

# Marking Definiteness

A semantic feature of noun phrases indicating whether a referent is identifiable or not within a given context.

In English, definite NPs generally consist of one of the following:

- a proper noun
- a pronoun
- a demonstrative (this, that, these, those)
- a generic NP starting with the definite article (*the*)
- a possessive NP
- a NP with an exhaustive quantifier (i.e., *every*, *all*)

More difficult is determining what it means for a NP to be definite, and why the definite form has been chosen for a particular context.

# Factors for Definiteness of NPs

A prototypical definite NP has the following characteristics:

- **unique**                      the referent is uniquely determined
- **familiar**                    the referent is known given the context
- **‘individuable’**            within the discourse model, the referent must be either able to locate an individual entity or else there no relevant basis for determining it

While uniqueness is sufficient, it is not necessary for definiteness. Counterexamples can be found for every other factor.