
This is the **published version** of the bachelor thesis:

Bacari López, Majula; Espinal, M. Teresa. Definiteness, indefiniteness and short weak definites : Reference to kinds and kinds of events. 2023. 29 pag. (Grau en Estudis d'Anglès i Espanyol)

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**Definiteness, indefiniteness
and short *weak definites*: Reference to
kinds and *kinds of events***

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Bellaterra, June 2023

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my supervisor, M. Teresa Espinal, for advice, encouragement, and support throughout my research project. Without her immensely valuable and motivational feedback, this dissertation would have never been completed.

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1. Introduction to definites, indefinites and *weak definites*

Definites are expressions with two main meaning components, existence and uniqueness. Considering this and agreeing with Aguilar-Guevara (2014) we could state that a “definite is felicitous only if there is one and only one entity in the context that satisfies its descriptive content” (i.e., the descriptive content of the noun; p.11). Moreover, there is another notion that we should consider, it is what linguists such as Aguilar-Guevara (2014) or Leonetti (2019) recalling Christophersen (1939), called *familiarity*. This notion refers to the fact that a definite only is appropriate if the existence of its referent is likely known by the hearer. Consider (1):

(1)

- a. Marc ate **the cake**. (English)
- b. Marc ate **a cake**.

In (1a), the definite phrase, as it is expected, conveys not only existence but also uniqueness. Its *strong reading* is because there is no possibility of ambiguity. The hearer will identify only one specific cake as a referent of this specific situation where both interlocutors share a specific context (i.e., the cake Marc’s mother did for his birthday party). However, in (1b) with the indefinite phrase, the range of possible interpretations is much wider than that, given it is not referring to one specific situation but to a general non-specific one in which the only information known is that there exists an x which satisfies the requirements of being a cake and that Marc ate it (i.e., It could be the cake his mother did to him, a random cake he bought, etc.).

Considering the examples in (1), the difference between definite and indefinite phrases in terms of meaning seems to be clear. Definite expressions just have one unique identifiable referent whose existence is known by both the hearer and the speaker; indefinite ones lack these properties and allow more than one possible referent not familiar with the speaker/hearer. That is why the phenomenon of *weak definites* exemplified in (2) is quite interesting in linguistics.

(2)

- a. Alicia is reading **the newspaper**. (English)
- b. L’Alicia llegeix **el diari**. (Catalan)

- c. Alicia lee **el periódico**. (Spanish)

It is generally assumed that definite articles convey the assumption of both uniqueness and existence. However, examples in (2a-c) show that there are cases where this generalization seems to fail. Although these propositions belong to three different languages, they all have two possible readings depending on whether there is an available and shared context. The *weak* one identifies the referent as a conventionalized activity (i.e., *reading the newspaper*) and the *strong* one as a specific newspaper which is being read. Examples (2a-c) have a *weak reading* which means that, even though there is a definite article, it does not entail uniqueness – unless we assume that Alicia who is *reading the newspaper* is also the person who is writing/creating it. In which case, the expression would have a *strong reading* and the possible referent would be one particular newspaper-. Why? Because although *reading the newspaper* does necessarily imply the existence of at least one x which has the property of being a *newspaper* and that is being read by someone, in any case, it conveys one specific *newspaper*. Mainly because *reading the newspaper* entails a much more abstract meaning given that it is a routine activity (i.e., *weak reading*). The possible interpretations of this expression could go from imagining a single individual who is literally reading a *newspaper* to a person who falls asleep reading the newspaper after having lunch or amuses themselves by doing its crosswords. Observe that in any case the existence of the object is questioned. However, the presupposition of uniqueness linked to the definite article (as in (1a)) is totally absent in *weak definites* (as in (2)).

Therefore, we agree with Leonetti (2019) that *weak definites* represent a case of form-meaning mismatch. They are structures in which there is a definite article preceding a noun which, following the strict definition of definites, would imply that both notions, existence and uniqueness are covered. However, despite their form, they do not convey a uniquely identifiable referent. Let us now compare the definite expressions in (2) with the indefinite ones in (3):

- (3)
- d. # Alicia is reading **a newspaper**.¹ (E)
 - e. # L'Alicia llegeix **un diari**. (C)
 - f. # Alicia lee **un periódico**. (S)

¹ This symbol is used to mark those expressions that, although neither anomalous nor ungrammatical, do not convey a *weak reading*.

We observe that all expressions share the possibility of having a *weak reading* when there is an entailment of existence, but not uniqueness. Nevertheless, just the ones in (2) could have a strong one in very specific contexts as mentioned before and, only the ones in (2), may convey the enriched meaning stated in the previous paragraph with respect to the expression *reading the newspaper*. Therefore, whether we have a definite or an indefinite article, there is an implication of existence. However, there is uniqueness only when we interpret the definite article in a strong sense. It is interesting to compare *weak definites* with indefinites because both imply existence and lack uniqueness, but they differ in that the *weak reading* of *weak definites* is obtained in specific V + DP combinations and the whole VP implies a ritualized activity (see Sections 2 and 3).

Nevertheless, due to their apparent similarities in many aspects such as the fact that neither of them has a unique referent, both *weak definites* and indefinites could be taken to share the same denotation. However, as it will be discussed throughout this study, they are not. Clarifying already introduced notions such as the assumption of existence and the assumption of uniqueness is fundamental to avoid this confusion. Observe the next examples where a definite article implies existence, but not uniqueness.

