

On the Interaction of Specificity and Modification

Specificity from Theoretical and Empirical Points of View

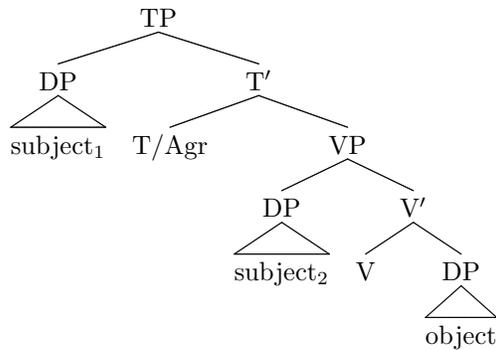
Stuttgart, Aug. 31-Sept. 2

Peter Hallman, University of Vienna
peter@peterhallman.com

The role of modification in supporting specific readings of indefinite DPs is often remarked on. In Arabic, modifiers also effect the syntactic distribution of subjects. This talk investigates this relationship and its consequences for a theory of specificity.

Two subject positions in Arabic:

subject ₁	verb	subject ₂	gloss
l-waladu	ʒāʔ-a	l-waladu	<i>The child came.</i>
	ʒāʔ-a		<i>The child came.</i>
l-ʔawlādu	ʒāʔ-a	l-ʔawlādu	<i>The children came.</i>
	ʒāʔ-ū		<i>The children came.</i>
l-bintu	ʒāʔ-at	l-bintu	<i>The girl came.</i>
	ʒāʔ-at		<i>The girl came.</i>
l-banātu	ʒāʔ-at	l-banātu	<i>The girls came.</i>
	ʒiʔ-na		<i>The girls came.</i>



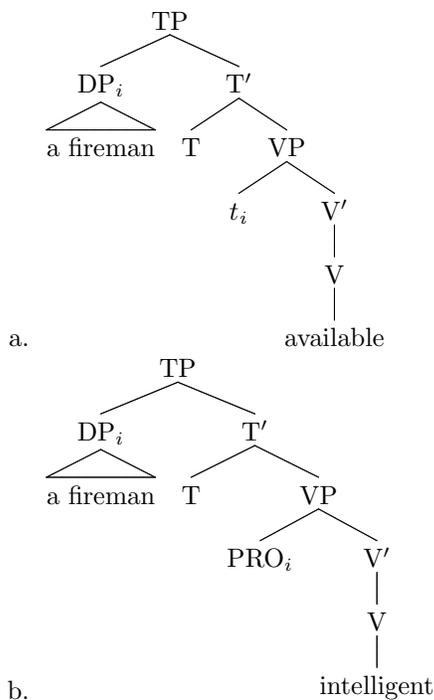
An indefinite subject may also occur in either the pre- or post-verbal position, but in the pre-verbal position it must bear a modifier (Cantarino, 1974; Bakir, 1980; Wright, 1981; Brustad, 2000; Mohammad, 2000; Holes, 2004).

- (2) a. walad-un *(ṭawīl-un) ʒāʔa.
 boy-NOM *(tall-NOM) came-3MS
 ‘A tall boy came.’
- b. ʒāʔa walad-un (ṭawīl-un).
 came-3MS boy-NOM (tall-NOM)
 ‘A (tall) boy came.’

English stage- and individual-level predicates show a similar distinction in the position of the subject (Kratzer, 1989; Diesing, 1992).

- (3) a. A fireman is available.
 b. A fireman is intelligent.
- (4) a. There is a fireman available.
 b. *There is a fireman intelligent.

(5) Diesing (1992)



In contrast to subjects of stage-level predicates, indefinite subjects of individual-level predicates are ungrammatical without a modifier (Erteschik-Shir 1997; Hallman 2004).

- (6) a. Are any firemen available?
 b. Yes, a fireman is available.
- (7) a. Are any firemen in the watchtower?
 b. Yes, a fireman is in the watchtower.
- (8) a. Are any firemen intelligent?
 b. *Yes, a fireman is intelligent.
- (9) a. Are any firemen Polish?
 b. *Yes, a fireman is Polish.
- (10) a. Are any firemen intelligent?
 b. Yes, a fireman in the third brigade is intelligent.

- (11) a. Are any firemen Polish?
 b. Yes, a fireman in the third brigade is Polish.

