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On weak definites and their contribution to event kinds

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Abstract

In this paper we focus on the meaning of definite DPs that allow a weak reading. We review three different proposals for weak definites, and we present a new analysis with special reference to Romance languages. We submit that the eventual weak reading of a definite DP and its contribution to a ‘familiar’ kind of activity is exclusively dependent on whether certain stereotypical information encoded on the N present in the DP is activated at the time of utterance interpretation. These DPs do not refer to kinds and do not correspond to incorporated objects. Hence, their interpretation is not compositionally driven, but rather pragmatically inferred. We predict that the identification of weak definites takes place beyond grammar and is constrained by encyclopedic information.

1. On weak definites

Previous versions of this paper were presented at the 40th *Incontro di Grammatica Generativa* (Trento, 2014), the 24th *Coloquio de Gramática Generativa* (Madrid, 2014), and the *Romania Nova VII* conference (Universidad de Buenos Aires, 2014). We would like to thank Elena Castroviejo, the audiences at these conferences as well as the reviewers for all their comments.

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A weak definite (henceforth, WD) is a definite DP that occurs in the object position of a transitive verb (or a V + P complex), and that together with this V (or V + P) forms a complex predicate that encodes some stereotypical information, usually associated with a typical or characteristic activity with respect to some accessible background knowledge.

Some examples of VPs containing WDs for English (E), Catalan (C) and Spanish (S) are given in (1).

(1) a. *read the newspaper / go to the hospital* (E)

b. *agafar l'ascensor / mirar-se al mirall* (C)

take the.lift look.at.REFL to.the mirror

‘take the lift / look at oneself in the mirror’

c. *lavar los platos / ir a la escuela* (S)

wash the.PL dishes go to the school

‘wash the dishes / go to school’

Several accounts of WDs have been put forth in the literature. We will review three of them to show they are either inappropriate or incomplete, and then present our own proposal.

1.1. Aguilar-Guevara and Zwarts: WDs and reference to kinds

Aguilar-Guevara and Zwarts (2010, 2013) and Aguilar-Guevara (2014) argue that weak definites refer to kinds (as opposed to individual objects).¹ However, we present

¹ See Zwarts's (2014) suggestion that WDs do not refer to kinds of individual entities, but rather to entities performing typical functions in specific (encyclopedic) frames. For an analysis in terms of frames of definite DPs that refer to non-unique and not necessarily familiar entities, see also Birner and Ward (1994).

a set of properties that show that nominal expressions interpreted as WDs are grammatically distinct from those nominal expressions with kind reference.

A) WDs are specified for Number. They must show either singular or plural number, but cannot show both, as exemplified in Spanish (2), which means that they are morphosyntactically defective.² By contrast, nominal expressions with kind reference in Spanish, such as *el dodó* in (3), have been argued to have no Number (Borik & Espinal 2012, 2015), which means that the definite article applies on the Noun itself, and no instantiation of the kind is under consideration.

(2)a. *Mirarse al espejo.* // # *mirarse a los espejos.* (S)

look.at.REFL to.the mirror.SG look.at.REFL to.the.PL mirror.PL

‘to look at oneself in the mirror’

b. *lavar los platos.* // # *lavar el plato.*

wash the.PL dish.PL wash the dish

‘to wash the dishes’

(3) *El dodó se extinguió en el siglo XVII.*

the dodo CL extinguished in the century 17

‘The dodo became extinct in the 17th century.’

(Borik & Espinal 2015: 241, ex. (30))

B) WDs even in languages that usually do not allow a null determiner in argument position, like Spanish and Catalan, show intra- and crosslinguistic variation with regard to the presence vs. absence of the definite article (4). By contrast, definite kinds require the obligatory presence of the definite article (5). This syntactic difference relates to a semantic one: whereas nominal expressions with a WD reading

² In the set of examples we give in this paper, the symbol # means that the sequence is not appropriate under a weak reading.

do not refer to a uniquely identifiable referent, nominal expressions with a kind reference refer to a unique entity.

(4)a. *cotizar en la bolsa.* // *cotizar en bolsa.* (S)

be.listed on the stock exchange be.listed on stock exchange

‘to be listed on the stock exchange’

b. *ir a la escuela.* (S) // *anar a escola.* (C)

go to the school go to school

‘to go to school’

(5) **(El) dodó era un ave endémica de la Isla Mauricio.* (S)

the dodo was a bird native of the Island Mauritius

‘The dodo bird was native to the island of Mauritius.’

C) In spite of being specified for Number, WDs refer neither to an individual object nor to a maximality of individuals. Accordingly, *los zapatos* ‘the shoes’ in (6), in the weak reading, do not refer to the maximal sum of all relevant shoes in the nominal domain, but to an amount³ of shoes (including boots, sandals, etc., that is, any type of footwear conceptually related to the hyperonym lexical item *zapato* ‘shoe’). In this sense, WDs are not generic expressions, but they are number neutral. By contrast, definite kinds, such as *el colibrí* ‘the hummingbird’ in (7), are conceived as integral entities that lack instantiations and are generic expressions (Borik & Espinal 2015).

(6) *limpiar los zapatos.* (S)

clean the.PL shoe.PL

‘to clean one’s shoes’

(7) *El colibrí es abundante en Costa Rica.*

the hummingbird is abundant in Costa Rica

³ See, in this respect, Doron and Meir (2013).

‘The hummingbird is abundant in Costa Rica.’

D) WDs are lexically restricted, that is, not any noun can be part of a definite DP with a WD reading. In other words, not any noun can occur in object position of a transitive verb (or a V + P complex) and together with this V (or V + P) forms a complex predicate that encodes some stereotypical information, usually associated with a typical or characteristic activity with respect to some accessible background knowledge. A well-known example is illustrated in (8): whereas *el periódico* ‘the newspaper’ licenses a WD reading in combination with the verb *leer* ‘to read’, *el libro* ‘the book’ cannot license a similar interpretation. On the other hand, what we call definite kinds are grammatically restricted; any noun is able to license a kind interpretation in argument position of a kind-level predicate (Carlson 1977), because this interpretation arises only when a DP structure with a definite D and no Number specification applies to a common Noun. This is illustrated in (9).

- (8) leer *el periódico* // # leer *el libro* (S)
 read the.SG newspaper.SG read the.SG book.SG
 ‘to read the newspaper’ // ‘to read the book’

- (9) Steve Jobs inventó *el ipod* / *el iphone* / *el ipad*.
 Steve Jobs invented the ipod the iphone the ipad
 ‘Steve Jobs invented the ipod / the iphone / the ipad.’

E) WDs occur with stage-level predicates, either transitive (10a) or unaccusative (10b), whereas definite kinds occur with kind- and individual-level predicates, as exemplified in (11a,b) respectively.⁴

- (10)a. mirar, lavar, leer, escuchar (S)
 ‘to watch, to wash, to read, to listen’

⁴ See Carlson (1977), Chierchia (1995), and Kratzer (1995), among others, for the distinction between the different classes of predicates: kind-level, individual-level and stage-level.

b. ir

‘to go’

(11)a. ser endémico/abundante/raro

‘to be native/abundant/rare’

b. tener el número atómico/ vivir

‘to have the atomic number/ to live’

F) WDs are complements of Vs (or a V + P complex), whereas definite kinds are mainly subjects and only very occasionally are they objects (e.g., in complement position of verbs such as *inventar* ‘to invent’, *crear* ‘to create’, *descubrir* ‘to discover’).⁵

From what we have discussed in this section we conclude that nominal expressions that allow a WD reading should be distinguished from nominal expressions that refer to kinds.

1.2. Carlson: WDs and semantic incorporation

Carlson (2006), Carlson and Sussman (2005), Carlson et al. (2006), and Klein et al. (2013) propose that WDs are semantically incorporated, the idea being that the nominal expression combines conceptually with the verb in a way that is different

⁵ Contrary to Klein et al.’s (2013) and Aguilar-Guevara’s (2014:57) claim that WDs are allowed in subject position, we would like to suggest that subjects of the sort exemplified in (i) are neither WDs nor definite kinds, but rather refer to prototypical representatives of a kind, as discussed in Borik and Espinal (2015).

(i) a. *The rat* was (just) reaching Australia in 1770.
(Krifka et al. 1995: 12, ex. (28a))
b. Despite the heavy rain, the window was open and *the radio* was playing loudly.
(Aguilar-Guevara 2014:57, ex. (133d))
c. *The hospital* is a place to go if you’re sick.
(Klein et al. 2013:190, footnote 2)

See Krifka et al. (1995) and Dayal (2004) for previous discussion on the meaning of this type of generic nominal expression.

from the canonical composition that holds between arguments and predicates. Although we agree with this intuition, in this section we show that WDs do not satisfy some of the basic arguments for an incorporation account.

A) ‘Restrictiveness’ is a property regularly associated with clear instances of incorporation (Carlson 2006: 47). This means that in regular cases of incorporation arguments modify the verb’s denotation to create a more specific event-type. Thus, in line with Mithun (1984), Borthen (2003), and Dayal (2003), Carlson (2010) insists on the hypothesis that the whole complex predicate denotes a sort of restricted activity, in comparison to the one denoted by the transitive verb. Thus, considering the examples in (12) from Chukchee, Carlson (2010) claims that both sentences mean about the same thing, though with subtle differences: the incorporated [N V] combination (i.e., ‘deer.seek’) does not simply mean to look for the reindeer or some reindeers, but is said to denote a *nameworthy* or *habitual activity* of looking-for-reindeer, thus designating a unitary concept (Carlson 2010:31).

(12) a. ∂ nan qaa-t q ∂ r ∂ r-ninet. [V_{TR}]

he.ERG deer.ABS.PL seek.3SG.S/3PL.O

‘He looked for the reindeer.’

b. ∂ tlon qaa-rer-g?e. [V_{INTR}]

he.ABS deer.seek.3SG.S

Similarly, *to go to the store* or *to read the newspaper* should be conceived as restricted activities of going or reading, which does not seem to appropriately describe the meaning of these expressions.