(4) Anna takes **the train** every morning. (E)

(5) Lola took **the train** from A to B.

(Example from Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010)

In (4) nobody would understand that Anna takes the exact same train every day, but probably that every morning she takes the train which leaves from one specific station at one specific hour. Moreover, the reading could be simply that reference is being made to the routine activity of taking public transport. In short, there is an entailment of the existence of at least one train which Anna takes, but there is no presupposition of uniqueness because although the train leaves from the same point and at the same hour, there is no guarantee that every day the “railway engine connected to carriages for carrying people” that departs from there, is exactly the same.

The same goes for example (5). Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2010) apply the *Minimal Situation Strategy* (MSS) prefigured in Löbner (1985) and developed by Schwarz (2009), and states the following:

Very roughly speaking, a definite noun phrase picks out its uniquely identifiable referent from a minimal situation *s*. If uniqueness is not satisfied in that situation *s*, then it is assumed that there is a situation *s'* part of *s* which contains the unique referent.

(Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts, 2010, p. 5)

The idea seems quite intuitive in the sense that when we are deciphering an expression we tend to run out of options until we find the one which seems to be more appropriate and less vague. However, this theory has an empirical problem in examples such as (4) and (5). As it was mentioned before, we could interpret those sentences as a way of pointing out that Anna/Lola takes public transport in general. For instance, imagine that both individuals travel by train but do transfer and combine the train with the metro or bus. Taking all this into account it would not be easy to *zoom in* enough to find the minimal situation in which there is one single train. Why is the MSS failing? According to Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2010) and Aguilar-Guevara (2014), it is the DP *the train* that behaves as a kind-referring expression where the definite article does not entail uniqueness, but a *weak reading* which, if it is true that at least conveys the existence of one train, it has the property of being able to refer to more than one object in the minimal situation described by the sentence. Nonetheless, as it will be further explained in Section 2, we argue that it is the whole VP (i.e., verb + DP) that encodes the *weak reading* associated with the conventionalized activity of *taking the train* (i.e., public transport). Let us show you some Spanish examples where the semantic and syntactic contrasts of these different approaches are easily appreciated:

(6)

- a. Lola ha [**cogido el tren**] y mañana también [**lo hará**]. (S)
- b. Lola ha cogido [**el tren**] y mañana también [**lo cogerá**].
- c. Después de comer voy a [**lavar los platos**] y mañana también [**lo haré**].
- d. Después de comer voy a lavar [**los platos**] y mañana también [**los lavaré**].

Although expressions in (6a-b) are singular and the ones in (6c-d) are plural (see Section 3.1), observe that both types of *weak definites* seem to work in the same way. As shown in (6a&c), the only way in which the *weak reading* associated with the activities of *taking the train* or *washing the dishes* can arise is by assuming that the *weak* expression

encompasses the combination of a certain verb with a certain DP (see Section 3.2) which would require a VP anaphor capable of replacing the entire antecedent (i.e., the VP). Otherwise, substituting just the DP, as shown in (13b&d), there would be only the possibility of conveying a *strong reading*. In short, there are different anaphoric relations depending on if we consider that the antecedent is the DP with an object entity as a referent or the entire VP with a *weak reading*.

We might hypothesize that if *weak definiteness* contains definite expressions which convey indefinite readings and indefinite expressions convey them too, there is no reason to distinguish them. So, are they simply two ways of expressing the same? No. Otherwise, people would use them randomly and they do not do so. Blurring the definite/indefinite distinction would not be appropriate in the sense that there is an essential aspect beyond uniqueness in which they differ, that is their communicative effects. Such effects are related to stereotyping and the associated meaning enrichment. Observe the examples in (7):

- (7)
- a. (?)Anna went to **the school**.² (E)
 - b. Anna went to **school**.
 - c. #Anna went to **a school**.

At first sight, (7a-c) contains three different nominal structures. Nonetheless, although (7a) has a definite article preceding the noun and (7b) just has a bare noun, both expressions can be used randomly, although (7b) is preferable and more common than (7a). Both could have two possible readings, at least in English (cf. Catalan in (9) and Spanish in (10)). They could convey a specific school (i.e. *strong reading*) or the specific action of going to an x which has the property of being a school to learn math, history, literature and so on (i.e. *weak reading*). Linguists such as Schwarz (2012), following Carlson (2006) argue that both the definite *the school* and the bare *school* forms have parallel semantic properties and that “both are instances of semantic incorporation, in that they mirror the core semantic properties of incorporation structures in other languages, even though no incorporation seems to be involved at the structural level” (Schwarz, 2012, p.14).

² Although this expression is not ungrammatical, it is not generally used (i.e. (6b) is preferable).

In contrast, the indefinite structure in (7c) allows many possible referents (i.e., schools) that are not necessarily shared by both the hearer and the speaker. The same would occur in minimal pairs such as *take the train/take a train* or *read the newspaper/read a newspaper* where the readings conveyed by the expressions with the definite article would be richer than the ones with the indefinite.

As shown in (7a) and (7b), there is often an alternation between *weak definites* and bare nouns. However, their interpretations, unlike the examples in (7a-b), do not always convey the same. See the example of Stvan (1998, p.151) in (8):

- (8)
- a. To be in school. (E)
 - b. To be in the school.

