

Introduction

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The papers collected in this volume explore the factors determining the referential interpretation of noun phrases across a wide array of typologically unrelated languages. The languages discussed include Armenian, Brazilian Portuguese, Catalan, Danish, French Sign Language (LSF), several West-Germanic languages, Modern Greek, Japanese, Karitiana, Martinique creole (Martinikè), Modern Hebrew, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Tatar and Turkish. The individual papers approach this question from complementary angles, covering morphology, syntax, semantics, information structure and acquisition.

The research reported here was inspired by the project *Languages With and Without Articles: calculating nominal reference*. By comparing languages with and without articles, the aim of this project was to place definite and indefinite articles in the wider context of grammatical devices constraining the construal of nominal reference. In what follows we use the abbreviation NP for *Noun Phrase*, taking this term as neutral with respect to the precise syntactic analysis of the constituent (e.g. NP, NumP, DP ...) which may be proposed in the aftermath of Abney (1987).

As is well known, the referential properties of nominal expressions are constrained by a number of grammatical factors, both external and internal to the noun phrase (cf. Kramsky 1972, Lyons 1999). External factors include, e.g., information structure, word order, case, verbal aspect, while internal factors include determiners, number, quantity and quantifiers, classifiers, noun type (e.g. count, mass, collective). The definition of *definiteness* is complicated by the fact that it is variably viewed as a syntactic property or feature arising from a structural position: D, or as a semantic property involving the way the reference of a noun phrase is construed in its sentence and discourse (cf. section 1.1. below).

1 Issues in the Analysis of Definiteness

Determiners and definiteness have been extensively studied in formal linguistics, and this introduction does not attempt to provide an exhaustive survey of the vast relevant bibliography. In what follows we single out a few key issues addressed in current research on definiteness and (in)definite articles, in order to place the contributions gathered in this volume in a wider theoretical perspective: