

Automatic Classification of Communicative Functions of Definiteness



Archna Bhatia^{LT1}, Chu-Cheng Lin^{LT1}, Nathan Schneider^{LT1}, Yulia Tsvetkov^{LT1}, Fatima Talib Al-Raisi^{LT1}, Laleh Roostapour^{LT1}, Jordan Bender^P, Abhimanu Kumar^{LT1}, Lori Levin^{LT1}, Mandy Simons^{PH}, and Chris Dyer^{LT1}
Language Technologies Institute / Department of Philosophy, Carnegie Mellon University • Department of Linguistics, University of Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh, PA

Abstract

Definiteness expresses a constellation of semantic, pragmatic, and discourse properties (the communicative functions) of an NP. Our supervised classifier for English NPs uses lexical, morphological, and syntactic features to predict the communicative functions in terms of a language-universal classification scheme and establishes strong baselines for future work. Additionally, analysis of the features and learned parameters in the model provides insight into the grammaticalization of definiteness in English, not all of which is obvious a priori.

Communicative Functions of Definiteness (CFD) Annotation Scheme

Nonanaphora [-A,-B]	999	Anaphora [+A]	1574
- Unique [+U]	287	- Basic_Anaphora [-B,+F]	795
* Unique_Hearer_Old [+F,-G,+S]	251	*Same_Head	556
Unique_Physical_Copresence [+R]	13	*Different_Head	329
Unique_Larger_Situation [+R]	237	- Extended_Anaphora [+B]	779
Unique_Predicative_Identity [+P]	1	*Bridging_Nominal [-G,+R,+S]	43
*Unique_Hearer_New [-F]	36	*Bridging_Event [+R,+S]	10
		*Bridging_Restrictive_Modifier [-G,+S]	614
- Nonunique [-U]	581	*Bridging_Subtype_Instance [-G]	0
* Nonunique_Hearer_Old [+F]	169	*Bridging_Other_Context [+F]	112
Nonunique_Physical_Copresence [-G,+R,+S]	39		
Nonunique_Larger_Situation [-G,+R,+S]	117	Miscellaneous [-R]	732
Nonunique_Predicative_Identity [+P]	13	- Pleonastic [-B,-P]	53
*Nonunique_Hearer_New_Spec [-F,-G,+R,+S]	231	- Quantified	248
*Nonunique_Nonspec [-G,-S]	181	- Predicative_Equative_Role [-B,+P]	58
- Generic [+G,-R]	131	- Part_Of_Noncompositional_MWE	100
*Generic_Kind_Level	0	- Measure_Nonreferential	125
*Generic_Individual_Level	131	- Other_Nonreferential	148

Examples for Communicative Functions

CFD Label	Example
Unique_Physical_Copresence	John here is an investment banker.
Unique_Larger_Situation	In the days since Hillary Clinton unburdened herself in an interview with The Atlantic’s Jeffrey Goldberg ...
Unique_Predicative_Identity	Clark Kent is Superman .
Unique_Hearer_New	a restaurant chain named Shoney’s
Nonunique_Physical_Copresence	The podium is too high.
Nonunique_Larger_Situation	the chair (at a conference) / today
Nonunique_Predicative_Identity	He is the manager .
Nonunique_Hearer_New_Specific	I am looking for a nurse . Her name is Sara.
Nonunique_Nonspec	I am looking for a nurse [any nurse would do].
Generic_Kind_Level	Dinosaurs are extinct.
Generic_Individual_Level	Cats have fur.
Basic_Same_Head	I’m going to tell you a <u>quick story</u> . It’s a true story .
Basic_Different_Head	I adopted a <u>cat</u> this weekend. The animal is so cute.
Extended_Bridging_Nominal	I looked at <u>an apartment</u> yesterday. The kitchen was really large.
Extended_Bridging_Event	My friend’s son <u>got married</u> this weekend. The bride looked beautiful.
Extended_Bridging_Restrictive_Modifier	the house <u>next door</u> / <u>John’s</u> daughter
Extended_Subtype_Instance	I collect <u>coins</u> . I have a 1943 steel penny .
Extended_Other_Context	I want to focus on what many of you have said you would like <u>me to elaborate on</u> . What can you do about the climate crisis ?
Pleonastic	It is raining .
Quantified	All the people / no motorcade
Predicative_Equative_Role	He’s a teacher . / This is an opportunity .
Part_of_Noncompositional_MWE	Ole’ Charlie kicked the bucket today.
Measure_Nonreferential	hours later / miles away
Other_Nonreferential	global warming / concern / the topic of energy

Analysis Example: Specificity

Confirmation of known facts	Hypotheses to test
+ the definite article "the"	+ objects of "from"
+ possessives (PRP\$)	+ NPs with NNP as their last dependent
+ proper nouns (NNP)	+ NPs with possessive pronouns immediately preceding the head (rather than the ones with intervening words)
+ 2nd person pronouns	
+ NPs with "the" as the first dependent	
- the indefinite article "a"	- NPS with comparative adjectives (JJR)

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Classification Model

We use an in-house implementation of a multiclass logistic regression classifier.

Feature function: $f(x,y) = \phi(x) \times \tilde{\omega}(y)$

Feature weight vector:

$$\hat{\theta} = \arg \max_{\theta} -\lambda ||\theta||_2^2 + \sum_{\langle x,y \rangle \in \mathcal{D}} \log \frac{\exp \theta^\top \mathbf{f}(x,y)}{\sum_{y' \in \mathcal{Y}} \exp(\theta^\top \mathbf{f}(x,y'))}$$

Features

Words of Interest Head of the NP, its dependents, its governor (external to NP), its first ancestor verb — token, lemma, POS tag, dependency relation, a binary indicator of plurality on the head N, first_dependent, last_dependent, auxiliaries of the first ancestral verb, first ancestral verb with a negative particle as dependent.

Structural — path length to the root, path length to the first ancestral verb, number of dependents, number of dependency relations that link non-neighbors.

Positional — token length of the NP, NP’s location in the sentence (first or second half), the first ancestral verb’s position relative to the head (left or right), POS & lemma of the left and the right neighbors of the head, governor, and the first ancestral verb.

Above features of NPs in Following NP-NP relation Types immediate parent, immediate child, immediate precedent, immediate successor, the nearest preceding coreferent mention.

Accuracy

Condition	Params #	Exact %	Soft %
Majority baseline	—	12.1	47.8
Log-linear			
+ attributes	473,064	38.7	77.1
+ labels	413,931	40.8	73.6
+ attributes, labels	926,417	43.7	78.2
Random forest	20,363	49.7	77.5

Communicative Function Label Accuracy

CFD label	#	F1
Bridging_Restrictive_Modifier	552	68
Same_Head	452	41
Different_Head	271	32
Quantified	213	57
Nonunique_Hearer_New_Specific	190	40
Nonunique_Nonspec	173	13
Other_Nonreferential	134	37
Generic_Individual_Level	113	13
Measure_Nonreferential	98	40
Unique_Larger_Situation	97	55
Nonunique_Larger_Situation	97	27
Bridging_Other_Context	96	11
Part_of_Noncompositional_MWE	88	18
Predicative_Nonidentity	57	—
Pleonastic	44	88
Nonunique_Physical_Copresence	36	—
Bridging_Nominal	33	15
Unique_Hearer_New	26	—
Nonunique_Predicative_Identity	10	—
Bridging_Event	9	—