Meanwhile, in (8a) the interpretation would be to be attending or teaching a class, in (8b) the reading could apply to any person who is physically inside the building. Cross-linguistically, there are other peculiarities related to these expressions. For instance, meanwhile, in Catalan, there are two different and equally acceptable ways to refer to the routine activity of *going to school*, in Spanish just the one with the explicit definite article is grammatically accepted. This is basically the reason why *weak definites* have been associated with incorporated bare nominals.

- (9)
- a. L'Enric va anar a **l'escola**. (C)
 - b. L'Enric va anar a **escola**.
- (10)
- a. Enrique fue a **la escuela**. (S)
 - b. *Enrique fue a **escuela**.³

Weak definites are generally known as structures where there is a VP whose argument is fixed (i.e., conventionalized activity, see Section 3.2) and, usually, singular (see Section 3.1 where Number is discussed and some plural *WD* are presented). However, it is also remarkable to mention that the presence of the article can vary from one language to the other. The particularity of the Catalan examples in (9) is that both expressions, with or without the definite article, are generally used and accepted (cf. English in (7) or Spanish

³ This symbol is used to mark ungrammatical sentences.

in (10)) to refer to the conventionalized activity of *going to school*. Nevertheless, either (9a) and (10a) thanks to the presence of a definite article can have two readings, a *strong* one where one concrete school is the referent and a *weak reading* where the specificity does not affect the *school* kind but the stereotyped activity. In contrast, the structure with the bare nominal in (9b) just can have a *weak reading*, as any other indefinite structure would have. Compare it to the English examples in (7b-c) where something similar happens and to the Spanish ones in (10b) where the elision of the article results in an ungrammatical expression.

Considering all this, it is quite intuitive to guess why *weak definites* constitute such a big problem for theories of definiteness and theories of compositionality. Basically, *weak readings* should be incompatible with definite articles.

So far, we have introduced definite structures, indefinite structures, their differences in terms of form and meaning and the way in which *weak definites* have a meaning enrichment that seems to be lacking in regular definites (as shown in (1a)) and indefinites (as shown in (1b), (3) and (7c)). Meaning enrichment which is immediately related to conventionalized activities such as *reading the newspaper*, *taking the train*, and so on.

The purpose of this study is to analyze in which way *weak definites* differ from indefinites in terms of the assumption of both uniqueness and existence and what are the requirements (i.e., lexical and verbal restrictions) that a definite expression in combination with a verb has to satisfy in order to be able to convey a *weak reading*. Moreover, we will discuss how weak readings do not depend on *kinds*, as stated by Aguilar-Guevara (2014), but on *kinds of events*, as stated by Espinal & Cyrino (2017), who follow Schwarz (2012). This approach allows us to explain why although *weak definites* imply existence, they do not presuppose uniqueness like DPs with *strong readings*.

To do so, we structured this piece of research as follows: In Section 2 the controversial possibility of some sort of uniqueness in *weak definites* and the conflicting theory of *Kinds* and theory of *Kinds of events* are introduced. Our aim is to show that the second one is preferable when analyzing *weak definites*. Section 3 is divided into two subsections. The first one is related to the behavior and restrictions these structures have in terms of

Number. And the second one is further divided into two key points, lexical and verbal restrictions which determine if one expression is allowed to be a *weak definite* or not. Then, in Section 4 some structures which have indefinite readings of definite articles, not being *weak* definites are examined. On the one hand, the case of the bare nominal expression *go home* is discussed in contrast with the Catalan and Spanish versions. On the other hand, some Spanish idioms which share some restrictions of form and meaning close to *weak definites* are also discussed. Finally, in Section 5 some conclusions are presented.

2. Weak readings: introduction to *kinds* and *kinds of events*

Agreeing with Leonetti (2019) we assume that “maintaining uniqueness forces us to explain how *weak readings* are possible, being apparently violations of the uniqueness condition” (p.7). However, is it fulfilled at the same level as regular definite structures? Linguists such as Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2013) state that, similarly to the fact that what allows *strong readings* of the definite article is the existence of certain circumstances which lead to the identification of unique ordinary individuals, in *weak definites* “what licenses the definite article is the uniqueness of the kind referred to” (p.40). In other words, these authors consider that although *weak definites* do not have an individual and unique entity as referent, they do denote uniqueness since the DPs that form them denote *kinds*.

Kinds can be defined as abstract objects which are representative of a group of individual entities with similar features. They are physically expressed by kind-referring NPs which can be bare plurals or definites:

(11)

- a. **Books** are given away for Sant Jordi. (E)
- b. Thomas Edison invented **the light bulb** in 1879.
- c. **The dog** is man’s best friend.

These are examples of generic definites whose referent is not an individual but the whole class to which it belongs. Its generic meaning results from the combination of the uniqueness encoded in the definite article and nouns denoting properties of *kinds*. In (11),

books, the light bulb and *the dog* correspond to the unique kind of which their properties hold.

Many linguists have discussed how nouns are able to denote both properties of ordinary individuals and be properties of *kinds*. However, linguists such as Borik & Espinal (2012) went further stating that nouns always convey properties of *kinds* and that their capacity of reaching an individual or *kind level* denotation would depend on the presence or absence of the number projection. In other words, if the NumP is present, the reading will be *strong* and if it is missing, just the *kind level* will be available, and the reading will be *weak* (see Section 3.1 for further information about Number).

