1 Bulu NPs with -tè vs. English definites

A. ✓ the | ✓DEM | ✓ Pronoun | ✓-tè

An NP with -tè is not necessarily felicitous even if its referent is semantically or situationally unique (Hawkins 1978) and weakly familiar (Roberts 2003).

(1) Context: Abondo is sitting on a bus when a stranger sits down beside him and says

a. The sun/that sun/#it is bright today.

b. The sun DEF shines today.

(2) Context: My cousin Dave likes white and dark meat turkey. At Thanksgiving dinner, Dave prefers only dark meat every year.

a. The legs/#those legs/#them.

b. The legs are more perceptually prominent than in (1).

(3) Context: Yasavul, and Clem (2014). However, NPs with -tè display a different pattern of perceptual prominence and task/goal relevance, including being the topic under discussion.

A. ✓ the | ✓DEM | ✓ Pronoun | ✓-tè

An NP with -tè is felicitous if its referent is semantically or situationally unique, weakly familiar, and perceptually prominent or task/goal relevant.

(1) Context: Minimally different from (1) in that Abondo first says “Do you remember the book I was reading last night?”

b. The chief DEF is coming home our 1PL.Poss.

B. ?the | ✓DEM | ✓ Pronoun | ✓-tè

An NP with -tè is not felicitous when its referent fails to be unique among the salient DRs, even if it is maximally salient (Roberts 2005) or indicated deictically.

(5) 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 black.

b. The [black] hair DEF AUX speaking French.

4 Analysis

Parallel analyses involving evident mental states of individual interlocutors:

- Roberts (2010) argues that the retrievability of the intended referents of definite NPs in English depends in part on the addressee’s attentional state.
- Gunlogson (2002) suggests that interlocutors track each other’s public discourse commitments.
- Altmann et al. (2012) find that speaker and addressee maintain a mental model of topic discussion.

Attention tracking in discourse

Facts about the interlocutors’ attentional states are in the common ground. Interlocutors track each other’s gaze, often for reference resolution.

Conclusions

- Bulu NPs with -tè display a different pattern of acceptability than any kind of English definite.
- NPs with -tè are felicitous in contexts that entail that the referent of the NP is unique among the DRs that are salient to the addressee, in the sense of being attended to.
- The cross-linguistically common feature of definites is uniqueness. However, definites differ cross-linguistically in their uniqueness domains.

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