

Definiteness

- “In many languages a noun phrase may contain an element which seems to have as its sole or principal role to indicate the definiteness or indefiniteness of the noun phrase.”

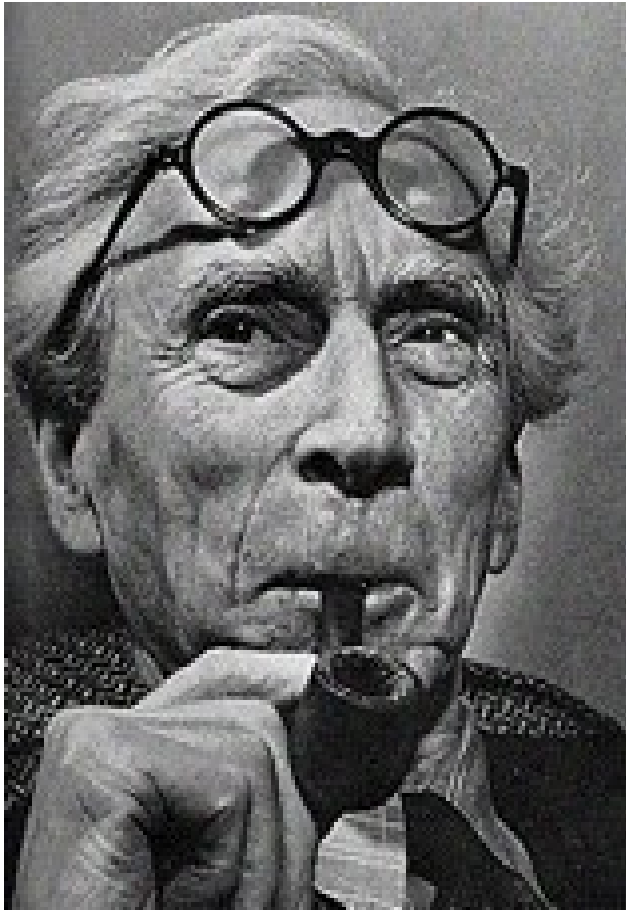
C. Lyons (1999)

1. b. John bought a car.
 - a. John bought the car.

The meaning of “the”

- “Particular”?
 - No: 2. I bought a car today.
- Two aspects are important:
 - Uniqueness
 - 3. a. The ling 130 student is smart.
 - Familiarity
 - 3. b. A student and a teacher came in.
The student sat down.

Uniqueness



Bertrand Russell

(1872 - 1970)

- “the” is a quantifier like “some” or “every”
- It combines with set-descriptions (something that has a variable in it):

4. the x . $\text{car}(x)$

Uniqueness (cont'd)

5. The king of France is not bald.

a. The king of France is such that he is not bald
(false)

b. It is not the case that the king of France is bald
(true)

- “the” is just like “some”, but is only true when it combines with singleton sets:

6. The king of France is bald.

$\exists x[(\text{King}(x) \ \& \ \underline{\forall y(\text{King}(y) \rightarrow y=x)}) \ \& \ \text{Bald}(x)]$

Problems with uniqueness theory

- There are several, but the two main ones are
 - Judgements of non-unique definites are not “false”

7. a. The ling 130 student is smart.

- We need these to come out “neither T nor F”

- Anaphoric uses – unlike “some unique x”

7. b. One of the ling 130 students came to the board.

The student took the chalk.

- We need this one to come out as “T”

Familiarity

- First full presentation in Christophersen (1939)
- More recent: Hawking (1978), Heim (1982)

8. a. The moon is very bright tonight.

b. I hear the president behaved outrageously again.

- Situational

c. An old man and two women were entered the room. I immediately recognised the old man.

- Anaphoric

Not quite Familiarity

- Familiarity doesn't apply to all uses

9. a. I got onto a bus. The driver was drunk.

- Bridging inferences (accommodation, inferrable)

b. I've just got in from LA. The plane was 5 hours late.

- Flying is just one of many ways of travel!

c. The guy Ann went out with last night came in.

d. The fact that you've known them for year is no excuse.

- Containing inferrable

(Unique) Identifiability

- The use of the definite article signals to the Hearers that they are in a position to identify the referent
 - Examples in (8) and (9) illustrate different ways in which Hearer may be in a position to identify the referent.
- Back to semantics: how to translate “the”?
 - Portner: a “robot” that picks out the unique relevant referent in the situation.
 - Situations crucial: slices of possible worlds

Situations and Definites

- Definites and pronouns pick out salient entities:
 - **Scenario:** Two dogs live in Paul Portner's house. One is a mutt from a shelter, and the other has a pedigree. The pedigree dog is playing with a cat in front of us.

(10) a. The dog that lives in Paul's house is cute.

- Situation: pedigree dog, cat playing

b. Shelter dogs are often very beautiful. The dog that lives in Paul's house is cute.

- Situation: shelter dogs, including Paul's mutt

Uses of pronouns & other definites

- Deictic (situational)

11. a. He is cute.

- Anaphoric

- Referring expressions can serve as antecedents:

- indefinites, definites, proper names, even some quantificational noun phrases.

11. b. A woman came in. She sat down.

- Not clear how to deal with antecedentless uses:

- “whoever is supposed to fix the telephone fixed it today”

11. c. They fixed the telephone today.

Uses of pronouns & definites

- Bound variables

11. d. Every student spoke to the student in front of him.

e. No one could tell what he was being tested for.

- There are more – in future weeks, we'll talk about

- attributive uses (Frege vs. Russell),

12. a. The murderer is insane. (whoever it happens to be)

- predicative uses,

b. Royslott is the murderer.

- generic uses

c. They are extinct. The dodo is extinct.

- and maybe even donkey pronouns