The fact that indefinite preverbal subjects in Arabic must always bear a modifier suggests they cannot escape the requirement by reconstruction. Independent support in Soltan (2007)

- (12) a. sabaq-a l-sayf-u l-ḥaḍl-a.
 preceded-3MS the-sword-NOM the-censure-ACC
 ‘It’s too late to do anything.’
 b. * l-sayf-u sabaq-a l-ḥaḍl-a.
 the-sword-NOM preceded-3MS the-censure-ACC

- (13) a. fāḍ-a l-kayl-u
 overflowed-3MS the-capacity-NOM
 ‘I am fed up.’
 b. * l-kayl-u fāḍ-a
 the-capacity-NOM overflowed-3MS

- Summary: In both English and Arabic, an indefinite DP in [spec,TP] must be modified. English allows reconstruction under some circumstances; Arabic doesn’t.

French subjects of certain predicates behave similiarly (Galmiche, 1986, and references therein).

- (14) a. * Un vélo est jaune.
 ‘A bicycle is yellow.’
 b. * Des hommes ont du chagrin.
 ‘Men are embarrassed.’

- (15) a. * Un homme est grant/gentile.
 ‘A man is tall/nice.’
 b. * Une fille est eskimau.
 ‘A girl is an Eskimo.’

- (16) a. * Un homme a faim.
 ‘A man is hungry.’
 b. * Une femme est chauve.
 ‘A woman is bald.’
 c. * Des gens sont témoins de Jehovah.
 ‘People are Jehovah’s Witnesses.’

- (17) a. Une femme, que je rencontre chaque matin dans l’autobus et dont j’ai toujours admiré la coiffure, est, en fait, chauve.
 A woman, who I meet on the bus every morning and whose hair I had always admired, is, in fact, bald.
 b. Une femme que je connais est chauve.
 A woman who I know is bald.

Erteschik-Shir (1997):

- (18) a. ??A student likes linguistics.
 b. A student who I know likes linguistics.
- (19) [[A student]_{FOC-SUB} [who I know [e]]]_{TOP} [likes linguistics]_{FOC}
- (20) a. ??Hans adores a dog.
 b. ??The queen of England has a fear of a mouse.
 c. ??This is a dissertation on a unicorn.
- (21) a. Hans adores a dog I own.
 b. The queen of England has a fear of a mouse which keeps appearing in her kitchen.
 c. This is a dissertation on a unicorn which appears in a certain fairytale.

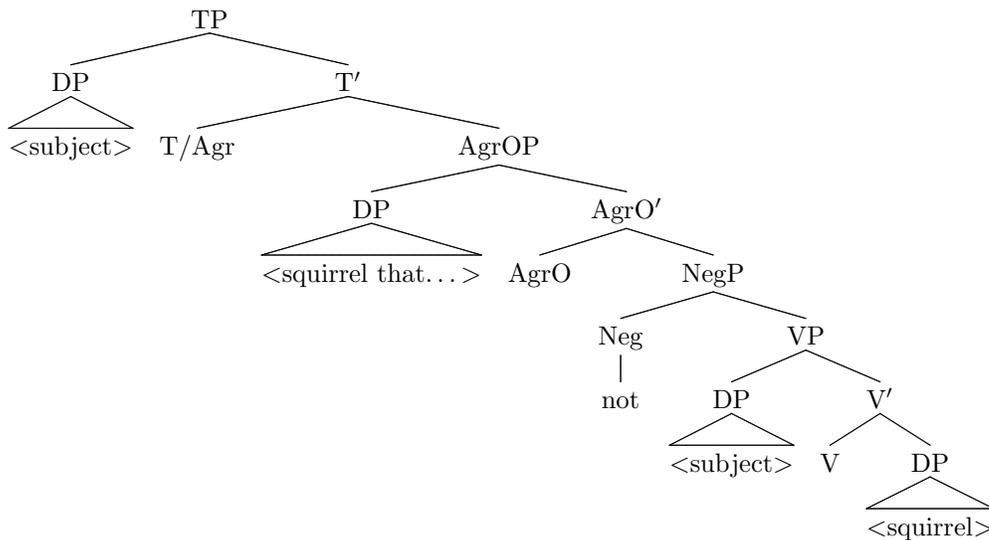
Fodor and Sag (1982): A modifier disambiguates a referential/quantificational ambiguity in favor of the referential reading.

