

Defining Definiteness in Ṭuroyo*

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Abstract

This paper reports on field investigations of the syntactic and semantic factors governing definiteness-marking in Ṭuroyo, an endangered Semitic language. Data collected from translation questionnaires and interviews with native Ṭuroyo speakers shows that Ṭuroyo’s definite article has a very wide distribution, covering the full range of uses exhibited by English articles, including giving rise to anti-uniqueness effects with exclusives. They also exhibit double-definiteness uses with demonstratives and possessives, even in non-contrastive environments. The only limit on their distribution is with superlative adjectives, which appear to compete for the article’s syntactic position. Based on the broad range of uses, we suggest that Ṭuroyo’s definiteness-markers are not ‘weak’ but ‘super-weak’ articles that they have familiarity uses because familiarity is a special case of uniqueness.

1 Introduction

Many languages in the Central Semitic family, including Arabic, Hebrew, and Aramaic, have definite articles, though their origins differ. The Arabic and Hebrew definite articles are cognate with each other, but the corresponding form in Aramaic became bleached and disappeared; O’Leary (1923, 204-205) summarizes this as follows:

For the definite article Arabic uses the demonstrative *-l...* Hebrew uses the prefixed demonstrative *ha...* In Aramaic this appears as suffixed *-a*, the so-called “emphatic” form, but here the determining force is generally lost.

*Acknowledgments will be added later.

In place of the lost article, some varieties of Aramaic developed a new one.

Doron & Khan (2016) argue that clues about the origins of this new definiteness marker can be gleaned through comparison of two varieties of Neo-Aramaic, namely Barwar (an Assyrian, or Eastern variety) and Ṭuroyo (a Western variety). Ṭuroyo’s definite article is cognate with its own demonstrative (Lipiński, 2001, 275), and with an element that serves purely as a demonstrative in Barwar. *Contra* Pat-El (2009), Doron & Khan (2016) argue persuasively that the historical development of definiteness in Semitic languages follows Greenberg’s *demonstrative cycle* (Greenberg, 1978), in which a demonstrative pronoun grammaticalizes into a definite article when the demonstrative pronoun becomes “bleached of deixis by anaphoric uses” (p. 79). Assuming this to be the case, Ṭuroyo’s definite article is clearly farther along the grammaticalization pathway than Barwar’s, for the reasons that Doron & Khan (2016) point out. The definite article has non-demonstrative uses, as in (1-a), and co-occurs with the demonstrative determiner (as usual in Semitic languages), as in (1-b):¹

- (1) a. roṭ-na baṭre d-**u** **zecu**ro
run-I after of-DEF child
‘I chased the boy.’
- b. roṭ-na baṭre d-**u** **zecu**ro **yo**
run-I after of-DEF child DEM
‘I chased that boy.’

But what exactly is the range of its usage? This article gives an in-depth look at its distribution, with an eye toward a semantic characterization. Although definiteness-marking has been described to some extent (Jastrow, 2011) and discussed from a syntactic perspective (Doron & Khan, 2016), we are not aware of any in-depth study of this particular issue.

Doron & Khan (2016) argue that Ṭuroyo’s article can mark both “prag-

¹Abbreviations used in glosses:

1/2/3 = first/second/third person
CMPR = comparative
COMP = complementizer
COP = copula
DEF = definite article
NEG = negative/not
POSS = possessive
PL = plural PRO = pronoun
REDUP = reduplication
SUF = (unknown) suffix

matic definiteness” and “semantic definiteness” in Löbner’s (1985) sense. To illustrate the ‘pragmatic’ part, they observe that (2-b) can follow (2-a), and ‘*u bayto* ‘the house’ in (2-b) is interpreted as anaphoric to the house introduced in (2-a).

- (2) a. axoni macmarle bayto
 brother.POSS.1 built house
 ‘My brother built a house.’
 b. ‘**u bayto** qariwo-yo l-u bayto d-**u malko**
 DEF house near-COP to-DEF house of-DEF king
 ‘The house is near the house of the king.’ (Doron & Khan, 2016)

In the same example, *u malko* ‘the king’ is a non-anaphoric definite. Ṭuroyo uses a definite article in this case, but Barwar does not.² Doron & Khan (2016) take the ‘king’ example to show that the definite article can mark semantic uniqueness, while the anaphoric case shows that it can mark pragmatic uniqueness.

Recent cross-linguistic work on definiteness has revealed subtle differences across languages with respect to the kinds of contrasts that definiteness-markers may encode. This project has gained steam after Schwarz (2009) developed a fine-grained, theoretically-based catalogue of uses that definite articles could in principle have, building on Hawkins’s (1978) classification.³ This set of descriptive categories has enabled field linguists to apply a more discerning lens to the languages they study, and we make use of these categories here, in a closer examination of the range of uses for Ṭuroyo’s article.