When a definite DP appears in a specific context where more than one referent satisfies its description, the uniqueness presupposition forces the hearer to infer a sort of *weak* interpretation. In the sense that the DP would be interpreted as a *kind*-referring expression and not as an individual-referring one. Examples in (11) showed that uniqueness is maintained in kind-referring DPs and that their reference to *kinds* conveys instantiations of them either in individual entities (i.e., *the light bulb, the dog*) or sums (i.e. *books*). Nonetheless, this view has some inconvenience. Look at examples in (12):

(12)

- a. **Reading the newspaper** is essential to keep up to date. (E)
- b. (?) **The newspaper** is essential to keep up to date.

Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2010) claim that *weak definites*, like regular DPs, can occur as the subject of a sentence due to their *kind*-referring nature. However, are (12a) and (12b) equally acceptable? Contrary to them, in this study, we will argue that they are not. Although it is true that in its *qualia structure*, the noun *newspaper* encodes certain information such as being “a regularly printed document consisting of large sheets of paper that are folded together [...] containing news” (source: Cambridge Dictionary), the DP (identified as a *kind*) on its own is not enough for being *essential to keep up to date*, but its combination with the verb *read*. This is what encodes the routine activity associated with the head of the DP. Linguists such as Espinal & Cyrino (2017) agreeing with Schwarz (2012) and going beyond the *Theory of Kinds*, have named this

indispensable requirement of agreement between verb and noun for being able to form *weak definites* as *Kinds of Events Theory*.

The result of combining the second version <incorporating verbs> with a predicate now yields a kind of event, i.e., a function from situations to the largest plurality of reading events which have as their theme an individual with the relevant property.

(Schwarz, 2012, p. 17)

These confronted theories agree in the sense that both consider that in *weak definites* there is a meaning enrichment which lacks in regular definites. However, in the former theory, the difference between both types of definites is quite blurred and in the latter, their contrasts are totally differentiated. Moreover, their discrepancies when defining what allows *weak readings* and what they imply are quite significant. Compare the examples in (13):

(13)

a. **The dog** is man's best friend. (E)

b. Lola took **the train** from A to B.

(Example from Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010, p. 5)

As presented in the previous Section, in (13b) the purported *kind*-referring DP is an instantiation of the whole *kind of event* (i.e. *taking the train*). This is, the sentence predicates an event in which the subject, Lola, directly interacts with (at least) one individual of the *train kind*. Furthermore, that level of abstractness allows this *kind* to have the possibility of being instantiated not only by a singular entity but by a sum of them. In other words, the DP can refer to a single train- say, the 11 am train- or to the whole set of transports that Lola takes to go from A to B.

However, in (13a) although we apparently have the same sort of DP structure as (13b), a DP whose interpretation goes beyond individual reference and licenses *kind*-referring readings, they are not the same. When analyzing it we think of the whole kind of “dog, (*Canis lupus familiaris*), domestic mammal of the family *Canidae* (order *Carnivora*)” (source: Britannica). It is a characterizing sentence whose interpretation drives us to think of the entire dog class/*kind* instead of a particular dog. So far, we could believe that we

are facing the same phenomenon, but this is not the case since in (13a) what behaves as a *kind* is the DP but in (13b), the activity of *taking the train*. Therefore, contrary to Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts 2010, Aguilar-Guevara (2014) and so on, the *kind* reading is in the event (VP level) and not in the DP.

In order to close this Section and after presenting all these examples we assume that as in short *weak definites*, the DP does not apply to a unique identifiable referent, satisfying uniqueness would depend on the contextual data (i.e., searching for an antecedent in the discourse or relying on the information shared by the interlocutors). Nonetheless, if the intention of the speaker is to talk about the stereotypical activity of *taking the train*, *reading the newspaper*, *going to school*, or *washing the dishes* there will not be any contextual data activated and the conveyance of the conventionalized activity will be enough to satisfy uniqueness.

Before starting with Section 3, we would like to briefly mention some key points. This study states that *weak readings* do not convey *kinds*- DP level-, but on *kinds of events*- VP level- (Schwarz (2012) and Espinal & Cyrino (2017)). In other words, what licenses the *weak reading* is not the DP itself (i.e., what presumably denotes a *kind*) but the combination of V+DP (i.e., a *kind of event*)-. Of course, there are verbal and lexical restrictions, otherwise, any verb or noun would be able to generate *weak readings*. This is the topic of Section 3.

3. *Weak definites*: Analysis

In this section, we analyze in more detail how *weak definites* arise and what are their limitations. To do so, we start by showing you what is the role of the morphosyntactic number in these types of expressions and then we present certain lexical and verbal restrictions that seem to be fundamental when entailing *weak readings*.

3.1. Number

In the previous sections, we briefly introduced the differences between *kind*-referring expressions and *weak definites*. Agreeing with Borik & Espinal (2012, 2019) and Espinal & Cyrino (2017), we state that nominal expressions with *kind* reference have no Number. Observe the following examples where *kind*-referring DPs lack the NumP regardless of

the language. Therefore, all the expressions have a *strong reading* which leads us to believe that in these cases, the definite article applies to the head of the DP, the noun itself, and no instantiations of the kind are under consideration.

- (14) **The whale** is on the verge of extinction.⁴ (E) (Borik & Espinal, 2019, p.247)
La balena és a punt d'extingir-se. (C)
La ballena está al borde de la extinción. (S)

Contrarily, and following Schwarz (2012) who argues that VPs containing *WDs* convey pluralities of events, *weak definites* do have Number. However, they are morphosyntactically defective in the sense that their complements must show either singular or plural Number, but not both. Consider (15):

- (15)
a. Anna **took the train**. (E)
b. Anna #took the trains.

