Definiteness Distinctions in a Language with One Determiner

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1 Introduction

What is this talk about? Definite and indefinite DPs in Palauan, a language with "only one determiner."

- Two key questions to answer:

    - Are there syntactic environments in which ambiguously (in)definite DPs may be interpreted only as definite or indefinite?

    - Do the structures of definite and indefinite DPs differ in Palauan?

Two types of Palauan DPs

- Basic DPs: *a* + NP (Palauan)
  ≈ *a/some/the* + NP (English)

- Demonstrative DPs: demonstrative + *el* + NP (Palauan)
  ≈ demonstrative + NP (English)

(1) a. Basic DP:

    Ng omes er [$_{DP}$ a bilis] a Melii.
    3sg see   acc [D dog] D Melii
    "Melii sees **a/the dog**."

   b. Demonstrative DP

    [$_{DP}$ Ngika el ngelek-el a uel   ] a   kmal mle kekere.
    [dem l child-poss D turtle] top very was small
    "**This turtle-baby** was very small."   [OS 1]

An oddity regarding the linker...

- Why does the linker *el* appear in demonstrative DPs?

    - Linker is a common Austronesian morpheme that co-occurs with modifiers that can appear either on the left or right of the constituent they modify.

    - In Palauan: this is true of adjectives, quantifiers, relative clauses.

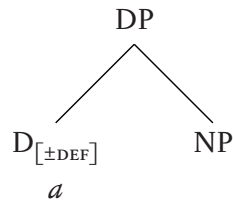   - There are no modificational elements in the DP in (1b)!

Analysis Preview:

- BASIC DPs):

    - Structure:

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\diagup\diagdown \\
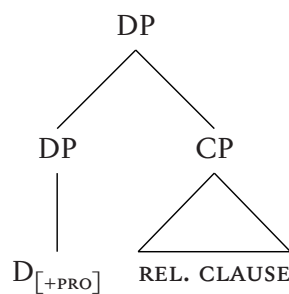\text{D}_{[\pm\text{DEF}]}\text{NP} \\
a
\end{array}
$$

    - *a* is a determiner (and the *only* determiner in Palauan that can select a complement).

    - Determiner *a* appears in both definite and indefinite DPs (possibly two homophonous determiners).

- DEMONSTRATIVE DPs):

    - Structure:

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\diagup\diagdown \\
\text{DP}\text{CP} \\
|\triangle \\
\text{D}_{[+\text{PRO}]}\text{REL. CLAUSE}
\end{array}
$$

    - Demonstrative morphemes are actually pronominal D's.

    - Demonstrative morphemes do not take NP complements.

    - What looks like an NP is actually a non-restrictive relative clause containing a nominal predicate. (Hence the appearance of the linker.)

Roadmap:

- §2: Basic facts about Palauan and the data.

- §3: Arguments for particular structures.

- §4: Definiteness distinctions and ambiguities.

- §5: Conclusion.

2   Basic facts about Palauan and the data

Palauan is spoken in the Republic of Palau (and elsewhere); approx. 15,000 speakers.

- *Typical Austronesian features:*

    - Underlyingly VOS.[1]

    - Null pronominal arguments (usually associated with overt agreement).[2]

    - Predicates of any lexical category and no copula. [3]

    - Head-initial; and rightward-branching specifiers.[4]

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[1]See Waters 1980 and Georgopoulos 1986 for arguments.
[2]See Hagège 1986 and Georgopoulos 1991 for details.
[3]See Capell 1949 and Josephs 1975 for many examples.
[4]See Georgopoulos 1991 for argumentation; *cf.* Guilfoyle et al. 1992 for a similar analysis of closely related Western Malayo-Polynesian languages.