We based our elicitation materials primarily on the kinds of examples that Schwarz (2009) uses to motivate the strong/weak distinction in Germanic, but also investigate exclusives and superlative adjectives. These latter two kinds of cases are potentially interesting for two reasons. First, Wespel (2008) shows that exclusives, superlatives, and sentence-internal readings of *same* behave distinctively in Haitian Creole, so their behavior cannot be assumed to be like that of other expressions in the language. Second, exclusives give rise to

²We replicated this data point for Ṭuroyo; both Ṭuroyo speakers we consulted produced the same pattern of definiteness marking when asked to translate the English sentence, *My brother built a house. The house is near the house of the king.*

³Besides the entries in this volume, see Wespel 2008 and Deprez (2016) on Mauritian Creole, Ortmann 2014 on Upper Silesian and Upper Sorbian, Jenks (2015) on Mandarin and Thai, Arkoh & Matthewson 2013 and Bombi 2018 on Akan, Barlew (2014) on Bulu, Maldonado et al. 2018 on Yucatec Maya, and individual contributions to Aguilar-Guevara et al. 2019 on Cuevas Mixtec, Lithuanian, American Sign Language, Yokot’an Maya, among others, as well as recent overviews.

anti-uniqueness effects, which Coppock & Beaver (2015) take to show that the English article should be analyzed as ‘super-weak’ rather than ‘weak’, in a sense described below. If Ṭuroyo’s article exhibits anti-uniqueness effects, then according to the same reasoning, such an analysis may be applicable to Ṭuroyo as well.

The results of our investigations show that Ṭuroyo’s definite article has a very wide distribution, covering the full range of uses exhibited by English articles, and beyond, into double definiteness constructions, where they may be used contrastively or non-contrastively. The only limit to their reach is with superlative adjectives, which appear to compete for the article’s syntactic position; we reject a semantic explanation for the absence of the definite article here. In light of these findings, we propose that Ṭuroyo has an underlyingly super-weak semantics.

2 Background on Ṭuroyo

Ṭuroyo is a Neo-Aramaic variety spoken in Southeast Turkey, specifically the Tur Abdin region. Ṭuroyo is considered threatened, with an approximated 100,000 speakers worldwide according to Glottolog,⁴ or 40,000 according to Jastrow (2011). Most Ṭuroyo speakers are in diaspora far from the original homeland. Our speakers live in Massachusetts and Indiana, USA, respectively.

Although Ṭuroyo was transmitted only orally for many years, there have been attempts to establish an orthography for it. Since the 1880’s, Ṭuroyo has been written using the Syriac alphabet, whose script has three main versions, each with its own system of diacritic vowels: Madnhaya, Serto, and Estrangela. In our case, most written communication with our informants was done in Estrangela. Latin scripts have also been developed for Ṭuroyo, primarily in Sweden. In this article we aim to adhere to the orthography standards developed at the 2015 International Surayt Conference held at the University of Cambridge.⁵

In the Syriac alphabet, regardless of script, the definite article is spelled using three letters: (i) *alap*, which we write here as ‘A’, (ii) *heh* ‘H’, and (iii) either *yod* ‘Y’, for the feminine article, or *waw* ‘W’, for the masculine.

Gloss	Syriac spelling	Pronunciation	Latin spelling	Gender
DEF	A- <u>H</u> -Y	[ʔi]	‘i	FEM
DEF	A- <u>H</u> -W	[ʔu]	‘u	MASC

⁴See <https://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/turo1239>.

⁵From <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/Turoyo.htm>, accessed December 15, 2019.

In the definite article series, the *heh* is silent (indicated with an underline in the Syriac orthography), and the *alap* is pronounced as a glottal stop, the *yod* or *waw* in this case functioning as a vowel. The result is pronounced either [ʔi] for the feminine definite article and [ʔu] for the masculine. In the Latin spelling, these are written as ‘*i*’ and ‘*u*’.

3 Findings based on Schwarz’s typology

Before presenting our findings on the distribution of ‘*i*’ and ‘*u*’, let us briefly discuss the theoretical considerations motivating our choice of example sentences. A broad distinction can be made between ‘uniqueness’ and ‘familiarity’ theories of definiteness. According to Frege (1892 [reprinted 1948]), use of a phrase like *the F* is sanctioned whenever one and only one object falls under the description *F*. Hence *the moon* is a licit definite description, since there is only one moon (for us humans), but *?the Baltic state* is not, since there are three. The *iota* operator gives a way of formally capturing Frege’s idea:

$$\iota x . \text{MOON}(x)$$

denotes the unique individual satisfying a given property if one exists, and otherwise fails to denote. A Montague (1973)-style translation of *the* into the typed lambda calculus capturing Frege’s idea can thus be written as follows:

$$(3) \quad \textit{the} \rightsquigarrow \lambda F . \iota x . F(x)$$

This says that the meaning of the definite article is a function that combines with any property to denote the unique individual satisfying that property, as long as such as exists. The lexical entry in (3) represents a UNIQUENESS THEORY of the definite article.

