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Rapport de mission
Participation au 32e colloque de la Société allemande de linguistique
(DGfS : Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sprachwissenschaft, AG 4: Indefiniteness Crosslinguistically)

La société allemande de Linguistique organise tous les ans un colloque de grande envergure qui a lieu à chaque fois dans une université différente. Le colloque est essentiellement structuré autour d'ateliers thématiques qui se déroulent sur 3 jours.

J'ai participé au workshop sur les indéfinis, organisé par Ljudmila Geist et Cornelia Ebert, où j'ai présenté une conférence intitulée « The distribution of Southern German Indefinites, and their diachronic evolution » (cf. le résumé ci-dessus).

Cette participation m'a donné l'occasion de prendre connaissance d'autres travaux en cours dans le domaine. L'interaction avec des germanophones locuteurs natifs de dialectes similaires au mien m'ont permis de clarifier certains jugements, et j'ai eu des précieuses remarques sur mon travail de recherche en cours.

Résumé
The Distribution of Southern German Indefinites, and their Diachronic Evolution
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In this paper, I will show that Southern German Indefinite articles provide a (synchronic) puzzle for Chierchia (1998)-style NP-denotations. I will show furthermore that the diachronic development of the German indefinite does not square at all with the assumptions put forward in Heine (1997), according to which grammaticalisation corresponds to gradual semantic bleaching, and that the diachronic evolution of indefinites in German follows a standard grammaticalisation path.

The Synchronic Puzzle Chierchia's system comes with a typological prediction about the distribution of determiners: there cannot be any determiner that applies to both singular count and (singular) mass nouns, but excluding plural count nouns.

In some contemporary Southern-German dialects (this one from Vorarlberg, Austria), it is perfectly acceptable to use an indefinite article with mass nouns, as well as with singular count nouns. However, the indefinite is not possible with plural count nouns (cf. (1)). This is precisely the pattern predicted to be impossible by Chierchia.

- (1) a. mir hond a hund. b. mir hond a meal. c. *mir hond a hünd.
 we have a dog. we have a flour. we have a dogs.

Importantly, the acceptability of the indefinite article with a mass noun cannot be analysed generally as a case of coercion from mass to count. The dialect investigated here has a phonetically clearly distinct cardinal determiner (similar to the English one), which sometimes is ungrammatical where the indefinite article is perfectly adequate.

- (2) a. dr schorsch hot a gealt. b. *dr schorsch hot uj gealt.
 the George has a money. the George has one money.
 'George has (some) money.' 'George has one money.'

Furthermore, this particular indefinite article cannot be analyzed as being semantically vacuous, and to correspond simply to the absence of the indefinite in contemporary standard German. In some contexts, like generic statements, the indefinite article is infelicitous with mass nouns, just like in standard varieties of German:

- (3) a. *a iis isch kolt. b. iis isch kolt.
 a ice is cold. ice is cold.

The examples in (3) make clear that a reasonable account of NP-denotations must offer some way of distinguishing plural count nouns from mass nouns. However, in Chierchia's system, there is no way of expressing such a distinction.

The Diachronic Puzzle People familiar with grammaticalisation theory and its mindset might suppose that the Southern German Indefinite (SGI) has grammaticalised away from an original state similar to the one of contemporary standard German. However, this assumption is not warranted. Quite to the contrary, the SGI is a much closer descendant to Middle High German (MHG) and Early New High German indefinite articles than the standard German indefinite. From the description in Heine (1997), one can deduce the following inferential scale for the distribution of indefinite articles:

- (4) Mass Nouns > Plural Nouns > Singular Count Nouns

Heine's scale is couched in a more general, five-stage model of the diachronic evolution of the indefinite article (Heine, 1997, 71ff.). Stage I corresponds to the stage where the form is used only as a numeral; stage IV corresponds to the indefinite article in languages like contemporary English and standard German. In stage V, we would have a completely unrestricted, "generalized" indefinite article, which can occur with all types of nouns (i.e., also plural, and eventually mass). At stage V, all number-specific behaviour has been bleached out. While, as already noted, the SGI does not fit neatly into this picture, it is clear that it must be beyond stage IV.

Interestingly, in MHG, the use of the indefinite article is less restricted than even in the contemporary Southern dialects. It combined quite freely with mass, but appeared also with at least some plural forms:

- (5) Daz was in einen zîten, dô vrou Helche erstarp
 That was in aPl timesPl, when lady H. died.

'It succeeded at the time when lady Helche had died.'

(5) may be a *plurale tantum*, but in contemporary Southern German, even such a combination with a merely morphological plural is ungrammatical. Furthermore, one finds the MHG indefinite article in vocatives, with discourse-old elements, and in generic comparison (cf. Paul et al., 1982), all of which is impossible in any contemporary variety of German I know.

In Luther's German, the indefinite article looks like it has lost many MHG environments (vocatives, pluralia tantum, discourse-old indefinites), and looks more like the SGI. However, it still can be shown that in his writings, there were less restrictions on the indefinite than there are today.

Conclusion The indefinite articles in different dia-systems of German pose serious problems to both formal theories of NP-denotation, as well as to commonly assumed pathways of grammatical change.

Chierchia, Gennaro. 1998. Plurality of mass nouns and the notion of "semantic parameter". In S. Rothstein, ed., *Events and Grammar*, pages 53–103. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Heine, Bernd. 1997. *Cognitive Foundations of Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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