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                         XP
                        /  \
                       /    \
                     X′    <SPECIFIER>
                    /  \
                   /    \
                  X    <COMPLEMENT>
                 HEAD
```
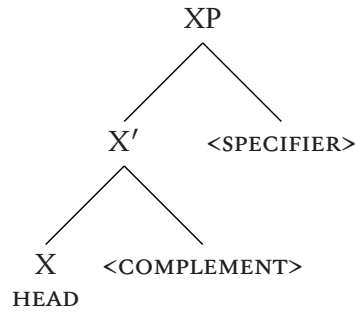
Figure 1: Phrase structure schema for all Palauan lexical categories

– Widespread subject (left-)topicalization.[5]

Sources of data:

- ELICITATION: >3 years of orig. fieldwork, incl. 6 months of on-site fieldwork in Palau.

- PREVIOUS DESCRIPTIVE/THEORETICAL LINGUISTIC WORK: reference grammars, dissertations, articles, books.

- NATURALLY OCCURRING DATA: books, newspapers, children's stories, pedagogical texts, cultural materials, the Palauan language Bible.

All argumentation today is based on data collected from actual speakers of Palauan; published data is provided to corroborate results from fieldwork. Citation codes are included: original sources can be provided.

3 Arguments for particular structures

This section is concerned with DP structure: first the structure of what I call "basic" DPs and then the structure of demonstrative DPs.

3.1 Distribution of the determiner *a*

- The syntactic status of *a* has proven mysterious to Palauan descriptive linguists, largely because it is homophonous with the topic marker *a* (Nuger 2010: 33–39).

    – No new analysis of *a* since the advent of the DP hypothesis.

- Essentially, *a* introduces any non-predicative nominal constituent (DP) that is not headed by a pronoun or demonstrative.

    – Many other constituents can appear inside a Palauan noun phrase.
    – *a* precedes all other material in the NP.
    – Unmarked order is something along the lines of [Determiner (*a*), (Quantifier), (Adjectives), Head Noun, (Possessor DP), PP/CP-Complements, (Other Modifiers)].

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[5]Though its analysis has been rather controversial — see, *i.a.*, Josephs 1975; Waters 1980; Georgopoulos 1991; Lemaréchal 1991 for details.

Examples of complex DPs:

(2) a me-kngit el ralm er a sewer el me t*u*obed er se er a Ongedei me
     D INTR-bad L water P D sewer L come *INTR*.emerge P this.(time) P D third and

     a Ongeuang el Ureor er tia el m*l*o merek el sandei
     D fourth L work(day) P this L *PAST*.become finished L week
     "the bad sewer water that came out on Wednesday and Thursday of last week"

[*Roureor Belau*, 17 April 2002]

(3) a kot el bli-l a ureor el omerek er a tekoi el chelid er tia el beluu
     D first L house-3SGP D work L spread.IMPF ACC D word L god P this L country
     "the first mission in this country" (*approx.* "the first house of work to spread God's word in
     this country") [IK 5]

(4) a re-terung el kau-sechelei el chad el m*i*llib er a mo er a chei
     D PL-two L RECIP-friends L people L *PAST*.plan P D go P D sea
     "the two friends who planned to go fishing" (*approx.* "the two friends-with-each-other people
     who planned on the going to the sea") [IC 151]

- All optional elements inside the NP other than possessors and PPs (*e.g.*, quantifiers, adjectives, relative clauses, and other modifiers):

    – Condition the presence of a linker morpheme *el*.[6]

    – May appear either on the left or the right side of the head noun.

- The morpheme *a* (by contrast):

    – Does not trigger linker morphology.

    – Must occur on the left of all NP-internal elements.

(5) a. Ak ou-charm **a uel** *pro*.
         1SG VBLZ-pet D turtles I
         "I keep turtles as pets."

     b. *Ak ou-charm **a el uel** *pro*.
         1SG VBLZ-pet D L turtles D I
         ("I keep turtles as pets.") *a* CANNOT TRIGGER LINKER MORPHOLOGY

     c. *Ak ou-charm **uel** **a** *pro*.
         1SG VBLZ-pet turtles D D I
         ("I keep turtles as pets.") *a* CANNOT APPEAR TO THE RIGHT OF NP

- Order with respect to modifiers suggests that *a* is a head, external to NP (consistent with DP analysis).

    – If *a* is a D, obligatory appearance to the left of NP follows from Palauan's head-initial word order.

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[6]This is typical of many Austronesian languages. I gloss the linker as L. In other work, *e.g.*, Nuger 2010, I treat the linker as a dissociated morpheme that is inserted post-syntactically. Nothing that I say today depends on a particular analysis of the linker, however.

Further support:

- Distribution of *a* is consistent with its analysis as a determiner if it's true that determiners and pronouns are in complementary distribution (Postal 1966; *cf.* Abney 1987).

- In Palauan, *a* cannot co-occur with pronouns (6) or with demonstrative morphemes (7).

(6) *a* CANNOT CO-OCCUR WITH PRONOUNS:

    a. Ke   olengit   er   **ngak** *pro*?
        2SG= ask.IMPF ACC me   you
        "Are you asking me?"

    b. *Ke   olengit   er   **a ngak** *pro*?
        2SG= ask.IMPF ACC D me   you
        ("Are you asking me?")

(7) *a* CANNOT CO-OCCUR WITH DEMONSTRATIVE MORPHEMES:

    a. **Tirke** el chad   a   mla olengeseu er   **se**   el bilis.
        those L   people TOP AUX help.IMPF ACC that L   dog
        "Those people have helped that dog."

    b. ***A tirke** el chad   a   mla olengeseu er   **a se**   el bilis.
        D those L   people TOP AUX help.IMPF ACC D that L   dog
        ("Those people have helped that dog.")

TAKE HOME MESSAGE: The morpheme *a* is a D.

3.2 The syntax of demonstrative DPs

RECALL THE ODDITY ABOUT THE LINKER: Why do demonstrative DPs contain a linker morpheme even if there are no modifiers in them?

(8) ngika <u>el</u> rubak
    this   <u>L</u> old.man
    "this old man"

PROPOSED ANSWER: Demonstrative DPs as pronominally-headed, with relative clause modifiers adjoined to the DP.

- Not often mentioned in the Palauan descriptive literature: definite DPs may substitute *a* for a pronoun + linker combination. Compare (9a–b).

- Resembles demonstrative DPs! See (9c).

(9) a. Basic DP:

        a uel
        D turtle
        "a/the turtle"

    b. Definite DP headed by pronoun followed by *el*:

        <u>ngii</u> el uel
        it   L turtle
        "that turtle"

    c. Demonstrative DP:

      <u>se</u>   el uel
   <u>that</u> L turtle
      "that turtle"

HYPOTHESIS: Demonstrative morphemes are pronouns.

- Besides similar distribution w.r.t. NPs, they are also treated as deictic pronouns in isolation as in (10).

(10) a. A rrat   a   mla er **sei**.
          D bicycle TOP was P that
          "The bicycle was (over) there."   *sei* MEANS EITHER "that" OR "there" (="that place")

    b. A rrat   a   mla er **tiang**.
          D bicycle TOP was P this
          "The bicycle was (right) here."   *tiang* MEANS EITHER "this" OR "here" (="this place")