Strawson (1950) pointed out that while there are many tables, and many books, *The book is on the table* is a perfectly legitimate sentence of English. One way of dealing with this fact is to relativize the definite article to a given situation as follows:

$$(4) \quad \textit{the} \rightsquigarrow \lambda s \lambda F . \iota x . F_s(x)$$

Here, *s* is a variable over situations, and $F_s(x)$ means that *x* is an *F* in *s*. The *iota* expression no longer requires that there be at most one *x* in the entire world, only relative to the given situation. This kind of analysis is developed by authors including Heim (1990), Cooper (1996), and Elbourne (2013).

A rival theory, often called the FAMILIARITY THEORY, is advocated within a dynamic semantic framework by Heim (1982), among others. According

to this view, a definite article serves to pick up a familiar discourse referent, just as anaphoric pronouns do. Definite descriptions are associated with an index, just as pronouns are. Without moving fully into dynamic semantics, this approach can be captured using the following formalism:

$$(5) \quad the_i \rightsquigarrow \lambda F . \iota x . [P(x) \wedge x = v_i]$$

Here, v_i denotes the i th variable in a logical language providing a sequence of variables v_0, v_1, v_2, \dots corresponding to potential discourse referents; the preceding context provides information about discourse referents that have already been introduced via constraints on these variables. The familiarity theory involves *iota* but it does not require uniqueness of P ; it only requires that there be exactly one ‘ P associated with index i ’ This helps to explain texts like the following:

$$(6) \quad \text{A glass broke last night. } \mathbf{The\ glass} \text{ had been very expensive.}$$

This story does not lead the reader to conclude that there is only one glass, so uniqueness with respect to the property ‘glass’ is not implied here; what is implied is that there is a unique ‘glass denoted by the antecedent of the current description’, roughly put. But can the job of the familiarity component be done by situations? Suppose *the glass* is evaluated relative to the situation containing the glass introduced in the former sentence; then it could succeed in referring, and uniqueness with respect to the property ‘glass’ would not be implied more generally. Heim (1990), Cooper (1996), and Elbourne (2013) argue that the use of situations renders the familiarity theory of definiteness unnecessary.

Schwarz (2009, 2013) argues that both the uniqueness theory and the familiarity theory are needed, but for different articles. The marriage between these approaches can also be seen in Schwarz’s lexical entry for the ‘strong’ definite article, which incorporates both discourse-familiarity and situation-sensitivity:

$$(7) \quad the_i \rightsquigarrow \lambda s . \lambda F . \iota x . [P_s(x) \wedge x = v_i]$$

In certain Germanic varieties such as the Frisian dialect Fering (Ebert, 1971), there are two series of definite articles, called ‘weak’ and ‘strong’. The distinction is also seen in standard German, in preposition-article combinations: *von dem* ‘of/by the’ vs. the contracted *vom* (*von* + *dem*). Here are two environments in which they are in complementary distribution:

$$(8) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{Der Ampfang wurde } \mathbf{vom} \quad \quad \quad / \quad \mathbf{*von\ dem} \quad \quad \text{Burgermeister} \\ \text{the reception was } \quad \mathbf{by-the}_{weak} / \mathbf{by} \quad \mathbf{the}_{strong} \text{ mayor} \end{array}$$

eröffnet.

opened

‘The reception was opened by the mayor.’ (Schwarz, 2009)

- (9) a. Hans hat einen Schriftsteller und einen Politiker interviewt.
Hans has a writer and a politician interviewed
‘Hans interviewed a writer and a politician.’
- b. Er hat ***vom** / **von dem** Politiker keine
He has **from-the_{weak}** / **from the_{strong}** politician no
interessanten Antworten bekommen.
interesting answers gotten
‘He didn’t get any interesting answers from the politician.’ (Schwarz, 2009)

Schwarz argues that these involve the uniqueness-based lexical entry (4) and the familiarity-based article (7), respectively, based on their distribution in a range of environments. As Schwarz shows, the weak articles are used when uniqueness is presupposed with respect to what Hawkins (1978) calls an ‘immediate situation’ (e.g. *the dog*), a ‘larger situation’ (e.g. *the priest*), or a ‘global situation’ (e.g. *the moon*), and in certain types of bridging anaphora.