- (16)
a. Joan **washed the dishes**. (E)
b. Joan #washed the dish.

In these examples, just one morphological number (i.e., singular or plural) licenses the emergence of *weak readings*. In (15) just the singular DP *the train* allows it and, contrarily, in (16), just the plural DP *the dishes* is capable of activating the stereotypical information encoded in the *qualia structure* of the head of the DP (see Section 2 where this idea is introduced and 3.2.1 for further information). This default reinforces the idea that *WDs* must be grammatically distinguished from nominal expressions with *kind* reference. It is relevant to clarify that the fact that (16a) conveys a *weak reading* and (16b) does not, does not mean that the instantiations of *washing the dishes* kind involve cleaning multiple dishes. The idea is that the plurality of instantiations of this *event kind* is not limited just to the action of washing a dish but also pots, pans, cutlery, spatulas, etc. -observe that

⁴ I am aware that bare plurals (i.e., **Whales** are on the verge of extinction) have been attributed a *kind reading* in English (Carlson, 1977) and definite plurals (i.e., **Las ballenas** están al borde de la extinción) have been attributed a generic plural reading in Spanish (Borik & Espinal, 2015, p.202).

even if the subject is just washing one dish the plural expression is still acceptable -and the fact of cleaning and ordering the kitchen after cooking or eating.

Although examples such as (14) show that it seems that there are no cross-linguistically differences between English, Catalan and Spanish related to numberless definite *kinds*, not all *weak definites* look the same from one language to the other.

(17)

- a. Alice **went to the mountains.** (E) (Aguilar-Guevara, 2014, p.55)
- b. Alice #went to the mountain.

(18)

- a. L'Alicia va **anar a la muntanya.** (C)
- b. L'Alicia va #anar a les muntanyes.

(19) a. Alicia **fue a la montaña.** (S)

- b. Alicia #fue a las montañas.

As previously mentioned, *weak definites* are either plural or singular but there is never an alternation between singular and plural Number on the complement DP. Therefore, if we make the singular form of the plural *WD going to the mountains* (17), the *weak reading* is lost. Aguilar-Guevara (2014, p.56) compared the impossibility of alternation of *plural weak definites* to the one affecting collective nouns. Her assumption is interesting because she describes the noun heads of the *WDs* as a type of *pluralia tantum* nouns that instead of referring to the sum of independent individuals to which the singular form refers, designate other individuals which convey plurality.

Accordingly, the plural noun *mountains* does not refer to a sum of mountains but rather to a collection, which, by the way, not only includes mountains but also the other surfaces between the mountains such as valleys and lakes.

Aguilar-Guevara (2014, p.56)

Weak readings can only be triggered by those expressions resulting from the combination of a verb and a DP which are able to activate extra grammatical information associated with stereotypical activities. The contrast presented in (17a), (18a) and (19a) is relevant

as in English it is the plural head which allows the *weak reading* to emerge and, contrarily, in the Catalan and Spanish examples, just the singular form allows it to occur. In short, although *weak definites* have been shown to exist in many languages such as English, Catalan and Spanish (see Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2010), Schwarz (2012), Aguilar-Guevara (2014), Espinal & Cyrino (2017), Leonetti (2019) and Borik & Espinal (2012, 2015, 2019)) the forms in which they appear may vary from one language to the other. While in English (17) the *weak definite* associated with the conventionalized activity of *going to the mountains* (and its associated meanings, such as encompassing valleys and lakes, the possible activities that can be performed there such as hiking or camping) requires a plural form, in Catalan and Spanish (18-19) the *weak reading* can only arise if the DP combined with the verb *go* is singular (i.e., *anar a la muntanya*, *ir a la montaña*).

Having discussed what role Number has in *weak definite* structures, we could conclude this Section stating that *kinds of events* conveyed by WDs in VP expressions such as *taking the train*, *read the newspaper*, *wash the dishes*, *anar a la muntanya*, *ir a la montaña*, *go to the mountains*, and so on, have singular or plural Number, but there is never an alternation. For instance, (15a) encodes a *weak reading* because when combining *the train* with the verb *go*, the resultant expression is associated with the conventionalized activity of taking public transport (i.e., train, bus, metro, etc.). However, if we alter the morphological Number (making the plural, *the trains*), there is no association, and the *weak definite* condition is lost.

3.2. Lexical and verbal restrictions

3.2.1. Lexical restrictions

When DPs combined with verbs convey *weak readings*, it is because there are certain lexical restrictions affecting the lexical heads of definite phrases that are being satisfied. Let us present the following examples where we classify the different types of *weak definites*, and we show some interesting contrasts that emerge when substituting one DP for another with which it shares semantic properties.

(20) Transport

Maria **took the train** // Maria took #the coach.

(21) Communication devices/tools

a. Jordi **listened to the radio** // Jordi listened to # the walkie-talkie.

b. Andreu **read the newspaper** // Andreu read #the book.

(22) **Establishments**

Jana **went to the bar** // Jana went to #the hotel.

(23) **Natural places**

Laia **went to the beach** // Laia went to #the lake.

(24) **Professions**

Sergi **called the doctor** // Sergi called #the physician.

The contrasts shown in these examples from (20) to (24) are quite interesting because although at first sight, it could seem that these DPs have quite a similar reference, they differ in their capacity of triggering *weak readings*. In short, not every noun designating an object of a particular class can form a *weak definite*. This is, *the train*, *the radio*, *the newspaper*, *the bar*, *the beach*, and *the doctor* give rise to *weak readings* only in combination with specific verbs, but DPs such as *#the coach*, *#the walkie-talkie*, *#the book*, *#the hotel*, *#the lake*, *#the physician* do not. Why? Basically, it is because satisfying noun properties is not enough when licensing *weak definites*.