    c. A rrat   a   mla er **ngii**.
          D bicycle TOP was P it
          "The bicycle was there."   *ngii* MEANS EITHER "it" OR "there"

- I propose that the structure of demonstrative DPs is that of (11).

- That is, what would be the NP complement of the determiner *a* is treated as a (non-restrictive/appositive) relative clause introduced by the linker *el* (as are all relative clauses in Palauan).[7]

(11) DEMONSTRATIVE DPS HAVE PRONOMINAL D HEADS WITH RELATIVE CLAUSE ADJUNCTS TO DP:
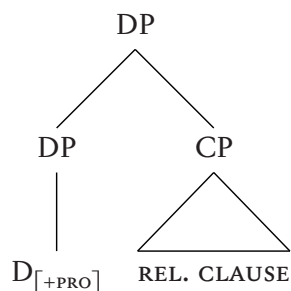
- In this structure, D does not have an NP complement!

- What looks like the NP is actually a relative clause.

    – (11) predicts that the linker will appear, despite there being no apparent modifier. (All relative clauses are introduced by the linker.)

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[7]See Demirdache 1991: 111 and Bianchi 2002: 237 for discussion.

(12) a. DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN *tirke* WITH VP PREDICATE IN RELATIVE CLAUSE:

[DP **tirke** [RELATIVE el ulsiik   a kodell-em   ]]
   those   L seeked D death-your
"those who wanted to kill you"   [*Chedaol Biblia*, Exodus 4:19]
LITERAL TRANSLATION: "those, who seeked your death"

b. DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN *tirka* WITH NP PREDICATE IN RELATIVE CLAUSE:

[DP **tirka** [RELATIVE el rokui el chad   ]]
   these   L all   L people
"all these people"   [*Chedaol Biblia*, Numbers 11:11]
LITERAL TRANSLATION: "these, who were all people"

c. REFERENTIAL PRONOUN *tir* WITH NP PREDICATE IN RELATIVE CLAUSE:
[DP **tir** [RELATIVE el rokui el sechal]]
   they   L all   L males
"all the males"   [*Chedaol Biblia*, Genesis 17:23]
LITERAL TRANSLATION: "they, who were all male"

TAKE HOME MESSAGE: Demonstratives are like pronouns insofar as they are determiners that are unable to select NP complements.

Syntactic evidence: Tense auxiliaries

- Demonstrative DPs can contain the tense auxiliaries used to mark tense on predicate nominals.

(13) a. [DP **tirke** [RELATIVE el <u>mle</u>   sensei   ]]
       those   L PAST teachers
    "those former teachers" (*lit.* "those (people), who were teachers")

b. [DP **tirka** [RELATIVE el <u>mo</u>   sechel-ik   ]]
       these   L FUTURE friends-my
    "these soon-to-be friends of mine" (*lit.* "these (people), who will be my friends")

Morphological evidence: Plural marking

- In Palauan, referential human plural nouns are obligatorily marked with the prefix *re-* (Josephs 1975).

- Predicate nominals describing plural subjects *optionally* marked with *re-*.

  – Marked with *re-* if the predicate nominal is referential (*i.e.*, in specificational copular sentences).

  – Not marked with *re-* if the predicate nominal is non-referential (*i.e.*, in predicational copular sentences).[8]

(14) PREDICATE NOMINAL WITH OPTIONAL PLURAL MARKING:

[A re-chad   er a osbitar] a   (re-)chad   el smecher.
[D PL-people P D hospital] TOP (PL-)people L sick
With *re-*: "The hospital patients the people who are sick."   SPECIFICATIONAL
Without *re-*: "The hospital patients are sick people."   PREDICATIONAL

[8]See Higgins 1973; Mikkelsen 2005 for more on the distinction.

- Interestingly, plural marking is *optional* in of demonstrative DPs.

  – Patterns with predicate nominals rather than head nouns in basic DPs!

