
      'Linguists love languages.'

- Interestingly, these languages differ from English and German in another domain, namely so-called adnominal pronoun constructions (APCs) and unagreement. While Greek and Spanish require a definite article in APCs (12a, b) and allow unagreement (13a, b), German and English show a complementary distribution of definite determiner and personal pronoun in APCs (12c, d) and German lacks unagreement (13c).
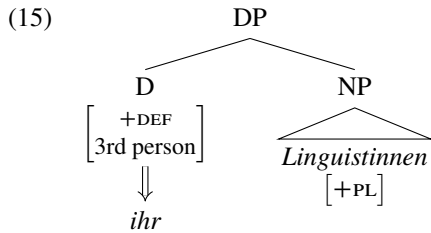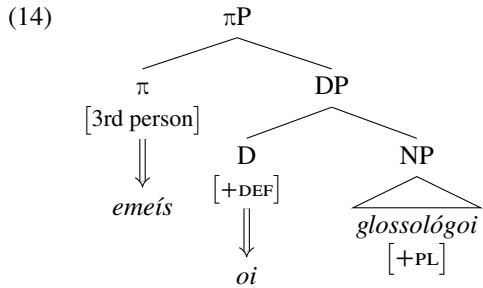
(12) *Adnominal pronoun constructions*

  a. Emeís *(oi) glossológoi agapáme tis glósses.   *Greek*
      we   the linguists   love.1PL the languages
      'We linguists love languages.'

  b. Vosotras *(las) linguistas amáis   las idiomas.   *Spanish*
      you   the   linguists love.2PL the languages
      'You linguists love languages.'

  c. Ihr (#die) Linguistinnen liebt   Sprachen.   *German*
      you the   linguists   love.2PL languages
      'You linguists love languages.'

  d. We (#the) linguists love languages.   *English*

(13) *Unagreement*

  a. Oi glossológoi agapáme tis glósses.   *Greek*
      the linguists   love.1PL the languages
      'We linguists love languages.'

  b. Las linguistas amáis   las idiomas.   *Spanish*
      the linguistas love.2PL the languages
      'You linguists love languages.'

c. *Die Linguistinnen liebt Sprachen. *German*
   the linguists love.2PL languages
   'You linguists love languages.'

- Höhn (2016) argues that this distribution of APCs and unagreement derives from the same source: In Greek and Spanish (and similar languages), person and definiteness are realized on distinct heads (14). In German and English (and similar languages) in contrast, these features must be realized in the same head (15).

(14)
```
              πP
           ╱      ╲
          π        DP
    [3rd person]  ╱  ╲
         ⇓       D    NP
       emeís  [+DEF]  ╱╲
                ⇓  glossológoi
                oi   [+PL]
```

(15)
```
              DP
           ╱      ╲
          D        NP
      ⎡ +DEF   ⎤   ╱  ╲
      ⎣3rd person⎦ Linguistinnen
          ⇓        [+PL]
         ihr
```

- We argue that this is also what gives rise to the split in the occurrence of the definite determiner in generics.

- In languages like Greek and Spanish, the definite determiner is not specified for (third) person (16). In fact, it cannot be as these features are hosted outside of D and are therefore not accessible for a D-element.

(16) a. *oi* ↔ [+DEF] *Greek*
   b. *los, las* ↔ [+DEF] *Spanish*

- Languages that do not allow unagreement and show a complementarity between determiners and pronouns in APCs should also exhibit a distance effect when the article appears in generics (which it generally shouldn't, unless there is a special overt form that is underspecified for person features).

- **Summary:** Kinds are person-free. They combine with person feature bearing heads in the syntax. Languages may vary (i) in whether they bundle person and definiteness on D or not, and (ii) whether the lexical item(s) for the determiner is specified for (third) person or not.

4.3 Italian

- The two points of variation give rise to the four possible combinations in (17).

(17) Possible combinations of feature bundling and lexical specification

	$\pi_{[\pm\text{AUTH},\pm\text{PART}]}\ D_{[\pm\text{DEF}]}$	$D_{[\pm\text{DEF},\pm\text{AUTH},\pm\text{PART}]}$
DET↔[+DEF]	Greek, Spanish	Italian
DET↔[+DEF,−AUTH,−PART]	—	English, German

- The lower left cell is systematically excluded by the Subset Principle. The determiner will always have a superset of the features of the D-head that it would have to be inserted into.