The above notion of ‘restrictiveness’ is also at the basis of the operation of semantic (pseudo) incorporation (Dayal 2003, 2011).⁶ However, several

⁶ See also the process of Restrict (Chung & Ladusaw 2004).

considerations are in order here if we take into account what we already know about Romance languages. First, a process of semantic (pseudo) incorporation seems only to apply to objects of HAVE-predicates and prepositions of central coincidence, which are the only ones that allow real NPs as objects (Dobrovie-Sorin et al. 2006; Espinal & McNally 2007a, 2011). Second, in Romance semantic (pseudo) incorporation does not convey typical activities (contrary to what has usually been assumed for semantic incorporation in various languages, such as Hindi, Chukchee and Norwegian; see references above); that is, the only expressions that convey typical activities in Romance are precisely those VPs that contain WDs. Therefore, we conclude that WDs are not semantically (pseudo) incorporated in Romance.⁷

B) Bare nominals, and by extension weak indefinites and weak definites, are claimed to be optimal candidates to semantic (i.e., conceptual) incorporation. According to Carlson (2010), such a conceptual approach opens the possibility of lexical gaps, since concepts are regarded as psychological objects, built independently of language.

Notice, however, that such a purely conceptual approach to noun incorporation runs into complications when we consider certain cases. Borthen (2003), for example, analyses Norwegian bare singulars as cases of (conceptual) noun incorporation.

⁷ We acknowledge that it is not always clear where the limits of incorporation lie. Let us consider the following examples:

- (i) a. piperøyking [Norwegian]
b. bilkjøring
- (ii) a. smoke a pipe [English]
b. drive a car
- (iii) a. fumar cachimbo [Brazilian Portuguese]
b. dirigir carro
- (iv) a. fumar amb pipa [Catalan]
b. anar amb/en cotxe

The Norwegian examples seem to involve syntactic incorporation and the noun has an indefinite reading, as overtly expressed in English (ii), and as has been proposed for parallel examples in Dutch (Booij 2010, Zwarts 2014). The Brazilian Portuguese examples in (iii) do not involve syntactic incorporation, and are ambiguous because the object noun allows both a definite and an indefinite reading, as well as a singular or a plural interpretation (Cyrino & Espinal 2015). Finally, the Catalan examples in (iv), where the bare nominals are objects of prepositions that express central coincidence (Hale 1986) and the whole prepositional phrase modifies the predicate event, seem to be interpreted as the output of a process of semantic incorporation.

However, we see that such a (conceptual) approach to noun incorporation cannot account for some grammatical restrictions that also apply to WDs: (i) Norwegian bare singulars normally do not occur as subjects or indirect objects and (ii) Norwegian bare singulars tend not to realize highly affected objects. Moreover, a conceptual approach to noun incorporation cannot account for the fact that (iii) a Norwegian sentence such as (13a) improves its grammaticality without the resultative predicate.⁸

(13)a. *??/*Hun vasket sykkel ren.* (Borthen 2003:62)

she washed bike clean

b. *Hun vasket sykkel.*

she washed bike

‘She washed a bike.’

These arguments suggest that Norwegian bare singulars cannot merely be licensed through a list of expressions in the lexicon associated with specific conceptual/encyclopedic information and, in conclusion, that syntax plays an important role when it comes to understanding the distribution of Norwegian bare singulars and a (conceptual) noun incorporation analysis does not account for the grammatical restrictions we have pointed out.⁹

Similarly, an analysis of WDs via conceptual incorporation would not be able to say anything regarding the morphosyntactic constraints that we have described for them: they are specified for Gender and Number (either singular or plural),¹⁰ and they combine with stage-level predicates (either unaccusative or activity transitive verbs).

⁸ Our gratitude to K. Borthen (p.c.) for her comment that the example definitely improves without the resultative.

⁹ See Espinal (to appear) for support of a morphosyntactic approach to noun incorporation.

¹⁰ See the contrasts in (i).

(i) a. *ir al médico / lavar los platos.* (S)
 go to-the.MASC doctor.MASC wash the.PL dish.PL
 ‘to go to the doctor/wash the dishes’
 b. *#ir a la médica / #lavar el plato.*
 go to the.FEM doctor.FEM wash the.sg dish.sg

C) The expletiveness of the article (i.e., a syntactic marker without semantic import) is claimed to be one of the most salient properties of overt definite articles with a WD reading (Klein et al. 2013), and hence a strong argument in favour of an incorporation account. This property would account for the apparent optionality and lack of unicity of the definite article in WDs as in English *play (the) piano*.¹¹

However, if we consider a language that allows null determiners, such as Brazilian Portuguese (BrP), the expletiveness of the article introduces an interesting puzzle. On the one hand, in this language the article is superficially optional in WDs that are complements of verbs.¹² Thus, in (14) no matter whether the article is overt or null, the nominal expression in object position has a weak reading.

(14) Pedro vai ler (o) jornal.

Pedro goes read the newspaper

‘Pedro is going to read the newspaper.’