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.

(Espinal & Cyrino, 2017, p. 131)

Verbal restrictions will be further examined in the next section but if we go back to the examples, we could observe that most of the verbs (i.e. *to take*, *to listen*, *to read*, *to call*) are transitive and that all the resultant expressions encode conventionalized activities. Moreover, it is also interesting to observe how *WDs* and definite *kinds* have different verbal requirements (see Section 3.2) which reinforces our view that nominal expressions that allow *weak readings* should be distinguished from those which refer to *kinds*. When presenting examples (20) to (24), we stressed the fact that having quite a similar reference is not enough for being able to license *weak readings*. So, there must be something else going on.

Nouns denote properties of kinds, and some nouns contribute to the formation of ‘familiar’ event kinds through the telic stereotypical information encoded in the qualia structure of the N.

Espinal & Cyrino (2017, p. 145)

Weak definites only can arise when the *qualia structure* (Pustejovsky, 1995) of their nouns goes beyond the compositional stage and its meaning is pragmatically inferred. The identification of *WDs* takes place when some stereotypical encyclopedic information is activated as it is shown in (25):

(25)

Newspaper (x^k)	TELICs: if	$\exists e^k [\text{read}(e^k)] \wedge \text{Theme}(\lambda x^k [\text{newspaper}(x^k)], e^k)$
QUALIA	then	$\exists e'^k . e^k < e'^k$ [be-informed / do-crosswords / take-a look at it while falling asleep / etc. (e'^k)]

Adaptation of the original proposal of Espinal & Cyrino (2017, p. 142)

In (21b), both DPs, *the newspaper* and *the book*, fit in with the semantic features required by the verb *to read* as both refer to objects that can be read. However, just *the newspaper* can emerge the *weak reading*. It conveys the semantic requirements demanded by the grammar to activate some extra pragmatic information which includes the ritualized activity of *reading the newspaper* and whose interpretation could vary as shown in (25). Nonetheless, *the book* does not activate such an amount of stereotypical information and that is why its lexical entry does not contain *qualia* information such as the one in (25). The same goes for the rest of the examples where *weak readings* just arise because of the stereotypical information activated when combining certain verbs with certain nouns, but not with any other nouns although they seem to satisfy the lexical requirements of the verb. It is shown in the following hyphens:

- *To take + the train*

I.e., taking at least one train, but not necessarily the same one and maybe combining it with the metro, bus, etc. This is, taking public transport.

- *To listen + the radio*

I.e., not necessarily some specific object or paying too much attention to it but the routine activity of listening to the radio.

- *To go + the bar*

I.e., not necessarily one unique bar, but the fact of going out to have a drink with some friends.

- *To go + the beach*

I.e., not necessarily one specific beach but the whole activity of going there to swim, play, sunbathe and so on.

- *To call + the doctor*

I.e., not necessarily one particular doctor, but any person who is graduated in medicine and works as a doctor. So, it refers to the event of asking for medical assistance.

Our proposal is, therefore, like the one stated by Schwarz (2014) in the sense that we agree in arguing that the role of the definite article in *weak definites* is to contribute to the possibility that VPs are interpreted as *kinds of events*. However, in our view *weak* expressions are not the result of a compositional operation of incorporation, but the result of the activation of some pragmatical data which relies on the *telic* information conveyed in the *qualia* structure of certain object nouns. In short, only when both the verb and the noun refer pragmatically to a conventionalized kind of activity, conceived as a fixed activity involving an action and a theme of the event, will *weak definites* be able to emerge.

3.2.2. Verbal restrictions

In the present analysis, VPs can refer to routine *kinds of events* if, and only if, the combination of the verb and the DP is able to activate some stereotypical information, as shown in (25). Moreover, neither the presence of the definite article nor the position of the noun when combined with a specific verb (generally, in the object position) is essential for it. This is because, contrary to Aguilar-Guevara & Zwarts (2010) and Aguilar-Guevara (2014), the definite determiner contained in WDs does not refer to a *kind* or contribute to simple nominalizations.

In the previous section, we examined some contrasts where changing the noun head of the DP removed the possibility of having a *weak reading*. However, *weak definites* are not only restricted by lexical means but also by verbal ones, as already indicated in (25). This is, they can only occur when the verb denotes a stage-level predicate (cf. *kinds* which appear in combination with *kind-level* predicates, as shown in (11) and (14)), whether transitive (26a) or unaccusative (26b).

(26)

- | | |
|--------------------|-----|
| a. Watch the TV | (E) |
| mirar la TV | (C) |
| mirar la TV | (S) |
| b. Go to the beach | (E) |
| anar a la platja | (C) |
| ir a la playa | (S) |

While working on finding what properties must a verb have to be able to form part of a *weak definite* when combined with a DP, some interesting examples appeared.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| (27) To read the newspaper | #To crumple the newspaper |
| (28) To take the train | #To paint / #To break / #To move the train |
| (29) To listen to the radio | #To fix the radio |
| (30) To call the doctor | #To denounce the doctor |
| (31) To play the guitar | #To sell the guitar |

Aguilar- Guevara (2014) when discussing what she named *weak verbs* (p.95) -for us there are no *weak verbs*, but certain regular verbs that together with certain DPs can generate *weak readings*- presented an interesting generalization:

Generalization 2. Weak verbs designate activities compatible with the characteristic function of objects designated by weak nouns combining with these verbs.

