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

Introduction. The representation of 3rd person is a matter of vibrant debate in the literature. While it is generally considered the absence of person, recent proposals provide both syntactic and semantic evidence for the need of the third person in the system of ϕ-features (Nevins 2007, Nevins 2011; Harbour 2016 Ackema and Neeleman 2018). We present an argument in favor of this view based on a recently noted effect of an alternation between the presence/absence of a definite determiner in generic statements (Acton 2019, Driemel et al. 2022).

Data. Generic predication involves semantically a kind as its argument. Kind readings are compositionally constructed by applying a definite determiner to a plural nominal (Chierchia 1998, Dayal 2004, Longobardi 1994). Languages differ in realization of this determiner. While in Greek (1-a) and Spanish (1-b) the definite determiner is overtly realized in generic statements, in German (1-c) and English (1-d) an overt definite determiner is generally not used to express genericity (but cf. Farkas and De Swart 2007, Alexiadou 2022).

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

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

      c. Linguistinnen lieben Sprachen.
         linguists   love.PL languages

      d. Linguists love languages.

Acton (2019) and Driemel et al. (2022) note, however, that a definite determiner can actually occur in generics in both English and German, triggering a distancing effect, indicating that the speaker is not part of the kind (2). Importantly, (1-c/d) remain underdetermined as to whether the AUTHOR/PARTICIPANT are understood to be included in the kind or not.

(2)   a. Die Linguistinnen lieben Sprachen.
         the linguists   love.PL languages

      b. The linguists love languages. ($\leadsto$ speaker not part of the kind)

This suggests that there is competition between bare plurals and definite forms for the expression of genericity (cf. Farkas and De Swart, 2007) both in English and German. An overt determiner unambiguously signals a 3rd person interpretation of the kind (excluding AUTHOR/PARTICIPANT). Its absence leaves the interpretation undetermined.

Claim. We propose that the restriction of the determiner to exclusively third person contexts in English and German is a consequence of it being specified for third person [-AUTHOR, -PARTICIPANT]. A kind that occurs without an overt determiner enters the derivation without person information. It is thus compatible with an interpretation where AUTHOR/PARTICIPANT is part of the kind but incompatible with an overt determiner. In this case, a default Ø-exponent is inserted. In Spanish and Greek, however, the determiner only realizes definiteness but is lacking person specification altogether. It is thus compatible with any kind noun regardless of its person specification.

(3)   a. die/the $\leftrightarrow$ [D, +def, −author, −participant, (NUMBER, GENDER)]
      b. oi/las $\leftrightarrow$ [D, +def, (NUMBER, GENDER)]

We further suggest that person underspecification in Greek/Spanish is not accidental. In these languages, in contrast to German and English, person is encoded separately from the D-head (cf. Höhn 2016) and can therefore never be realized by an element that is inserted into the D-head. As a consequence, a determiner must lack person specifications.

Supporting evidence. This separation of person is further supported by the fact that pronouns in these languages have been argued to have phrasal rather than head status. Namely, first and second person pronouns in Spanish (*nosotros/vosotros*) have complex internal structure consisting of *nos/vos* realizing person and number and the plural noun *otros* 'others' (Torrego and Laka,

2015). Similarly, in addition to pronominal base, dedicated person morphology is present in the morphological make-up of Greek personal pronouns, with *-m-* and *-s-* being exponents of first and second person, respectively (Alexiadou and Stavrou, 2000).

This approach also captures the fact that in Greek and Spanish an overt determiner is required in the presence of an adnominal pronoun both in generic statements (4) (and more generally). As separate DPs, pronouns do not compete with determiners (which are D-heads) and cannot occupy their position. Instead, they can readily occupy the specifier position of a D-head.

(4) a. Emeís *(oi) glossológoi agapáme tis glósses.
     we   the linguists   love.1PL the languages
   b. Nosotras *(las) linguistas amamos las idiomas.
     we   the   linguists   love.1PL the languages
     'We linguists love languages.' (⤳ speaker/hearer are part of the kind)

In English and German, in contrast, adnominal pronouns are in complementary distribution with the determiner in generics (5) but also more generally (6).

(5) a. We/You(pl.) (*the) linguists love languages.
   b. Wir/Ihr   (*die) Linguistinnen lieben/liebt Sprachen.
     we/you(PL) the   linguist.PL   love.PL   languages

For English and German, person is hosted on the D-head directly. Pronouns must therefore be D-heads and cannot, without further ado, appear in the specifier of another D-head. They compete, instead, with regular determiners for insertion into the single D-head of a DP, which derives their complementary distribution. Note that local pronouns are specified for person and can therefore only occur with a kind that encodes this person information, i.e. one that the AUTHOR/PARTICIPANT is understood to be included in. This is indeed what we observe in (4)–(5).

This analysis presupposes that nouns as kinds can enter the derivation with four different person specifications, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or no person/some underdetermined person, the latter of which is compatible with all interpretations regardless of whether the speaker/hearer is or is not part of the kind. Crucially, this implies that there must be a systematic distinction between 3rd person and the absence of person, i.e. that 3rd person cannot generally be taken to be the absence of person.

Italian. In Italian, like in Greek and Spanish, generic nouns always occur with a definite determiner without inducing a distance effect (6-a). However, like in German and English, personal pronouns are in complementary distribution with determiners (6-b).

(6) a. *(I) cani amano   giocare.   b. Noi (*i) linguisti amiamo le   lingue.
      the dogs love.3PL play.INF   we the linguists love.1PL the languages

This is straightforwardly captured if Italian encodes person on the D-head (like German/English), but the determiner is still underspecified for person (like Greek/Spanish).

Some issues and outlook. As bare nouns in English and German still trigger 3rd person agreement, this must be default agreement. It is noteworthy that the separation of person from D further correlates with other properties related to pronouns; Greek and Spanish, but not English, German and Italian, show unagreement (Höhn 2016). These can potentially be linked to the big-DP structure that is necessitated by the combination of the phrasal pronouns with regular DPs in Greek and Spanish. **Selected References.** Acton, E. K. (2019). Pragmatics and the social life of the English definite article. *Language* 95. ● Driemel, I., et al. (2022). An experimental study on kind and generic readings across languages: Bare plural vs. definite plural. *Proceedings of the 23rd Amsterdam Colloquium.* ● Farkas, D. F. & De Swart, H. (2007). Article choice in plural generics. *Lingua* 117.