Bridging anaphora is a phenomenon in which an anaphor does not have a coreferential linguistic antecedent, but is licensed in view of a predictable relation between its referent and the referent of its antecedent. Schwarz observes that German articles show a split between two different types of bridging anaphora, ‘part-whole bridging’ (e.g. *the tower*, after a church has been introduced), and ‘product-producer’ bridging (e.g. *the author*, after a book has been introduced). The weak article is used for part-whole bridging, while the strong article, which also occurs in anaphoric context, is used for product-producer bridging.

The question we address in this section is whether Turoyo’s article is used in each of these environments. Given the evidence that Turoyo’s definite article is derived from the anaphoric demonstrative **hu* (Doron & Khan, 2016, 49), one might expect the definite article to behave like a strong article to some extent. There tends to be a connection between strong articles and demonstratives. In German, the strong article can also be used as a demonstrative, and strong articles in German, Fering, Akan, Haitian Creole, Mauritian Creole, and Hausa have deictic uses that would be translated into English using a demonstrative (Schwarz, 2013). Cross-linguistic work on definiteness has revealed that languages with definite determiners derived from demonstratives often behave like ‘strong’ articles (Schwarz, 2019); for instance, Cho (2016) argues that Korean *ku*, although it had traditionally been classified

as a demonstrative, functions as a strong definite article. But we find that the distribution of the definite article is not limited to those environments in which strong articles are found in German; it extends fully into all weak article environments as well (and beyond).

3.1 Weak-only environments

We begin with ‘immediate situation’ uses, where uniqueness of the relevant predicate is presupposed relative to the immediate context of use. Turoyo allows the definite article in such cases; the following sentence is acceptable in a context where both the speaker and listener know the dog in question (cf. Schwarz 2009, citing Ebert 1971):

- (10) ‘**u kalbo** arša kokaciv
 DEF dog tooth hurt
 ‘The dog has a toothache’ (Ebert, 1971)

The definite article can also be used to express the uniqueness of ‘larger situations’, where a description is unique relative to a local context (cf. Schwarz 2009, citing Ebert 1971):

- (11) lazëm ezi l-**u dukano**
 must go.1.SG to-DEF store
 ‘I must go to the grocer.’

Doron & Khan’s (2016) ‘king’ example in (2-b) can also be classified as a ‘larger situation’ use.

A case involving ‘global uniqueness’—where the descriptive content is unique relative to the whole world—is the following (cf. Schwarz 2009):

- (12) Armstrong wa ‘**u barnašo** qadmoyo d-faer l-**u sahero**
 Armstrong COP.PST DEF person first COMP-fly to-DEF moon
 ‘Armstrong was the first person to fly to the moon.’

So even if the description is inherently unique, and not mentioned in prior discourse, the definite article is used.

We turn now to part-whole bridging. Bridging is a phenomenon in which the introduction of one entity into the discourse raises other, associated entities to a sufficient level of salience that they can be referred to using an anaphoric expression. The following example illustrates a type of bridging known as ‘part/whole bridging’ (cf. Ebert 1971; Schwarz 2009). In the following example, the first sentence establishes a context, and the second sentence

includes a definite description licensed by an indefinite in the first sentence:

- (13) a. chaza lan **adta** b-flago d-i krito.
 saw to.us church in-middle of-DEF village
 ‘We found **a church** in the middle of the village.’
 b. ‘**u burgo** ušimto awigo wa
 DEF tower a little bit crooked COP.PST
 ‘**The tower** was a little crooked.’

Let us suppose that Turoyo’s definite article has the meaning in (4). Then, according to Schwarz (2009), we can explain its appearance in part/whole bridging contexts like the above as follows: The definite description ‘*u burgo* ‘the tower’ is interpreted relative to the situation consisting of the church introduced in the previous sentence. Since the tower is part of the church, the the tower is guaranteed to exist and in the relevant church-situation, it is the only one.

To summarize, Turoyo’s definite article is used in all of the environments where Germanic weak articles are found: cases where uniqueness is satisfied in the immediate, larger, or global situation, and in part-whole bridging examples. But as we will see in the following section, it is used in all of the environments where Germanic strong articles are found, as well.

3.2 Strong-only environments

The following example, based on Schwarz (2009), illustrates another type of bridging, known as ‘producer/product bridging’; cf. *John bought a book today. The author is French*; Schwarz 2009 p. 6.

- (14) a. Abgar zvalo **kaṭwa** adyoma.
 Abgar bought book today
 ‘Abgar bought a book today.’
 b. ‘**u kaṭowo** franšoyo yo.
 DEF author French COP
 ‘The author is French.’