On the other hand, WDs as complements of the terminal coincidence prepositions (Hale 1986) *em* ‘in’ and *para* ‘to’ do not allow the optionality of the article. In (15a) the expression *ir no médico* means ‘to seek medical assistance’, and in (15b) *levar (alguém) para o hospital* means ‘to take someone to be hospitalized’.¹³

(15) a. ir no médico

¹¹ Different cases of expletive determiners (articles with no denotational content) are discussed in the literature. Vergnaud and Zubizarreta (1992) focus on inalienable and extended inalienable DPs, and associate the semantic expletiveness of the article with a *type* (vs. *token*) interpretation. Longobardi (1994), on the other hand, mainly focuses on the morphosyntactic expletiveness of the article that introduces proper names in languages like Italian.

¹² See Munn and Schmitt (2005), and Cyrino and Espinal (2015), among others, in relation to the apparent optionality of the determiner when the DP is a canonical syntactic and semantic argument of the verb.

¹³ We see that nominal expressions in these examples, which show locative prepositions *em* and *para*, are associated with weak readings only when the determiner is present because: (i) they denote a non-unique referent; (ii) they manifest narrow scope with respect to other operators (in *Pedro não foi no médico* ‘Pedro did not go to the doctor’s’, *médico* ‘doctor’ cannot scope over *não*); (iii) they have a restricted distribution as objects of Vs and Ps; (iv) they do not support an anaphoric relationship with a pronoun such as *ele* ‘him’ (#*Pedro foi no médico, mas não encontrou ele* ‘Pedro went to the doctor’s, but did not find him’); and (v) they allow an enriched meaning (*ir no médico* means ‘to seek medical assistance’).

go in.the doctor

‘to go to the doctor’s’

b. levar (alguém) *para o hospital*

take someone to the hospital

‘to take someone to the hospital’

Contrastively, the absence of the determiner necessarily conveys an indefinite interpretation, as illustrated in (16).

(16)a. ir *em médico(s)*. // ir *em um(s) médico(s)*

go in doctor(.PL) go in a/some doctor(.PL)

‘to go to a doctor/some doctors’.

b. levar (alguém) *para hospital(is)* // levar(alguém) *para um(s) hospital(is)*

take someone to hospital(.PL) take someone to a/some hospital(.PL)

‘to take someone to a hospital/some hospitals’.

Notice that this indefinite reading is distinct from the weak reading inferred from the examples in (15).

BrP provides, then, an interesting argument against the expletiveness of the article and against an incorporation analysis. First, the presence of the article in the nominal expressions in (15) is obligatory and it conveys a meaning different from the indefinite reading in (16): it must be definite. Second, semantic expletiveness should be distinguished from syntactic optionality: expletive articles can be optional only in object position of Vs (see (14)). Third, the absence of the article in the nominal expressions in (16), given the fact that they convey an indefinite interpretation, must be linked to a null determiner, which excludes an incorporation account. In object

position of prepositions of terminal coincidence, the nominal expressions are associated with weak readings only when the definite article is overt.¹⁴

All in all, we conclude that a purely semantic (i.e., conceptual) incorporation account of WDs would not be able to explain the morphosyntactic contrasts we find in Brazilian Portuguese between objects of Vs and objects of terminal coincidence prepositions in WD constructions.

D) The lack of restrictive modification has been put forward as an additional argument in support of an analysis of WDs in terms of incorporation (Klein et al. 2013). However, as already pointed out by Aguilar-Guevara and Zwarts (2010, 2013) and Aguilar-Guevara (2014), the potential WD reading of a nominal expression is

¹⁴ The data we have shown is not complete, however, because this pattern does not apply to all prepositions. The two prepositions that we have just mentioned (*em* and *para*) are terminal coincidence prepositions in BrP. This semantic characterization is important because when we consider prepositions of central coincidence, we observe a different pattern. Prepositions of central coincidence, such as *de* ‘of’ and *com* ‘with’ cannot combine with definite DPs with a weak reading, but instead they select for real bare NPs with an interpretation close to that of incorporated objects (see Carlson & Sussman 2005, Espinal & Dobrovie-Sorin 2006).

- (i) a. *ir de moto*
 go of motorbike
 ‘to go by motorbike’
 b. *comer com colher*
 eat with spoon
 ‘to eat with a spoon’

It should be noted that with these prepositions of central coincidence, the nominal expression does not refer to an individual entity, but rather behaves semantically as a predicate modifier. The prepositional phrases in (i) express a manner: *de moto* in (ia), a way of transporting oneself, and *com colher* in (ib), a way of eating. As soon as an overt definite article is introduced, either we obtain an ungrammatical sequence (**ir da moto*), or the nominal expression refers to a specific entity (*comer com a colher*) and, as a result, the incorporated meaning that the PP with a bare NP had is lost. Therefore, for these prepositions of central coincidence, the presence of an (overt) definite or indefinite article, when possible (that is, with prepositions such as *com* ‘with’), will lead to a strong reading or an indefinite reading respectively.

A final note regarding the preposition *em* ‘in’ is relevant here. This preposition may combine with a DP with an overt definite article in order to express a weak reading (15a), and with a DP with an overt or covert indefinite article in order to express an indefinite reading (16a). In addition, this preposition can also express central coincidence, and with this meaning it may also combine with pure NPs in lexically restricted combinations, such as the one exemplified in (ii), which presumably is the only one that encodes an incorporated reading.

