# The development of definite articles – a process along two paths

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The literature offers different ways of understanding the spreading of the definite article, once it has emerged in a language but is not yet mandatory in the way that applies to e.g. the modern Western European languages. I will here focus on how the article successively spreads to NPs representing new referential categories. (For a partly different perspective, see Leiss 2007.) Two models are scrutinized, one essentially based on the referential categories identified in Hawkins 1978, and one based on the referential categories that follow from the theory of determination in Löbner 2011. As neither view seems to capture the full picture, a new model is proposed, by which the spreading is taken to follow two paths. Moreover, the new model is supported by empirical evidence from Old Scandinavian. The general view that definite articles normally have their origin in demonstratives used for anaphoric reference is not questioned here.

According to Hawkins (1978, Ch. 3), there are four main uses where the definite article is appropriate, namely *immediate situational uses*, *anaphoric uses*, *associative anaphoric uses* and *larger situational uses* (i.e. uses for referents that are uniquely identified without an antecedent or anchor (trigger) in the preceding discourse). The model for grammaticalization of definite articles proposed in Skrzypek et al. 2021 (based on the theory of grammaticalization in Heine 2002) makes use of the three latter, but labels them *direct anaphora*, *indirect anaphora* and *unique reference* respectively. In addition, one category not considered in Hawkins is added to the model, generic NPs. In sum, the spreading of the definite article is taken to follow the path in (1).

(1)    deictic NPs > direct anaphora > indirect anaphora > unique reference > generic NPs

Another view follows from the scale of uniqueness as presented in Löbner 2011 (and subsequent works by others). Löbner's theory is based on the assumption that nouns are distributed on four types, which are distinguished in the lexicon on the possible combinations of two binary features: [±U] for uniqueness, [±R] for relationality (+R ~ being a "possessee" of a "possessor"). This means that, according to Löbner, there is a difference between nouns that inherently express uniqueness and/or relationality, e.g. *sun* [+U, –R], *king* [+U, +R], and *finger* [–U, +R], and nouns that do not, e.g. *tree* [–U, –R]. This assumption is supported empirically by the fact that languages cross-linguistically are more apt to use definite articles with nouns of the latter kind than with nouns with U- and R-features, as indicated by the ordering of the simplified model of the scale of uniqueness in (2).

(2)    deictic NPs > dir. anaphora [–U, –R] > ind. anaphora [±R] > [+U] NPs > proper names

The implicative ordering in (2) is also supposed to indicate how languages that develop definite articles start out by stretching the use of demonstratives with [–U, –R] nouns for anaphoric reference and gradually expand the use to new kinds of NPs along the scale.

None of the models presented here can fully capture the expansion of the definite article. It is a drawback of the model based on Hawkins' referential categories that it does not discriminate between larger situation uses on the basis of inherent U- or R-features in the head noun. The indirect anaphora (lately discussed in e.g. Schwarz 2009, 2013, 2019, Schwarz-Friesel 2007, Irmer 2011) are partly a problem to both models. The model in (2) does not take nouns without U- and R-features in non-anaphoric uses into account. Nor has it room for generic NPs. The model in (1), on the other hand, has, contrary to the model in (2), no room for the category of proper names. To remedy these shortcomings, I will propose that definite articles spread along two separate paths, one "semantic" and one "pragmatic". I will support my view by some evidence from the development of definiteness marking in the early Nordic languages.

**Keywords**:
definite articles, development of definiteness marking, referential categories, early Scandinavian

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