- Nothing, however, precludes a language in the upper right cell. In fact, we argue that Italian instantiates this state of affairs.

- Like Greek and Spanish, Italian requires an overt determiner in generic expressions (18) whose presence does not trigger a distancing effect.

(18) *(I) linguisti amano le lingue. *Italian*
   the linguists love.3PL the languages
   'Linguists love languages.'

- Like English and German, Italian lacks unagreement (19a) and does not allow pronouns and the definite determiner to co-occur in APCs (19b).

(19) a. *I linguisti amiamo le lingue. *Italian*
     the linguists love.1PL the languages
     'We linguists love languages.'

   b. Noi *(i) linguisti amiamo le lingue. *Italian*
     we the linguists love.1PL the languages
     'We linguists love languages.'

4

- (18) and (19) indicate that person and definiteness are bundled on D in Italian, like in German and English. We can then account for the genericity data by assuming that the definite determiners *i/gli, le* are underspecified for person (20).

(20)   *i/gli, le* $\leftrightarrow$ [+DEF]

5   The argument for third person

5.1   The interpretation of person features

- φ-features, including person, have been argued to be interpreted (if interpreted) as a presupposition on the reference of an individual-denoting expression (among others Cooper 1979, 1983, Heim 2008).

(21)   a. $[\![1]\!]^c = \lambda x_e$: x includes the speaker$_c$. x

b. $[\![2]\!]^c = \lambda x_e$: x includes the hearer$_c$ and excludes the speaker$_c$. x

c. $[\![3]\!]^c = \lambda x_e$: x excludes both speaker$_c$ and hearer$_c$. x

- There are various proposals for the featural representation of person and the concomitant meaning of the features (e.g. Zwicky 1977, Noyer 1992, Harley & Ritter 2002, Sauerland 2003, 2008, McGinnis 2005, Ackema & Neeleman 2013, 2018, Harbour 2016). We will adopt the privative features AUTHOR and PARTICIPANT with the semantics in (22), where '$\sqsubseteq$' encodes the relation 'included in' (cf. Sauerland & Bobaljik 2022).

(22)   a. $[\![\text{AUTHOR}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. author(c) $\sqsubseteq x$

b. $[\![\text{PARTICIPANT}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. author(c) $\sqsubseteq x \vee$ addressee(c) $\sqsubseteq x$

c. $[\![\text{PERSON}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. x

- A person-encoding head would thus bear [PARTICIPANT] for 2nd person and [AUTHOR] for 1st person.

- We assume that when PERSON combines within an NP it must be presupposed.

- So far, the presence of [PARTICIPANT] does not exclude the possibility that the author is included. While that can be achieved by the principle of presupposition maximization (Heim 1991, Sauerland 2003), we assume grammatical exhaustification **exh**.

(23)   a. $[\![\text{exh AUTHOR}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. author(c) $\sqsubseteq x$

b. $[\![\text{exh PARTICIPANT}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. (author(c) $\sqsubseteq x \vee$ addressee(c) $\sqsubseteq x) \wedge \neg$ author(c $\sqsubseteq x$

c. $[\![\text{exh PERSON}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. $\neg$ author(c) $\sqsubseteq x \wedge \neg$ addressee(c) $\sqsubseteq x$

- Absence of either feature thereby implies that neither the author nor the addressee are included in the referent of an individual-denoting expression. Hence 3rd person is represented as the absence of any person features.

5.2   Default third person

If exh always applied as above, person marking would be end up to render certain meanings ineffable:

(24)   Every person including you and me loves their mother.

How can *their* be bound if third person excludes author and addressee?

(25)   Alternatives can be pruned from an occurrence **exh** if a meaning is otherwise ineffable. (Elliott & Sauerland 2019, Elliott et al. 2022).

If no-person is furthermore available, it should exclude exhaustified alternatives author, participant and person.

(26) $[\![\text{exh NO-PERSON}]\!]^c = \lambda x$. $\neg \ldots$

- Above we proposed that the distance effect with definite plurals (as opposed to bare plurals) in German and English is a consequence of the explicit specification of the definite determiner for 3rd person (excluding the author and addressee).