The use of the definite article is not directly predicted based on the lexical entry in (4). As Schwarz (2009, 54) puts it, “when considering wholes and their parts, it is clear that there is a containment relationship between the two, which in turn ensures that whenever we are looking at a situation that contains the whole, it will also contain the part. This is not the case for the relationship between products and their producers. A situation containing

a book does not generally contain the book’s author.” This data supports an analysis of the definite as a familiarity article, as in (7) (although strictly speaking Schwarz (2009) advocates a relational variant of that lexical entry for cases like this, after arguing that the ‘producers’ producer-product bridging must be relational nouns).

The article in Turoyo also exhibits prototypically anaphoric uses. Example (15) (based on Arkoh & Matthewson 2013) shows an anaphoric use of the definite article.

- (15) a. zvn li furtkala.
 bought for.me orange.
 ‘I bought an orange today.’
 b. **i furtukala** galbo basimto wa
 DEF orange very tasty COP.PST
 ‘The orange was very tasty.’

This example is much like Heim’s *glass* example above; there is no implication that there is only one orange here.

Anaphoric examples abound; here are two more, based on Schwarz (2009) and Ebert (1971), respectively:

- (16) a. ‘u Sargon simlo mēkabolnuṭo cim kaṭowo wa politikaya.
 DEF Sargon had interview with writer and politician
 ‘Sargon interviewed a writer and a politician.’
 b. lo atile punya tuvo m-**u politikaya**
 NEG get answers good from-DEF politician
 ‘He didn’t get any interesting answers from the politician.’

As with the orange example, there is no implication that there is only one politician here. If Schwarz’s (2009) interpretation of this kind of data is correct, then these examples support an analysis of Turoyo’s article as a strong article, as in (7).

3.3 Summary

The distribution of Turoyo’s definite article spans across weak and strong environments. Thus, either Turoyo’s definite article is ambiguous between a uniqueness article and a familiarity article, or its meaning is sufficiently general that it applies in both types of cases. Under Beaver & Coppock’s (2015) view, familiarity is a special case of uniqueness, so an article that carries a uniqueness presupposition should always be usable in anaphoric environments, unless it

is preempted by another form. To account for Heim’s *glass* example above, Beaver & Coppock posit that nouns may carry an index, so that *the glass_i* requires uniqueness relative to the property ‘being a glass labelled *i*’. It turns out that if *i* is a familiar index, then uniqueness of *glass_i* is guaranteed, no matter how many glasses there are, under the system that they define. The data presented in this section is consistent with a unified analysis along these lines, where Turoyo’s definite article is simply a uniqueness article, but nouns may carry an index; hence the familiarity uses.

In the next section, we consider uses that did not figure in Schwarz’s (2009) study, and which are not as often looked at in cross-linguistic studies of definiteness. Exclusives in particular can be used to assess whether a lexical entry that is even weaker than the one in (4) is appropriate.

4 Additional categories

4.1 Exclusives

Coppock & Beaver (2015) argue for what might be called a “super-weak” analysis of the definite article, one where uniqueness is presupposed but existence is not. Evidence for this kind of analysis comes from anti-uniqueness effects in examples like:

(17) Scott is not the only author of *Waverley*.

On one prominent reading of this sentence, it implies that there are multiple authors of *Waverley*. If so, then there is nothing that satisfies the description ‘only author of *Waverley*’. So the definite description as a whole cannot presuppose existence. Under Coppock & Beaver’s (2015) analysis, English *the* is fundamentally predicative, and it acquires existential import through the same kinds of type-shifting operations that give existential import to bare nouns in article-less languages like Russian. Combined with a predicate *P*, *the P* denotes *P*, as long as there is no more than one satisfier of *P* (possibly zero):

(18) $\lambda P . \lambda x . \partial(|P| \leq 1) \wedge P(x)$

With this in mind, we set out to determine whether Turoyo’s definite article appears in noun phrases with exclusives that exhibit anti-uniqueness effects. And indeed, we found that it does. We found anti-uniqueness effects not only for nominals in predicate position, as shown in (19), but also for nominals in argument position (object position in particular), as shown in (20).

- (19) Moushe let-yo ‘**u katowo yëxidoyo** d-u ktowa-wo
 Moushe NEG-COP DEF author only of-DEF book-DEM.FEM
 ‘Moushe is not the only author of that book.’
- (20) Sona lo zamrala yo ‘**i zmirta yaxidita** d-u xago
 Sona NEG sing COP.PST DEF song only of-DEF party
 ‘Sona did not sing the only good song at the party.’