(15) PLURAL MARKING OBLIGATORY ON HUMAN NOUNS IN BASIC DPs:

    a. a chad
        D person
        "a/the person"

    b. a <u>re-chad</u>
        D PL-people
        "(some/the) people"

(16) PLURAL MARKING OPTIONAL ON HUMAN NOUNS IN DEMONSTRATIVE DPs:

    a. ngike el chad   / tirka el <u>chad</u>
        this   L person / these L <u>people</u>
        "this person / these people"

    b. tirka el <u>re-chad$_i$</u> [el k-ulemes   er   tir$_i$]
        these L <u>PL-people</u> [L 1SG.IRR-see.PAST ACC them]
        "these people, whom I saw"

(17) a.

   b.
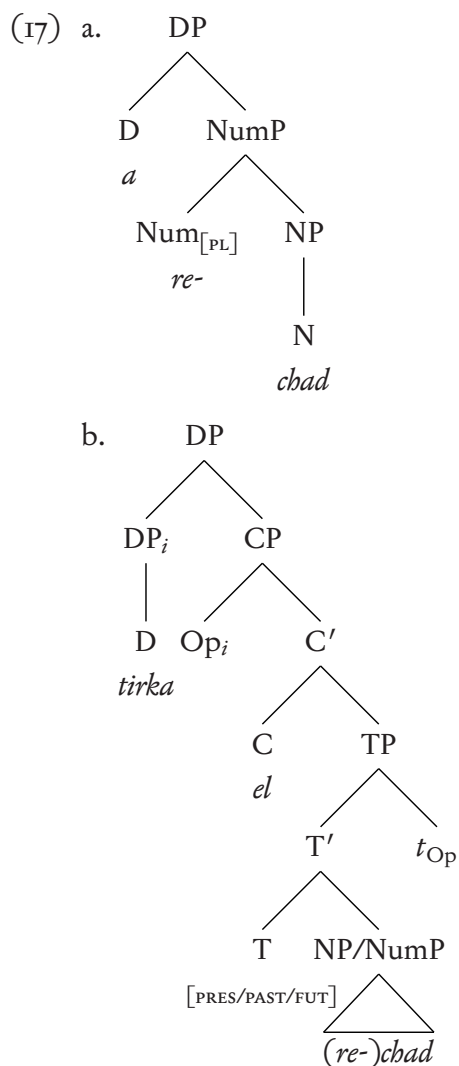
4   Definiteness distinctions and ambiguities

Where are we so far?

- There is only one non-pronominal determiner in Palauan that takes a complement (*a*).

- Demonstrative determiners are pronominal and do not take complements.

QUESTION: In a system like this, how does definiteness work?

4.1   Definiteness distinctions in basic DPs

- The determiner *a* does not encode definiteness (Capell 1949; Josephs 1975, 1997, 1999).

  - DPs whose heads are *a* can be interpreted either as definite or indefinite.
  - Recall (1a).

(1a) Ng omes er   [$_{DP}$ a bilis] a Melii.
      3SG see   ACC [D dog] D Melii
      "Melii sees **a/the dog**."

- Definiteness ambiguity is pervasive in ordinary Palauan speech in all registers.

  - Often resolved through contextual clues.

- SUGGESTS: Definiteness is either...

  1. determined contextually/pragmatically.
  2. encoded formally in the grammar somehow (syntactically or semantically).

Two reasons to believe that definiteness is somehow encoded as a grammatical feature:

- Differential object marking is sensitive to definiteness (Woolford 2000; Nuger 2009, 2010; *cf.* Bossong 1985, Aissen 2003).

- Pivot of a Palauan existential must be indefinite (*cf.* Milsark 1977 for English).

Differential object marking

- Definite direct objects of imperfective verbs must bear overt accusative case marking.

- Indefinite direct objects optionally bear accusative case, depending on whether or not they are specific.[9]

(18) a. Ak milenga   er   a   bobai *pro*.
          1SG eat.PAST.IMPF ACC that L   papaya I
          ✔ CAN MEAN: "I was eating **the papaya**."
          ✘ CANNOT MEAN: "I was eating **papaya**."

      b. Ak milenga   a bobai *pro*.
          1SG eat.PAST.IMPF D papaya I
          ✘ CANNOT MEAN: "I was eating **the papaya**."
          ✔ CAN MEAN: "I was eating **papaya**."

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[9]*cf.* Turkish (Enç 1991), Persian (Lazard 1982).

TAKE HOME MESSAGE: The grammar must be sensitive enough to definiteness to determine whether DP direct objects should bear overt or null accusative case morphology.

Pivots of existentials

- Palauan has the same type of definiteness effect in existentials as Milsark (1977) observed for English.

- Referential DPs ungrammatical in existentials, as in (19).

- Clearly indefinite DPs okay in existentials, as in (20).

(19)   PRONOUN/NAME/DEFINITE DESCRIPTION:

    *Ng ngar er ngii tir   / a Melii / [a del-am   *pro*] er a delmerab.
    3SG exist P there them / D Melii / [D mother-POSS you] P D room
    "There is **them/Melii/your mother** in the room."

(20)   a.   DISCOURSE REFERENT INTRODUCED AT THE BEGINNING OF A STORY:

        A irechar   e   ng   mla er ngii [a ta   el chelid [el ngkl-el   a