- We therefore argue for a meaningful distinction between the presence of the feature [PERSON] (on definite plurals) and its absence (on bare plurals).

(27)   a.   *we* $\leftrightarrow$ [+DEF, PERSON, AUTHOR]

b.   *you* $\leftrightarrow$ [+DEF, PERSON, PARTICIPANT]

c.   *the* $\leftrightarrow$ [+DEF, PERSON]

d. $\emptyset$ $\leftrightarrow$ [+DEF]

- It therefore unambiguously signals the presence of [PERSON]. Since none of the elements with a stronger presupposition (*we, you*) are used, according to presupposition maximization their presuppositions are not fulfilled. That is, neither the author nor the addressee are included in the referent

(28)   [DP tree]   ⤳ author, addressee ⊈ ⟦Americans⟧

DP → D, NP
D: [+DEF, PERSON] ⟹ *the*
NP: *Americans* [+PL]
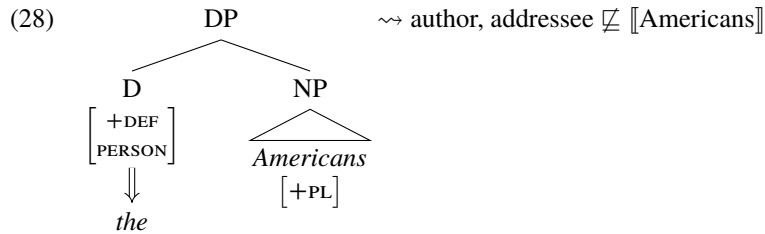
- The absence of [PERSON], however, blocks insertion of the definite determiner on the PF side of the derivation and prevents presupposition-based reasoning on the LF side.

(29)   [DP tree]   ⤳̸ author, addressee ⊈ ⟦Americans⟧

DP → D, NP
D: [+DEF] ⟹ Ø
NP: *Americans* [+PL]
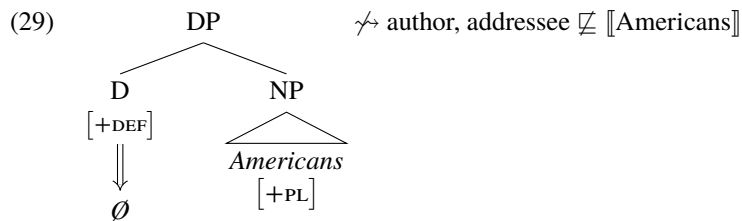
Cross-linguistic differences

- In Greek, the overt definite article does not compete with the silent one as bare plurals are not an option for the expression of genericity.

(30)   a.   I   ghates   ine   aneksartita   zoa.   *Greek*
            the   cats   are   independent   animals
            'The cats are independent animals.'   (Alexiadou et al. 2007)
       b.   *Ghates ine aneksartita zoa.

- Thus, in Greek bare plurals do not participate in structural complexity considerations → **exh** applies to both the definite article and the plural nominal excluding the possibility for the definite article to encode person.

(31)   Prediction for Greek
       exh [the [PL ghates]]

- Our prediction in (31) is accounted for under (30) as kind-denoting nominal in Greek obligatorily surfaces with the definite article which means that the article in Greek has to be in the scope of **exh**.

- We furthermore predict that in Greek all nouns surfacing with the definite article are underspecified for person.

- This semantic prediction neatly correlates with syntax.

- We have proposed here that English has on its disposal two alternatives that compete for insertion: an overt definite article and a null article. In Greek, however, such a competition does not emerge.

- This is precisely the stance of Alexiadou (2014), who building on Alexopoulou & Folli (2019), provides syntactic evidence for availability of null Ds in English and obligatory overtness of D in Greek on the basis of the availability of multiple determiners.

6   Summary

- Realization of determiners in generic statements provides evidence for the existence and representation of third person.

- In languages that do not employ an overt determiner in generic statements (English, German), definite articles are specified for [PERSON] compete with null underspecified articles. As a result, an overt realization of the determiner in these languages triggers distance effects.

- In contrast, in languages that definite plurals in generics (Greek, Spanish), determiners are not specified for [PERSON], which explains the absence of distance effects.

- Third person crucially differs from the absence of the [PERSON] feature.

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