From Coppock & Beaver’s (2015) perspective, what this shows is that a ‘super-weak’ analysis of the sort given in (18) is appropriate. We offer this conclusion tentatively, as more recent work has offered alternative interpretations of this data. According to Bumford (2017), anti-uniqueness effects arise when a definite article, together with the adjective *only*, is interpreted with scope over a larger constituent than the one in which it is syntactically realized. Under this perspective, what data like (19) and (20) show is that the definite article is capable of taking higher-than-surface scope. We have no reason to rule out this alternative view on the significance of these examples.

These two different interpretations of anti-uniqueness effects yield slightly different cross-linguistic predictions. If anti-uniqueness effects show that the definite article lacks an existence presupposition, then we should not find a language with a strong familiarity definite that combines with exclusives to give rise to anti-uniqueness effects, since familiarity implies existence. On the other hand, if anti-uniqueness effects merely signal that the definite article can be interpreted with high scope, then in principle, familiarity definites should be compatible with anti-uniqueness effects. We hope that further cross-linguistic investigations of definiteness will help to shed light on this question.

4.2 Double definiteness

So far, we have seen that Turoyo’s definite article appears everywhere that English *the* appears: In all of the environments that Schwarz considers, and with exclusives that give rise to anti-uniqueness effects as well. We turn now to an environment beyond the distribution of *the* in which Turoyo’s definite article appears, namely in double definiteness constructions.

As Doron & Khan (2016) point out, double-definiteness is found in noun phrases featuring both demonstrative determiners and attributive adjectives:

- (21) kroxam-no ‘**i radayta-yo ‘i semaqto**
 love-I DEF car-DEM DEF red
 ‘I love that red car.’

It is also found in noun phrases with possessives:

- (22) **‘u kalb-aydi ‘u šafiro**
 DEF dog-POSS DEF beautiful
 ‘my beautiful dog’
- (23) **huwë yo ‘u zëmr-idi ‘u raximo**
 PRO COP DEF artist-POSS DEF favorite
 ‘He is my favorite artist.’

The previous examples use the possessive suffix *-idi/aydi*, which co-occurs with the definite article. There is another possessive suffix, *-i*, which is typically used with nouns denoting close familial relationships, and this one does not co-occur with the definite article (Jastrow, 1993, 52-53). However, modifying adjectives are still marked by the definite determiner in conjunction with this kind of possessive:

- (24) **axon-i ‘u nacimo**
 brother-POSS DEF small
 ‘my younger brother’

Although this is not strictly speaking ‘double definiteness’, this construction does involve auxiliary marking of the adjective with the definite article.

Doron & Khan (2016) argue that double definiteness (at least with demonstratives) imposes a contrastive interpretation. They give the following example:

- (25) **g-coyašno b-u bayt-ano ‘u nacimo**
 FUT-live in-DEF house-DEM DEF small
 ‘I shall live in this small house.’

We presented informants with a scenario in which there was only one car, which was red, and our participants reported that the following example would be felicitous in such a scenario.

- (26) **kroxam-no ‘i radayta-yo ‘i semaqto**
 love-I DEF car-DEM.FEM DEF red
 ‘I love that red car.’

Similarly, we found no requirement of contrast in double-definiteness examples with possessives. In a context with only one rosebush, the following sentence was judged acceptable by our informants:

- (27) **hate yo ‘i wardo d-Ashur ‘i šafirto**
 this COP.PRES DEF rose of-Ashur DEF beautiful

‘This is Ashur’s beautiful rosebush’

Hence, at least for our informants, double definiteness is *not* conditioned by contrast, unlike Doron & Khan (2016) would predict. A detailed consideration of the morphosyntax of double-definiteness constructions is beyond the scope of this article. We suggest, however, that in both of these cases the intervention of the demonstrative or possessive phrase between the head noun and the modifier triggers a second realization of definiteness on the modifier, inherited from the dominating DP, as a kind of grammatical agreement.

It may seem at this point that almost nothing can limit the distribution of Ṭuroyo’s definite article. But we turn now to superlatives, which will finally put a stop to it.

4.3 Superlatives

There is no morphological distinction between comparatives and superlatives in Ṭuroyo; the distinction is made through syntax. There are three ways of forming comparatives in Ṭuroyo, one native, one borrowed from Arabic, and one borrowed from Kurdish.

- The native Ṭuroyo form is a reduction of the positive form; for example, *basimto* ‘tasty’ becomes *basəm* ‘tastier/tastiest’.
- In the form borrowed from Arabic, a triconsonantal root enters the aC-CaC template. Thus *basimto* becomes *absam*.
- Finally, the comparative ending *-ter*, borrowed from Kurdish, can be suffixed to the adjectival root, so *basimto* becomes *basim-ter*.