        D earlier.times then 3SG= was P there [D one L god   [L name-3SGP D

           Meluadeangel]].
           Meluadeangel]]
        "Once upon a time, there was **a god named Meluadeangel**."   [CM 7]

    b.   NON-REFERENTIAL DP IN A CONDITIONAL:

        A l-sekum   te   ngar er ngii [a re-mo   50 el melemalt el chad   [el
        D 3SGS.IRR-case 3PL= be   P there [D PL-AUX.FUT 50 L innocent L people [L

           ngar er se   el beluu]], e...
           be P that L city   ]] then...
        "If there are **fifty innocent people in the city**..."   [*Chedaol Biblia*, Genesis 18:24]

PREDICTION: Basic DPs will be unambiguously indefinite in existentials. [Borne out.]

(21)   Ng ngar er ngii a rechad er a delmerab.
    3SG exist P there D people P D room
    ✔ CAN MEAN: "There are **people** in the room."
    ✗ CANNOT MEAN: "There are **the people** in the room."

4.2   Demonstrative DPs are definite (unsurprisingly)

- Demonstrative DPs (and pronominal DPs more generally) are treated as definite by the two diagnostics.

Differential object marking pattern:

(22)   PRONOUNS MUST BE CASE-MARKED AFTER IMPERFECTIVE VERBS (LIKE ALL DEFINITES):

    a.   Ak milenga   er   ngii *pro*.
        1SG eat.PAST.IMPF ACC it   I
        "I was eating it."

   b. *Ak milenga   ngii *pro*.
      ISG eat.PAST.IMPF it   I
      ("I was eating it.")

(23) DEMONSTRATIVE DPs MUST BE CASE-MARKED AFTER IMPERFECTIVE VERBS:

   a. Ak milenga   er tia el blauang *pro*.
       ISG eat.PAST.IMPF ACC this L bread   I
       "I was eating this bread."

   b. *Ak milenga   tia el blauang *pro*.
       ISG eat.PAST.IMPF this L bread   I
       ("I was eating this bread.")

(24) PRONOUNS CANNOT BE PIVOTS OF EXISTENTIALS:

  *Ng ngar er ngii ngii/kau/tir er a delmerab.
   3SG be   P there it/you/them P D room
   "There is **it/you/them** in the room."

(25) DEMONSTRATIVE DPs CANNOT BE PIVOTS OF EXISTENTIALS:

  *Ng ngar er ngii tia el blauang er a delmerab.
   3SG be   P there this L bread P D room
   "There is **this bread** in the room."

5 Conclusions

Summary of the talk:

- Palauan has only one non-pronominal D: *a*.

- Demonstrative morphemes are pronouns (with optional relative clauses adjoined to DP).

- Basic DPs exhibit definiteness ambiguities (*a* does not encode definiteness).

- Demonstrative DPs (and all pronominal DPs) are universally definite.

Food for thought:

- Strong evidence that there is a grammatically encoded definiteness distinction between different types of DP.

- Where is it encoded? A few options:
  - In the syntax?
    * Of the candidates for a host (D and N), D seems more attractive.
    * It must be on D in pronominal DPs.
    * Would be odd to have (all?) nouns lexically marked as definite/indefinite.
    * But where would a [±DEF] feature come from? (Discourse structure?)
  - In the semantics?
    * Possibly a better explanation for the definiteness effect in existentials.
    * But differential object marking pattern a challenge for the Y-model.

OVERALL CONCLUSION: Despite minor differences in the morphology and syntax of DPs in Palauan vs. other languages, definiteness seems to work similarly. The determiner system is, in contrast to some other languages, relatively impoverished, but the relevant distinctions between definite/indefinite DPs can still be observed.

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