(Aguilar-Guevara, 2014, p.98)

Observing examples from (27) to (31) and ignoring what she calls *weak nouns* -for us there are no *weak nouns*, but certain regular nouns that together with certain verbs can generate *weak readings* -, it justifies why the left examples are acceptable *weak definites*. Nonetheless, it fails to explain why the ones on the right do not arise *weak readings*. At first sight, it is evident that transitive verbs are either to read, to take, to listen, to call and to play or to crumple, to paint, to broke, to move, to fix, to denounce and to sell. In short, all of them designate agentive activities. Moreover, each of them has its own requirements when combined with objects. For instance, *to read* requires its direct argument to designate an object with a text and *to crumple*, an object that can be rumped. However, although none of the verbs from (27) to (31) lacks a direct object and all of them express an activity, all the expressions lose their *weak reading* if the verb is changed. The interesting question is why? Why *reading the newspaper* is a *weak definite* but not *crumpling the newspaper*?

In the previous sections, we stressed the fact that both the formation and the interpretation of *weak definites* go beyond grammar in the sense that the activation of stereotypical information related to routine activities is fundamental for their existence. Therefore, the right examples do not entail *weak readings* because, although like those on the left, the verbs have their semantic requirements satisfied by the DPs, the resultant combination is incapable of activating any information associated with a conventionalized activity.

In Section 3.2.1, we showed how lexical restrictions affect the formation of *weak definites* and now, when examining these expressions, we find that not all transitive verbs work well when generating these structures. Verbs such as *to read*, *to take*, *to listen*, *to call* and *to play* are stage-level predicates and even though *to crumple*, *to paint*, *to broke*, *to move*, *to fix*, *to denounce* and *to sell* are transitive too, they do not work well in *weak definite* structures.

All this attempt does not clearly explain why *weak definites* exist and allow both transitive and unaccusative verbs in their structures. What they all have in common is that they are stage-level predicates and we hypothesized that the lexical entry of specific nouns will constrain the verb that is involved in the *kind of event* stereotypical conventionalized activity. Considering this last remark, it is interesting to consider examples such as the ones in (32), which show a contrast between a definite and an indefinite article in the

complement position of a preposition in an unaccusative structure with the verb *ésser* (i.e., *to be*).

(32)

- a. La Mariona és al telèfon. (C)
- b. La Mariona #és a un telèfon.

The verb *to be* is a stative verb regardless of the language. On the one hand, it is not expected to find a *weak definite* containing a stative verb as they do not encode actions. And, on the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that examples such as (32a) are *weak definites*. In Catalan, *ésser al telèfon* conveys the routine activity of being on a telephone call. However, in (32b) this interpretation is lost. It is noteworthy that the substitution of the definite article for an indefinite one not only disrupts its conception as *weak definite* but also completely changes the type of interpretation. In short, while in (32a) the sense is stereotyped, in (32b) the referent is no longer the activity of calling or being using any entity whose qualities are being “a device that uses either a system of wires along which electrical signals [...] make it possible for you to speak to someone in another place” (Cambridge Dictionary). The reading of (32b) is locative (i.e. Mariona is (physically) in a phone booth).

Overall, in this section 3 we have shown that, although *weak definites* are typically singular, there are also plural ones. However, such expressions can only have singular or plural Number, but there is never any alternation. Moreover, when analyzing the lexical restrictions, it is evident that the fact that the DP satisfies the semantic requirements of the verb is not enough for the combination to entail a *weak reading*. In the same way, the fact that a verb satisfies the semantic requirements of the DP is not enough for conveying a *weak reading*. In other words, only certain verbs (i.e., stage-level predicates) in combination with certain DPs can give rise to *weak definites* as long as the resultant combination entails a conventionalized activity.

4. Indefinite readings of definite articles, different from *weak definites*

In this section, we analyze some structures which have indefinite readings of definite articles but without being *weak definites*. In 4.1, we will comment on bare nominal

expressions which, as it was already introduced in the first section of this study, sometimes seem to behave as *weak definites* in the sense that they can encode stereotyped activities. And, in 4.2, we will examine the similarities and differences between *weak definites* and some Spanish idioms in terms of form and meaning.

4.1. *Weak definites* and bare nominal expressions

In Section 1, we already introduced that there are occasions where both *weak definites* and bare nominal expressions are not so semantically different. Look at the following examples from English, Catalan, and Spanish:

(33)

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|
| a. Maria went home. | // *Maria went to a home. | (E) |
| b. La Maria va anar a casa. | // La Maria va anar a una casa. | (C) |
| c. María se fue a casa. | // María se fue a una casa. | (S) |

Encoding a stereotypical activity is one of the fundamental features that a *weak definite* must have. Left examples in (33a-c) show that this feature is not exclusive to *weak definites* but that there are certain structures, in these cases with bare nominals, that can also convey a routine activity. In other words, although the form is different from *weak definites*, both structures behave in a semantically similar way. It is noteworthy that, except in English, both in Catalan and in Spanish, these structures require the presence of the preposition "a" -we saw the same when we analyzed the contrast between "anar a escola" and "*ir a escuela". Maybe it has to do with the fact of conveying direction, in any case, it is not within the scope of this study to examine this. However, examples on the right with indefinite DPs have a *weak reading* given that they do not have a unique identifiable referent, but their *weak reading* is not associated with a conventionalized activity. In short, it seems that indefinite structures, contrary to *weak definites* and some bare nominal structures, cannot entail stereotypical activities.