Superlatives involve a form that is morphologically indistinguishable from a comparative, placed syntactically before the noun (whereas adjectival modifiers are normally placed after the noun). The native Ṭuroyo strategy is shown in (28), with the adjective *rabo* ‘big’ shortened to *rab*.

(28) **rab** **ktowo hano** yo
big.CMPR book DEM COP
‘This is the biggest book.’

The Kurdish strategy, which was quite commonly used by our informants, is seen in the following examples:

(29) Sargon salak l-**ali-ter** **tura** b-afrika
Sargon climbed to-high-CMPR mountain in-Africa

‘Sargon climbed the highest mountain in Africa.’

- (30) ‘i momo kosimo **basim-ter besqwit** b-i barito
 DEF mother bakes tasty-CMPR cookies in-DEF world
 ‘Mom bakes the yummiest cookies in the whole world.’
- (31) let no ‘u hadomo d-i ikrataydi d-kit la
 NEG I DEF person of-DEF family.POSS COMP-has to.them
nacim-ter kacaro
 small-CMPR waist
 ‘I’m not the one in the family with the thinnest waist.’

Notice that the superlative adjective precedes the noun in these examples. Adjectives normally follow the noun. It is only when a *-ter*-marked adjective is interpreted as a superlative that it appears prenominal. Here is a minimal pair showing that adnominal superlatives are prenominal, while adnominal comparatives are postnominal:

- (32) ono no d-košote **noketz-ter qahwuto**
 REDUP I COMP-drink less-CMPR coffee
 ‘I am the one who drinks the least coffee.’
- (33) ‘i momo këmore kolazëm d-šute **qahwuto noketz-ter**
 DEF mother says needs to-drink coffee little-CMPR
 ‘Mom says that he ought to drink less coffee.’

The same pattern holds for all three of the morphological comparative/superlative-marking strategies: with a superlative interpretation, the adjective is placed before the noun, and otherwise it is placed after the noun. In this way, the marking of superlative meaning is done through a combination of morphology and syntax.

There are quite a number of other Semitic varieties that exhibit this superlative fronting phenomenon. Other Aramaic varieties that do so include Syriac and the Jewish dialect of Zakho; see Gutman (2018, 86,123) for examples. Superlative fronting occurs in Arabic as well; Elghamry (2004) and Hallman (2016) offer theoretical takes on it, which we will discuss further below. Plank (2003, 361-362) discusses the case of Maltese (heavily influenced by Arabic, if not strictly speaking Semitic) within the context of a general discussion of superlatives in Romance languages, pointing out that because the superlative is fronted, one of the definite articles that would otherwise surface is lost.

But fronting of superlatives in this fashion is not ubiquitous among the Semitic languages. Urmi, for example, a dialect of Assyrian (alternatively,

‘Eastern’) Neo-Aramaic—much more closely related to Ṭuroyo than Arabic or Maltese—treats superlatives on a par with other adjectival modifiers, that is, after the noun (Khan, 2016, 67) (although Gutman (2018, 7) notes that superlative adjectives can occur preminally as part of the Construct State construction in Urmi).

Superlative fronting (an instance of what Gutman (2018) calls ‘inverse juxtaposition’) is “clearly an areal phenomenon” according to Gutman (2018, 123, fn. 10), and it may be due to contact with Persian languages, where superlatives, along with ordinals (which are morphologically superlative) are generally placed before the noun, although adjectives canonically appear after the noun (see e.g. Samvelian 2007 for Persian, MacKenzie 1961, 68 for Sorani Kurdish, and Thackston 2006, 28 as well as MacKenzie 1961, 215 for Kurmanji Kurdish).

Gutman (2018, 123, fn. 10) writes, “One reviewer suggested this [superlative fronting] is semantically motivated, as superlatives establish a unique reference similarly to determiners which are typically pre-nominal.” While there might be something to this idea, we believe that this theory raises more questions than it resolves. The case of Mauritian Creole (Wespel, 2008) is instructive as a point of comparison. Mauritian Creole has a split definiteness-marking system, where the determiner is absent in the presence of adjectives that imply uniqueness, including *sèl* ‘only’, superlatives (although here there is a split, described further below), and *menm* ‘same’. If the fronting of superlatives in Ṭuroyo were due to their inherent uniqueness, then we would expect fronting with exclusive adjectives as well. As we saw above, exclusive ‘only’ in Ṭuroyo is not fronted, nor is it in any of the other geographically-related languages with superlative fronting, as far as we know.

We also do not see the split among superlatives that we see in Mauritian Creole. The Mauritian Creole sentence corresponding to (34) lacks a definite article while the one corresponding to (35) has one. Ṭuroyo’s definite article is persistently absent across these contexts, and superlatives are consistently fronted.