- (22) a. Sandy didn't see a squirrel.
 b. Sandy didn't see a squirrel that was chasing its tail around the oak tree.
- (23) $(a_r \alpha : \Phi)$ denotes the unique individual i such that $i = c_{IR}$ and $\models_{cf^{\alpha} c_T c_W} \Phi$ if there is such; otherwise \dagger .

It is not clear that the DP without the modifier is ambiguous:

- (24) Sandy saw several squirrels. . .
 a. *but she didn't see a squirrel.
 b. but she didn't see a squirrel that was chasing its tail around the oak tree.

One possible take on these facts is that objects show a similar positional effect contingent on modification.



Do modified indefinites show any other hallmarks of specificity other than what is associated with their syntactic position?

English—Definite Partitivity (as per Enç 1991)

- (26) a. *Sandy heard several squirrels rustling in her flower garden. She chased some away, but she didn't see a squirrel.
 b. Sandy heard several squirrels rustling in her flower garden. She chased some away, but she didn't see a squirrel that was digging up her prized petunia.
- (27) a. Some firemen were honored at the awards ceremony. A fireman from the third precinct was very emotional.
 b. Most firemen are tall, though a fireman from the 3rd precinct is rather short.
- (28) a. The firemen in the 3rd precinct are quite negligent. Nonetheless, there's a fireman in the watchtower at all times.
 b. The firemen in the 3rd precinct are quite negligent. Nonetheless, there's a fireman in the watchtower at all times. It's staffed entirely by firemen from the neighboring 7th precinct.

English—Referentiality (in the sense of co-indexation with a syntactic antecedent)

- (29) Sandy heard a squirrel rustling in her flower garden, but she didn't see a squirrel that was digging up her prized petunia.
- (30) A fireman was honored at the awards ceremony. A fireman from the 3rd precinct was very emotional.
- (31) There is a fireman singing and there is a fireman cooking.

Familiarity condition (Heim, 1983)

- (32) Let F be a file, p an atomic proposition. Then p is appropriate with respect to F only if, for every noun phrase NP_i with index i that p contains:
 a. if NP_i is definite, then $i \in \text{Dom}(F)$
 b. and if NP_i is indefinite, then $i \notin \text{Dom}(F)$

Arabic—Definite Partitivity

- (33) taḡammaf-a fuḡarāʔ-u fi l-maqhā.
 gathered-3MS poets-NOM in the-cafe
 'Some poets gathered in the cafe.'
 a. *fāʔir-un ʔalqā qaṣīdat-a-hu l-ḡadīdat-a.
 poet-NOM recited-3MS poem-ACC-his the-new-ACC
 'A poet recited his new poem.'
 b. fāʔir-un ḡamīl-u l-ṣawt-i ʔalqā qaṣīdat-a-hu l-ḡadīdat-a.
 poet-NOM beautiful the-voice-GEN recited-3MS poem-ACC-his the-new-ACC
 'A poet with a nice voice recited his new poem.'
- (34) katab-a karīm-un qaṣāʔid-a.
 wrote-3MS kariim-NOM poems-ACC
 'Kariim wrote some poems.'

- a. * qaṣīdat-un nuḡir-at ʔalā ʔabakat-i l-internet.
poem-NOM published_{PASS-3FS} on net-GEN the-internet
'A poem was published on the internet.'
- b. qaṣīdat-un ʔamīlat-un nuḡir-at ʔalā ʔabakat-i l-internet.
poem-NOM beautiful-NOM published_{PASS-3FS} on net-GEN the-internet
'A beautiful poem was published on the internet.'
- (35) a. ʔāʔir-un ʔamīl-u l-ṣawt-i ʔalqā qaṣīdat-a-hu l-ʔadīdat-a fī l-muntadā.
poet-NOM beautiful the-voice-GEN recited-3MS poem-ACC-his the-new-ACC in the-forum_{GEN}
'A poet with a nice voice recited his new poem at the forum.'
- b. qaṣīdat-un ʔamīlat-un nuḡir-at ʔalā ʔabakat-i l-internet ʔamsi.
poem-NOM beautiful-NOM published_{PASS-3FS} on net-GEN the-internet yesterday
'A beautiful poem was published on the internet yesterday.'
- (36) ʔāʔ-a ʔawlād-un li-l-malʔab-i.
came-3MS children-NOM to-the-playground-GEN
'Some children went to the playground.'
- a. walad-un ʔawīl-un rama-a ʔubbāk-an bi-ḡaʔarat-in.
child-NOM tall-NOM threw-3MS window-ACC with-rock-GEN
'A tall child threw a rock at a window.'
- b. walad-un ʔawīl-un rama-a-hum bi-ḡaʔarat-in.
child-NOM tall-NOM threw-3MS-them with-rock-GEN
'A tall child threw a rock at them.'