4.2. *Weak definites* and idioms

At this point, it is easy to identify *weak definites* as one sort of semi-lexicalized expressions since they have an enriched meaning, and the morphological Number is fixed (i.e., either singular or plural but never alternating). However, although each *weak definite*

has a fixed structure in which just certain verbs in combination with certain DPs can arise its *weak reading*, the form of the verb is not fixed. Therefore, *weak definites* can be found in any verb tense (cf. *Juan va a la montaña*, *Juan irá a la montaña*, etc.). In terms of interpretation, as proved in the previous sections, *weak definites* are a problem when defining theories of definiteness because they do not have a unique referent as definite expressions typically have but they involve *weak readings*. With idioms, something similar happens because even though some of them contain DPs, in any case, they convey *strong readings*.

Throughout this study, we have been scrutinizing the way in which *weak definites* convey interpretations that go beyond the ones of regular definite expressions. We could say that the meaning of *weak definites*, unlike that of regular definites, is the result of the sum of the literal meaning of the words and the stereotyped activity associated with the whole. On the contrary, the meaning of idioms such as the ones we have in (34), has nothing to do with the literal meaning of the words that compose them, but it is something entirely figurative.

(34)

- a. Chuparse el dedo. (S)
- b. Irse por las ramas.

The Spanish idiom *chuparse el dedo* (34a) is used when someone does not want to be treated as if they were unconscious, inexperienced or ignorant (i.e., *Trató de engañarme pero yo no me chupo el dedo*). And the idiom *irse por las ramas* (34b) is used when someone talks for a long time about insignificant things, avoiding the main topic (i.e. *El ladrón se fue por las ramas y no dijo dónde estaba el dinero*). In short, neither (34a) has anything to do with the literal action of sucking a particular finger nor (34b) refers to the action of going through the branches.

Moreover, we realized that although in any case, we can catalogue both idioms and *weak definites* as the same thing, their behavior is quite similar in some cases. Look at examples in (35) where the interpretation changes radically when substituting the definite article for an indefinite one.

(35)

a. # Chuparse un dedo. (S)

b. # Irse por unas ramas.

In (35a-b) the figurative sense has completely disappeared, and the only available interpretation is the literal one given by the meaning of every individual word that composes the expression. So, in (35a) we must imagine someone literally sucking on one of their fingers and in (35b), someone literally going through some branches. Note that, as we have already seen in previous examples such as (32) it is like what happens when we change the definite article for an indefinite one in a weak definite. Although in these cases what changes is not the literalness of the interpretation but the capacity of arising a reading associated with a conventionalized activity.

It is also interesting to note that none of these structures allows variation of any of its components. This is, if in section 3 when delimiting the lexical and verbal requirements of *weak definites* we realized that they are fixed expressions in the sense that only certain combinations of verbs and DPs work well, something very similar occurs with idioms. They have a fixed structure since if we modify any of the words that constitute them, the meaning is lost. Compare *chuparse el dedo* with either *chuparse el pie* or *lavarse el dedo* where neither the DP *el pie* nor the verb *lavar* manages to convey the weak figurative reading of the original expression.

Overall, in this section, we showed that there are expressions that, despite not being *weak definites*, share certain properties with them. On the one hand, bare nominals share semantic properties and, on the other hand, idioms share the fact that they are fixed expressions in the sense that only certain combinations of verbs and DPs give rise to *weak readings*. More examples could be presented regarding all this. However, for reasons of length, we cannot go deeper into this interesting question.

5. Conclusion

Throughout this study, we reviewed the different views on the notion of *weak definite* through the analysis of the contrasts between definite and indefinite expressions in terms of their structure and possible meanings. According to this analysis, regular definite

expressions are only appropriate when they satisfy either existence or uniqueness conditions (i.e., *strong reading*) and their referent is likely known by the hearer. On their part, indefinite expressions and *weak definites* entail existence but not uniqueness (i.e., *weak reading*).

Nonetheless, when examining deeply *weak definites*, contrary to Aguilar-Guevara (2014), we argue that they do not refer to *kinds* but to *kinds of events*. We have observed that cross-linguistically (i.e., English, Catalan, and Spanish), all *weak definites* are able to encode their *weak readings* if, and only if, some restrictions are considered. Their *weak readings* associated with stereotyped activities can be grammatically predicted if, and only if, it is specified in the lexical entry or certain nouns in combination with certain verbs (i.e., stage-level predicates) which are part of their *telic* structure. Moreover, we showed that there are plural and singular *weak definites* but neither of them allows Number alternation. *Weak definite* structures must respect these restrictions to be able to entail *weak readings*. Otherwise, the activation of extra grammatical information will not occur, and the *weak* condition will be lost. The assumption that what is fundamental for inferring *weak readings* is the *telic* structure of the noun and not the presence of the definite article itself, leads us to predict that the fact that a language lacks articles does not prevent it from having *weak definite* structures.

In the last section, we presented some structures which although they are not *weak definites* have definite articles which fail to arise *strong readings*. It is relevant because some bare nominals and idioms behave similarly to *weak definites* when they can entail indefinite readings. It would be interesting to go deeper into this to know what exactly occurs when we decode these structures so that they can give rise to *weak readings* despite having DPs.

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