- (ii) *estar em casa*
 be in home
 ‘to be at home’

Notice also that the examples in (i) should be distinguished from English referential NPs of the sort *at school*, *at sea*, *in bed*, *in hospital*, *on campus*, *to church*, *to town*, etc. (see Stvan 1998, Carlson & Sussman 2005). These examples tend to require an overt D in the Romance languages considered in this paper, and, consequently, for these expressions we would postulate a full DP structure.

maintained when the N intersects with a classifying expression. Interestingly, with such a classifying modifier a sloppy identity reading is possible in elliptical contexts (17b), while in combination with a restrictive modifier such as *de ayer* ‘yesterday’s’ a strict reading arises (17c).

- (17)a. leer *el periódico digital* // # *el periódico de ayer*
 read the newspaper digital the newspaper of yesterday
 ‘to read the digital newspaper // to read yesterday’s newspaper’
- b. Pedro *ha leído el periódico digital* y María también lo ha hecho.
 Pedro has read the newspaper digital and María also it has done
 ‘Pedro read the digital newspaper and María did too.’
- c. Pedro *ha leído el periódico de ayer* y María también
 Pedro has read the newspaper of yesterday and María also
 lo ha hecho.
 it has done
 ‘Pedro read yesterday’s newspaper and María did too.’

We conclude that it is unlikely that such morphosyntactic differences can be accounted for under a purely semantic (i.e., conceptual) incorporation approach based on the requirement that a verb-noun combination may exist for a certain language only if it presupposes that there is a corresponding unitary concept.

1.3. Schwarz: *WDs and a compositional account of event kinds*

Schwarz (2014:220) proposes that “Weak Definites are definites appearing in verb phrases that –at least at one stage of the compositional semantic derivation– denote kinds of events”. We agree with this assumption for the simple reason that, no matter

which examples of the sort illustrated in (1) we consider, by means of these VPs, speakers always refer to kinds of activities that involve, as a theme of the event, some particular property-denoting expression (see below Section 2). However, Schwarz's compositional analysis relies on the following dubious assumptions:

A) Reference to kinds of events implies a plurality of events: “the kind [*read the newspaper*] consists of the plurality including every event which is an event in which the unique newspaper that is part of that event is being read” (Schwarz 2014:224). Thus, the semantic representation of the kind denotation of the VP *to read the newspaper* would look like (18), where the * operator stands for a plurality of events and the iota operator stands for a nominalization over events.¹⁵

$$(18) \quad k_{read-the-newspaper} = \lambda s. \iota^* \{e \mid \text{read}(e) \ \& \ \exists x[x = \iota y[\text{newspaper}(y)(e)] \\ \& \ Th(e) = x] \ \& \ e \leq s\}$$

However, this assumption can be sustained neither empirically nor theoretically. Consider the Catalan example in (19).

(19) (Context: the person we are referring to is in the entrance hall of a building)

Ha agafat l'ascensor al primer pis.
has taken the.lift to.the first floor
'(S)he has taken the lift to the first floor.'

Notice that the proposition expressed by this sentence is true if the person we refer to has participated in *the* kind of event denoted as *to take the lift* independently of the fact that in this particular example the DP most probably refers to a unique individual object and the VP to a single event (i.e., only one lift is required to be taken in order to move to one floor above the entrance hall of a building).

¹⁵ Antecedents for this operation of nominalization of predicates is found in the nominalization of infinitives and gerunds that refer to individual correlates of propositional functions (see Chierchia 1984).

From the theoretical side, this assumed plurality seems to hang on the associated common assumption that the default way to refer to kinds in languages such as English and Italian is by means of plural expressions (Carlson 1977, Chierchia 1998, Zamparelli 2002). Similarly, Schwarz (2014) assumes that VPs containing WDs imply pluralities of events.

However, it is important to make a caveat that takes into account reference to kinds in other natural languages. In this respect it has been argued that the default way to refer to kinds in the nominal domain in languages such as Spanish is by means of a definite article, not specified for Number, in combination with a Noun (Borik & Espinal 2012, 2015). Given this reasoning, if definite kinds have no morphosyntactic Number, event kinds presumably have no Number either.¹⁶

B) The meaning of VPs containing WDs is composed by incorporation, along Dayal's (2011) semantico-formal approach. Accordingly, Schwarz's analysis relies on a set of ingredients: the definite DP object refers to an entity-type expression. This entity is first shifted into a property by means of the *ident* operator (Partee 1987). Once the definite DP object denotes a property, it is possible to apply a semantic incorporation analysis that composes the meaning of the WD with an incorporating version of the V. Next, the combination of properties denoted by the WD and the V is nominalized by means of a iota ι operator.

¹⁶ A reviewer questions the correctness of this claim for a VP with a plural WD such as *lavar los platos* 'to wash the dishes'. The fact that (i) can be said to be true in a situation where the speaker ends up washing a single cup, suggests that plural Number is not always syntactically and semantically relevant. See Ionin and Matushansky (2006) and Pereltsvaig (2011) for the claim that number morphology does not always get interpreted semantically.

