

Towards a cartography of the D region: Bare nouns and "Articles" (Demonstratives, case, classifiers, and noun classes.)

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[Read this document before you start the object properties.](#)

This short document discusses three aspects of the documentation project to code certain properties of the D region, concerning the distribution of bare nouns and determiners. This illustrates the various aspects involved in of the development of content of the SSWL/linguistic explorer database project.

- Seeding the database (property definitions, defining the task, and illustrate the values with examples from languages)
- Populating the database (with property values, yes/no for language X)
- Exploring the database (browse, query, download, examining predictions, looking for gaps... a very preliminary investigation)

Nominal structures in object position (and in subject position)

So far, a set of 40 object properties (subdivided in groups of 3 or 4) have been posted that probe for a particular set of phenomena related to nominal structures.

In addition, there are 16 properties related to vocatives,

The properties are organized around the following variables: [which can be further expanded, or refined](#)

1. indefinite vs. definite reading of (unmodified) noun phrases
2. mass nouns vs. sg/pl count nouns
3. nouns with (intrinsically) unique reference
4. proper names, proper names modified by adjectives
5. ordering properties:
 - defart-N, N defart, art Name, Name article etc... *to add, still missing: Order indefinite articles-N, and scopal properties for indefinites*
 - order Modifier-Proper Names
6. syntactic position: object (*vs. subject properties have been prepared but not yet posted*)
7. vocatives

In particular, we are interested in whether a nominal expression, according to each of the variables 1-6/1-5-7:

- a. can be "bare" (i.e. lack an "article"), or
- b. must have an "article", or
- c. can have an article (i.e. can either be bare or occur with an article)

This gives rise to different property definitions for objects, organized in the following fashion. The task (defined below) asks for yes/no values:

- (1) Indefinite mass nouns in object position

- | | | |
|----|----------------------|--------|
| a. | can be bare | yes/no |
| b. | must have an article | yes/no |
| c. | can have an article | yes/no |
- (2) definite mass nouns in object position.
- | | | |
|----|----------------------|--------|
| a. | can be bare | yes/no |
| b. | must have an article | yes/no |
| c. | can have an article | yes/no |

and so forth.

These properties apply to:

- unmodified mass/count nouns (NO quantifiers, adjectives, possessors, relative clauses, adpositional complements)
- objects in affirmative transitive sentences (NO negative, interrogative, passive)

Each **property definition**: is a small field-work questionnaire with instructions on how to set the value, elicitation contexts and illustrations, and is organized in the following way.

- definition of the property
- elicitation context(s)
- explicit instructions on how to set the values for the language in question
- examples that illustrate the yes/no values for different languages
- comments

Definitions: What counts as bare and what counts as an "article"?

This is necessary because of the absence of stable linguistic definitions: the current terminology depends on the language, but does not allow crosslinguistic comparisons For the purposes of this set of properties, we do this as follows (this is repeated and slightly adjusted in each property definition),

A bare noun phrase

- for languages with definite/indefinite articles, specificity markers, definite/indefinite affixes: lacks an article (can be bare)
- for languages without articles but with case, adpositional affixes/endings, classifiers, noun classes/augments, exhibits no structural alternation with noun phrases of a particular type (defined in each property definition)

An "article"

- self explanatory for languages with articles
- for languages without articles: sometimes "case", adpositions, count as "article" (if case expresses a contrast definite and indefinite readings of objects.)
- Demonstratives counts as an "article" if they can be used like articles (and should show homogeneity (aka as consistency) effects (Löbner, 2000))
- Classifiers can count as articles (in certain readings/circumstances).

- noun class markers/ augments may count as articles in a subset of contexts.

The way to proceed: read the property definitions.. (these define what you are supposed to do)

- (3) a. step 1: "fieldwork": elicit examples in language X. (Questionnaire, with elicitation sentences and contexts;
- b. step 2: construct the examples (can be more than one per property), paying attention to the property definitions.
Type up the examples in the format given, (and feel free to send them to me and Cristina for comments).
- c. step 3: Classify the examples: read property definitions carefully, and set the property values. (Use the supporting excel sheets..(we still need to update these))
Can the task be done in your language? note any questions/ unclarities, and run them by us.
- d. step 4: (creating the language and) enter the property values, with examples, and comments into the database (we added a *how sure are you* measure in Terraling.
Comments about distribution are particularly important. In many cases further work will be needed, please feel free to indicate so !
- e. step 5: explore with the database search tools. (Searches include: complex searches, implications, compare (up to 8 languages), similarity trees, map results, download, saved searches with stable handle (when one returns to the database the searches will update...)

Findings and Theory

The property definitions define 3 types of languages for each set of a/b/c/:
3 types of languages are excluded.

(In)def sg Count N	can be bare	must have article	can have article	found?
	yes	no	yes	found
	no	yes	no	
	yes	no	no	
*	yes	yes	no	<i>0 contradictory</i>
*	no	no	yes	<i>0 contradictory</i>
*	no	yes	yes	<i>0 contradictory, for same article</i>

Note that contradictory statements hold only for the " same" article. Since we classify some expressions of case as an article, and similarly we classify some uses of Demonstratives as articles, we allow for languages that have an obligatory case marker for objects expressing definiteness, and an optional Dem yo yield both " must" Yes and " Can have"

0.1 Results and discussion

Write to me if you want the draft.