Arabic—Referentiality

- (37) ʔāʔ-a ʔāʔir-un ʔilā l-muntadā.
came-3MS poet-NOM to the-forum_{GEN}
'A poet came to the forum.'
- a. ʔāʔir-un ʔamīl-u l-ṣawt-i ʔalqā qaṣīdat-a-hu l-ʔadīdat-a.
poet-NOM beautiful the-voice-GEN recited-3MS poem-ACC-his the-new-ACC
'A poet with a nice voice recited his new poem.'
- b. ʔalqā ʔāʔir-un (ʔamīl-u l-ṣawt-i) qaṣīdat-a-hu l-ʔadīdat-a.
recited-3MS poet-NOM beautiful the-voice-GEN poem-ACC-his the-new-ACC
'A poet (with a nice voice) recited his new poem.'
- c. wa ttaḡaḡ-a ʔanna-hu l-ʔāʔir-u θāt-u-hu.
and turned out-3MS that-him the-poet-NOM same-NOM-his
'and it turned out it was the same poet.'
- (38) katab-a karīm-un qaṣīdat-an.
wrote-3MS kariim-NOM poem-ACC
'Kariim wrote a poem.'
- a. qaṣīdat-un ʔamīlat-un nuḡir-at ʔalā ʔabakat-i l-internet.
poem-NOM beautiful-NOM published_{PASS-3FS} on net-GEN the-internet
'A beautiful poem was published on the internet.'
- b. nuḡir-at qaṣīdat-un (ʔamīlat-un) ʔalā ʔabakat-i l-internet.
published_{PASS-3FS} poem-NOM beautiful-NOM on net-GEN the-internet
'A (beautiful) poem was published on the internet.'
- c. wa ttaḡaḡ-a ʔanna-hā l-qaṣīdat-u θāt-u-hā.
and turned out-3MS that-it the-poem-NOM same-NOM-its
'and it turned out it was the same poem.'

- Hypothesis 1: A modifier licenses an indefinite DP in a higher position than the DP would have been able to occur in without the modifier. The modified DP in the higher position does not show any signs of discourse anaphoricity of either the partitive or referential type (beyond what an existential quantifier shows). A modifier doesn't make an indefinite specific, it just gives it higher scope.

(39) kaθīr-un min l-suwwāh-i daxal-ū l-masʒid-a.
 many-NOM of the-tourists-GEN entered-3MP the-mosque-ACC
 'Many of the tourists entered the mosque.'

a. lākin lam ya-dxul-∅-hu sāʔih-un.
 but not_{PAST} 3M-enter-S-it tourist-NOM
 'But no tourist entered it, *(40)'

b. lākin lam ya-dxul-∅-hu sāʔih-un miṣriyy-un.
 but not_{PAST} 3M-enter-S-it tourist-NOM egyptian-NOM
 'But no egyptian tourist entered it, *(40)'
 'But an egyptian tourist didn't enter it, ✓(40)'

(40) bal zār-a l-sūq-a bi-ʒānib-i l-masʒid-i.
 rather visited-3MS the-market-ACC at-beside-GEN the-mosque-GEN
 'Rather, he visited the market next to the mosque.'