(i) Voy a lavar los platos. (S)
 go to wash the.PL dishes
 'I'm going to wash the dishes.'

Although it is true that WDs share a significant number of properties with bare nominals,¹⁷ technically speaking neither the *ident* operator that turns the definite DP into a property, nor the assumption of an incorporating version of the verb seems to be appropriate for an analysis of VPs containing WDs in Romance. We support our position on the following arguments:

1. Semantic incorporation *à la* Dayal in Romance is only possible with a restricted class of predicates, the so-called HAVE-predicates, those that allow real bare nominals in object position (as pointed out above).¹⁸

2. Whereas a VP containing a WD denotes a type of activity identified as familiar according to the most accessible common ground, Romance VPs containing incorporated real bare nominals express a HAVE-relationship where the bare nominal is simply a verb modifier rather than a contributor of information about an explicit thematic argument (Espinal & McNally 2011).

C) The result of applying the postulated incorporating version of a V to a property (i.e., the denotation of the WD) is a kind of event. However, it is theoretically questionable to suggest that the output of combining the property denoted by the V with the property denoted by the WD gives rise to a kind. On the one hand, in the parallel Romance V+N construction the result of combining a bare nominal with an incorporating HAVE-predicate gives rise either to an intersection of properties or to a situation in which the property denoted by the N modifies an internal participant of the predicate. On the other hand, if the *ident* operator turned an entity-type expression

¹⁷ Semantic similarities between WDs and bare nominals include the following: they can both be scoped over, they can only combine with classifying expressions, they allow enriched meanings, and they show number neutrality.

¹⁸ See Espinal and McNally (2007a, 2011) for details of this argumentation. See also Farkas and de Swart (2003) and McNally and van Geenhoven (2008) for a different semantic incorporation analysis of bare plurals in Hungarian and Spanish.

corresponding to the WD object into a property, it would be absolutely unclear where the iota over events would come from.

To sum up, in this section we have argued that WDs do not refer to kind entities, that WDs show morphosyntactic restrictions that cannot be analyzed under a purely semantic (i.e. conceptual) incorporation approach, and that WDs do not contribute to kinds of events conceived as pluralities of events.

In the next section we present our analysis of VPs containing WDs based on the following two assumptions: (i) the identification of a WD reading for a definite DP is not the output of a grammatical operation, and (ii) the contribution of a definite DP to a ‘familiar’¹⁹ kind of event (i.e., activity) is dependent on the activation of encyclopedic information that is encoded in the telic stereotypical information (from now on TELIC_s) of certain nouns. We claim that this TELIC_s information encoded on certain nouns may be activated at the time of utterance interpretation; when it is, a ‘familiar’ kind of event may be inferred, sometimes even in the absence of overt definite articles (as shown by cross-linguistic evidence: Spanish *ir a la escuela* vs. Catalan *anar a escola* ‘to go to school’, English *play (the) piano*) and sometimes in the absence of specific verbs (English *the hospital* in the context of verbs other than *to go to*; Zwarts 2014).

2. Proposal: how WDs contribute to event kinds

¹⁹ For the purposes of this paper we assume a semantic-pragmatic notion of ‘familiarity’, initially proposed by Christophersen (1939) in his description of the articles in English (see also Heim 1982), also assumed by Klein et al. (2013) in their empirical investigations of weak definite and weak indefinite noun phrases in English.

Given the fact that all definite DPs with a WD reading are regular DPs that also allow a strong reading, and that some definite DPs with a WD reading are BNs in some languages or in some varieties of a given language, we put forward the hypothesis that the eventual WD reading of a definite DP and its contribution to a ‘familiar’ kind of event (i.e., activity) are exclusively dependent on the information encoded on the Noun contained in the DP. This means that, even though definite DPs may refer to non-unique and not necessarily familiar entities (Birner & Ward 1994), the recovery of a ‘familiar’ kind of activity (with respect to the common ground of both speaker and hearer), in which some particular property-denoting expression is involved, is required for a felicitous use of the definite DP with a weak reading.

We assume that a common noun denotes properties of kinds (Dobrovie-Sorin & Pires de Oliveira 2007, Espinal & McNally 2007b, Espinal 2010),²⁰ and that of the various components that characterize a lexical item the one that is crucial for a Noun to be interpreted as the head of a WD is the TELIC component (Pustejovsky 1995), when specified for a stereotypical activity, that is, the TELICS information.²¹ Thus, we understand that the noun *escuela* ‘school’ denotes a property of kinds of entities sharing the attribute expressed by the noun, and that in the Spanish VP *ir a la escuela* ‘to go to school’ the noun is interpreted as conveying a weak reading because some specific TELIC information is activated, namely the one that denotes the purpose and function of people participating in the ‘familiar’ type of activity of going-to-school (i.e., in order to be educated).

²⁰ The arguments supporting the hypothesis that common nouns denote descriptions of kinds are based on adjective modification, pronominalization, and number neutrality. See the references just noted in the text as well as McNally and Boleda (2004).