- (34) **ṭav-ter** **yalufa** b-u sidra d-malfana Malka gad atile dašno
 good-CMPR student in-DEF class of-teacher Malka will get prize
 ‘The best student in Mr. Malka’s class will get a reward.’ (Wespel, 2008)
- (35) b-u sidra d-malfana Malka **ṭav-ter** **yalufa** gad atile dašno
 in-DEF class of-teacher Malka good-CMPR student will get prize
 ‘In Mr. Malka’s class, the best pupil will get a reward. (Wespel, 2008)

Nor is the fronting of superlatives, and concomittant absence of the definite article, tied whether they have an ‘absolute reading’ or a ‘relative reading’ (Szabolcsi, 1986; Heim, 1999). The following example illustrates a relative reading:

- (36) min binta d-u Moushe wa ‘u Sargon wa ‘i Atour ‘u
 from among of-DEF Moushe and DEF Sargon and DEF Atour DEF
 Sargon salak l-**ali-ter** **ṭura**
 Sargon climbed to-high-CMPR mountain
 ‘Among Moushe, Sargon, and Atour, Sargon climbed the highest mountain.’ (Wespel, 2008)

(We consider this a relative reading because the comparison class, made explicit with the *among* phrase, is a set of mountain-climbers, rather than mountains.) One might expect the definite article to be absent only with relative readings, as superlatives are semantically indefinite on such readings (Szabolcsi, 1986).

Hallman (2016) offers another somewhat semantically-based theory of superlative fronting in Syrian Arabic in terms of Heim’s (1999) analysis of superlatives. As he points out, the syntactic behavior of superlatives in Syrian Arabic matches Heim’s (1999) posited Logical Forms, in which superlatives undergo a raising operation within the local noun phrase. He posits that Heim’s LF movement takes place overtly in Syrian Arabic. We find this rather implausible for the Sprachbund in general, and Ṭuroyo in particular, though, because if superlatives always surfaced in their LF position, then superlatives should surface far from their local noun phrase on relative readings, assuming Heim’s (1999) scope theory of relative superlatives. Under this theory, on relative readings, superlatives undergo a movement operation that lands them in proximity to the focused constituent, far away from the modified noun. As we have just seen, with example (36), superlatives do not move so far away from the noun they modify on relative readings, so the degree to which their surface syntax reflects their LF position would have to be limited in some way. Furthermore, something would have to be said about the related languages that do not exhibit superlative fronting, and this would presumably have to do with their syntax, rather than the LF position of superlatives. Thus any explanation for superlative fronting will ultimately have to rest at least in part with the syntax.

These considerations leave us with no reason to believe that the fronting of superlatives or the absence of the definite article is semantically motivated. Rather, we find it more likely that superlatives and the definite article compete

for the syntactic position of the determiner, as Elghamry (2004) argued for Arabic.

5 Conclusion and outlook

We have carried out a detailed investigation of the distribution of definiteness-markers in Turoyo. We found that Turoyo’s definite articles are used everywhere English *the* is used, spanning both weak and strong environments, and also giving rise to anti-uniqueness effects. There are two major differences between Turoyo’s definite articles and English’s: (i) they appear on adjectival modifiers in double definiteness constructions, and (ii) they do not co-occur with superlatives, but we argue that these differences are due to purely syntactic factors. We tentatively propose that Turoyo’s definiteness-markers are super-weak articles in Coppock & Beaver’s (2015) sense, although we recognize that Bumford (2017) provides an alternative perspective on the significance of anti-uniqueness effects that could also account for the data. A weak or super-weak analysis is compatible with familiarity uses under the assumption that familiarity is a special case of uniqueness (Beaver & Coppock, 2015).

Methodologically, this paper adds exclusives to the list of environments to check when investigating the distribution of the definite article in a given language. Exclusives play a starring role in a phenomenon that potentially distinguishes between ‘weak’ and ‘super-weak’ semantics for the definite article, namely anti-uniqueness effects. If Coppock & Beaver’s (2015) interpretation of the phenomenon is correct, then field researchers should add this to their battery of tests, in order to be on the lookout for super-weak articles.

Our reasoning makes two testable cross-linguistic predictions. First, the idea that familiarity is a special case of uniqueness means that uniqueness definites should always have familiarity uses except when blocked by a specific form. We know of no counterexamples to this prediction, but as far as we know it has not been tested specifically. Second, if anti-uniqueness effects are diagnostic of the absence of an existence presupposition, then we should not find a language with a strong familiarity definite that combines with exclusives to give rise to anti-uniqueness effects. We hope that both of these predictions will be tested in future cross-linguistic work on definiteness.

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