(41) ʔin ya-mut-∅ θalāθat-un min ʔaqribāʔ-ī, ʔariθ bayt-an.
 if 3M-die-S three-NOM of relatives-my, 1S-inherit house-ACC
 'If three relatives of mine die, I'll inherit a house.' (same range of meanings as English)

- Hypothesis 2: Modifiers have two independent effects: 1) they license a certain semantic attribute of the DP they occur in (e.g. "+specific"), and 2) they license the occurrence of the DP in a higher syntactic position than the DP would otherwise have been able to occur in. [+specific] is interpreted either as variable over choice functions, e.g. ϵ in von Stechow (2002), or as a singleton-set deriving domain restriction (Schwarzschild, 2002).

(42) a condition: $\epsilon_i x$ [condition(x)]
 a. $\llbracket \epsilon_i x[\text{condition}] \rrbracket = \Phi_1(\llbracket \text{condition} \rrbracket)$
 b. $\Phi_1(\llbracket \text{condition} \rrbracket) \in (\llbracket \text{condition} \rrbracket)$

- If hypothesis 2 is the correct approach, we can draw some conclusions about what the attribute [+specific] is associated with.
 - If [+specific] is a choice function, It is not an optional interpretation of the indefinite article a or its unpronounced counterpart in Arabic.
 - If [+specific] is a covert domain restriction, it is not the ubiquitous pragmatic restriction proposed by Stanley and Gendler Szabó (2000); Stanley (2002).

(43) a. Everyone answered every question.
 b. In most of his classes, John fails exactly three Frenchmen.
 c. In every room in John's house, he keeps every bottle in the corner.
 d. The customer is always right.
 e. Usually, the sailor stops, but the marine goes on.

(44) Everyone_i answered every $\langle \text{question}, f(i) \rangle$.

The variable i is bound by the higher quantifier, context-given f maps that person to the set of questions on that person's exam.

- (45) a. At the park _{i} , Sandy saw a \langle squirrel, $f(i)$ \rangle .
 b. At the park _{i} , Sandy didn't see a \langle squirrel, $f(i)$ \rangle .
 c. At the park, Sandy didn't see $\epsilon_{\text{park}}x$ squirrel(x).
 d. At the park, Sandy didn't see $\epsilon_{\text{speaker}}x$ squirrel(x).
- (46) a. At the park _{i} , Sandy didn't see a [squirrel and \langle that was chasing its tail around the tree, $f(i)$ \rangle].
 b. At the park, Sandy didn't see a [squirrel and $\{\epsilon_{\text{park}}x$ (x was chasing its tail around the tree) $\}$].
 c. At the park, Sandy didn't see a [squirrel and $\{\epsilon_{\text{speaker}}x$ (x was chasing its tail around the tree) $\}$].
- (47) a. *The police chief didn't read a report.
 b. ?*The police chief didn't read a report that someone bribed an officer.
 c. The police chief didn't read a report that someone published on the internet.
- (48) a. *A report is well written.
 b. ?*A report that it's going to rain this morning is well written.
 c. A report that Mary submitted this morning is well written.
- (49) a. *A rumor is baseless.
 b. ?*A rumor that someone is planning a terrorist attack is baseless.
 c. A rumor that someone posted on the internet is baseless.
- (50) a. *The police chief didn't act on a rumor.
 b. The police chief didn't act on a rumor that someone was planning a terrorist attack.
 c. The police chief didn't act on a rumor that someone was circulating on the internet.
- (51) a. *bayaan-un kafafa daʕf-an fii jihaaz-i l-ʔamin-i.
 report-NOM exposed weakness-ACC in apparatus-GEN the-security-GEN
 'A report exposed a weakness in the security apparatus.'
 b. ?*bayaan-un ʔanna faxʕ-an jaaʔa bi-qunbulat-in ʔilaa l-minʔaqat-i l-xadraaʔ-i
 report-NOM that someone-ACC came with-bomb-GEN to the-zone-GEN the-green-GEN
 kafafa daʕf-an fii jihaaz-i l-ʔamin-i.
 exposed weakness-ACC in apparatus-GEN the-security-GEN
 'A report that someone entered the Green Zone with a bomb exposed a weakness in the security apparatus.'
 c. bayaan-un nafara-hu faxʕ-un ʔalā jabakat-i l-internet kafafa daʕf-an fii
 report-NOM published-it someone-NOM on net-GEN the-internet exposed weakness-ACC in
 jihaaz-i l-ʔamin-i.
 apparatus-GEN the-security-GEN
 'A report that someone published on the internet exposed a weakness in the security apparatus.'

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