²¹ Following Pustejovsky (1995), we assume that a lexical item is composed of what he calls a QUALIA structure: the CONSTITUTIVE component (that refers to the relation between an object and its constituent parts), the FORMAL component (that distinguishes the object within a larger domain), the TELIC component (the object’s purpose and function), and the AGENTIVE component (which includes the factors involved in the object’s origin).

See also Corblin (2013), Aguilar-Guevara (2014), and Zwarts (2014) for different proposals also based on Pustejovsky (1995).

Under this view, what makes *la escuela* ‘the school’ a good candidate for a WD reading in Spanish? To answer this question, we first postulate that the noun *escuela* ‘school’ encodes the following information.

(20)

$$\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{escuela } (x^k) \\ \text{QUALIA} \end{array} \left[\begin{array}{l} \text{TELIC}_S: \text{ if } \exists e^k [\text{go-to}(e^k)] \wedge \text{Theme}(\exists x^k [\text{school}(x^k)], e^k) \\ \text{then } \exists e'^k . e^k < e'^k [\text{be-educated}(e'^k)] \end{array} \right] \right]$$

Our proposal is, therefore, as follows: some but not all nouns (e.g., in English *newspaper* but not *book*, in Spanish *escuela* ‘school’ but not *biblioteca* ‘library’) encode TELIC_S information. This information is available at the time of utterance interpretation, but may or may not be activated. When this information is not activated, the nominal expression will contribute to a regular nominal expression with a strong reading. When it is activated, a weak reading may emerge, such that the V + the object noun refers pragmatically to a ‘familiar’ kind of activity, conceived as an integral activity involving an action and the theme of the event that has the property encoded by N, whose purpose is ‘to be educated’.

Let us now consider what the meaning of the VP in italics is in (21a). This example allows both a strong and a weak reading of the DP, represented respectively as in (21b) and (21c).²²

(21)a. Juan *fue a la escuela* hasta los 14 años.

Juan went to the school until the 14 years

‘Juan went to school until he was 14 years old.’

b. $\lambda e^k \lambda e [\text{go-to}(e) \wedge R(e, e^k) \wedge \text{Theme}(\iota x [\text{school}(x)], e)]$

c. $\exists e^k [\text{go-to}(e^k)] \wedge \text{Theme}(\exists x^k [\text{school}(x^k)], e^k)$

²² In (25b) the R operator stands for a *realization* operator, which instantiates an event kind into an event token.

In (21b) go-to is a predicate of an event token and the theme of that particular event is identified as the unique *x* that has the property of being school. In (21c), by contrast, go-to is a predicate of an event kind and the theme of this kind of event is a property of kinds. Given that only (21c) coincides with the antecedent of the TELIC_S information in (20), the consequent can also be inferred, which means that, only when the TELIC_S information is properly activated, can a WD reading for the nominal expression be obtained, and can reference to a ‘familiar’ kind of event for the whole VP be driven.

According to this analysis, the presence of specific stereotypical information on certain nouns is what yields the enriched meaning of WDs, in the sense that *ir a la escuela* is not interpreted as a motion event towards a unique school, but as a kind of event whose theme is an individual to which the property of kinds ‘school’ applies. This kind of event is conceived pragmatically as a ‘familiar’ (Heim 1982) type of activity from which the education purpose can be inferred. The presence of this sort of stereotypical information in the QUALIA structure of certain nouns is also what explains the fact that WDs can be used out-of-the-blue (Corblin 2013), unlike strong referential nominal expressions that refer to entities, which require an indefinite determiner the first time they are introduced in discourse. Moreover, the presence of such stereotypical information on certain nouns is what makes them good candidates for becoming part of potential idiomatic expressions. Thus, we conclude that the enriched information that can be inferred from WDs is not a reflex of its definiteness, but rather follows from the TELIC_S information specified on certain Nouns, which may be activated in the process of utterance interpretation.

This analysis may also account for the most characteristic set of properties of WDs: (i) their number neutrality, their lack of unicity,²³ and their failure to allow third person entity-type anaphora²⁴ all follow from the fact that the object noun denotes properties of kinds (i.e., $\text{school}(x^k)$); (ii) the sloppy reading of VPs containing definite DPs with a weak reading follows from the fact that the whole VP is conceived as referring to a ‘familiar’ type of activity and the Theme is not identified not with a token entity; and (iii) the atelicity of VPs containing WDs (Schwarz 2014)²⁵ follows also from our hypothesis that the Theme of the kind of event should be identified not with an object individual (i.e., an incremental theme) but rather with an individual characterized by a property of kinds: (i.e., $\text{Theme}(\exists x^k[\text{school}(x^k)], e^k)$).

²³ We understand the lack of unicity of WDs (even in the case of plural DPs, as in *lavar los platos* ‘to wash the dishes’) to be related to the cultural and encyclopedic knowledge speakers have about the world (i.e., *to wash the dishes* usually implies the washing of more than one dish).

²⁴ The intriguing fact that WDs cannot be referred back by third person anaphoras is at first sight surprising given the fact that WDs are always definite DPs. See the contrast in (i).

- (i) a. Pedro ha leído *el periódico* y posteriormente la asistente *lo* ha tirado.
 Pedro has read the newspaper and later the assistant it has thrown
 ‘Pedro read the newspaper and later the assistant threw it away.’ (# WD reading)
 b. Pedro ha leído *el periódico* y María también *lo* ha hecho.
 Pedro has read the newspaper and María also it has done
 ‘Pedro read the newspaper and María did too.’ (ok WD reading)

Notice that (ia) shows that the third person pronoun in the second clause refers back to a referential object DP antecedent. The existence of this discourse anaphoric relationship clashes with the WD interpretation of the antecedent; therefore, *el periódico* ‘the newspaper’ in (ia) can only be a regular definite DP. By contrast, (ib) shows the possibility of a sloppy identity interpretation in elliptical contexts, by which Pedro has been involved in one instantiation of the ‘familiar’ *reading the newspaper* event kind and María has been involved in a different instantiation of the same type of event kind. The VP anaphora *hacerlo* ‘do it’ guarantees this reading.

²⁵ Consider the difference expressed in (i):

- (i) a. Pedro ha leído *el periódico* en una hora.
 Pedro has read the newspaper in an hour
 ‘Pedro read the newspaper in an hour.’ (* WD reading)
 b. Pedro ha leído *el periódico* durante toda la tarde.
 Pedro has read the newspaper during whole the afternoon
 ‘Pedro spent the whole afternoon reading the newspaper.’ (ok WD reading)

The example in (ia) implies that, once the time span of one hour elapsed, the whole newspaper was read, or at the very least that some news n_n corresponding to a proper part e'_n of e was read. This telic interpretation that allows an *en* ‘in’ modifier correlates with the regular definite reading of the object DP. By contrast, (ib) implies that during the whole interval of one hour *the reading the newspaper* kind of activity took place. The atelic interpretation is not connected to any specific news n_l read in any subevent e'_n part of e .

This property, like the lack of discourse anaphora (see footnote 24), is also rather surprising given Krifka’s (1998) theory on the relation between the presence of incremental affected themes (cf. Dowty 1991, Beavers 2011) and the origins of telicity.

A final question we must raise concerns the nature of the contribution of the definite determiner that occurs in WDs. From a syntactic point of view, all definite DPs are regular DPs, independently of the final weak or strong reading; therefore, for any given language, they are expected to behave like any definite DP occurring in argument position.

From a semantic point of view, we agree with Schwarz (2014) in claiming that the role of the definite determiner in WDs is to contribute to VPs that are interpreted as kinds of events, but recall that in our analysis this contribution is not compositionally driven by means of an operation of incorporation, but rather pragmatically inferred, and it relies exclusively on the TELIC_S information encoded in the QUALIA structure of certain object nouns. In our analysis reference to ‘familiar’ kinds of events is possible if, and only if, the TELIC_S information is activated, and this operation is independent of the presence of an overt determiner or even independent of the fact that the noun is in object position of a specific verb. This means that the definite determiner contained in WDs does not refer to a kind entities (contra Aguilar-Guevara and Zwarts 2010, 2013, and Aguilar-Guevara 2014), nor is it the expression of a nominalization operation.²⁶

3. Conclusion and predictions

In this paper we have reviewed three different analyses of WDs, and we have presented a new analysis of the contribution of nominal expressions that allow a weak

²⁶ VPs containing WDs can be nominalized independently of the presence of the definite DP.

(i) El lavar los platos en lavavajillas puede ayudar a prevenir alergias en las manos.
 the wash the dishes in dishwasher may help to prevent allergies in the hands
 ‘Doing the dish-washing in a dishwasher may help to prevent hand allergies.’
 See Grimm and McNally’s (2015) analysis of “the VP-ing” construction in English.

reading to ‘familiar’ event kinds, with a special reference to three Romance languages, namely Spanish, Catalan, and Brazilian Portuguese. According to this analysis, the WD reading of a regular DP is dependent on whether certain stereotypical information encoded on the object noun is activated at the time of utterance interpretation. In our analysis nouns denote properties of kinds, and some nouns contribute to the formation of ‘familiar’ event kinds through the *TELIC_S* stereotypical information encoded in the *QUALIA* structure of the N. In that way, our analysis is able to account for the relevant data involving WDs, and it also overcomes the problems we have seen with the other proposals presented in Section 1, since we do not regard WDs as having any specific type of syntactic structure or as having a specific semantics, but instead rely on pragmatic inference. Hence, from the point of view of syntax, we have regular DPs, whose D may be null or not (as in the case of the BrP data discussed in Section 1.2). From the point of view of semantics, these DPs do not refer to kinds and do not correspond to incorporated objects. Their interpretation is not compositionally driven but rather pragmatically inferred. Our proposal, therefore, does not come up against the problems the three reviewed proposals presented here.

One of the predictions of this analysis is that the identification of WDs (i.e., regular DPs conveying a weak reading) takes place beyond grammar, when some stereotypical encyclopedic information is activated. A second prediction is that the inference of a ‘familiar’ kind of event is constrained not by grammatical constraints but by encyclopedic information. A third prediction is that WDs may contribute to ‘familiar’ kinds of events in a way similar to object bare nominals in some languages or in some varieties of a given language.

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