

# A morphological distinction between bound and free definites

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## 1) Introduction

When a German **definite follows certain prepositions**, the two can **contract**:

- (1) *Hans sass {an dem / am} Schreibtisch.*  
Hans sat {at the / at-the} desk.

There are **subtle differences in meaning and usage of the two forms**  
This poster explores these differences, in particular:

- Differences relating to **discourse and donkey anaphora** (section 2: **A-D**)
- Differences with respect to **accommodation** and **bridging** (section 3: **I-IV**).
- Theoretical implications of these findings, in particular for
  - **uniqueness-based E-type-** and
  - **familiarity-based dynamic** approaches (section 4).

## Distribution (rough first shot):

- i) The primary use of the Non-Contracted Form (**NCF**) is **anaphorically** (I'm ignoring deictic uses, which require stress on the determiner).

- (2) *Hans hat einen neuen Schreibtisch.*  
Hans has a new desk

*Er hat den ganzen Tag an dem Schreibtisch gesessen.*  
He has the whole day **at the** desk sat

- ii) The Contracted Form (**CF**) is used in several situations, for example in:

a) **Generic sentences:**

- (3) *Büroangestellte arbeiten am Schreibtisch.*  
Office employees work **at-the** desk

b) **Unique referents:**

- (4) *Morgen fliege ich zum Mond.*  
Tomorrow fly I **to-the** moon

c) **Idioms:**

- (5) *Jetzt ist alles im Eimer*  
Now is all **in-the** bucket

## 2) The Non-Contracted Form (NCF)

### A NCF as Discourse Anaphors

Only **NCF** can refer back to the politician in (6):

- (6) *Im Fernsehen interviewte gestern ein Journalist einen Politiker.*  
on television interviewed yesterday a journalist a politician

*Er war ziemlich unfreundlich zu dem /#zum Politiker.*  
He was quite unfriendly **to the to-the** politician

'A journalist interviewed a politician on TV yesterday. He was quite unfriendly to the politician'

- (7) *Hans hat einen neuen Schreibtisch.*  
Hans has a new desk.

*Er hat den ganzen Tag an dem / ≠ am Schreibtisch gesessen.*  
He has the whole day **at the at-the** desk sat

'Hans has a new desk. He sat at the desk all day.'

→ With CF, Hans could have sat at any desk!

### B Binding of NCF

Only **NCF** can co-vary with a **c-commanding antecedent**:

- (8) *Kein Politiker kann von einem Journalisten erwarten, dass*  
no politician can of a journalist expect that

*er freundlich zu dem /#zum Politiker ist.*  
he friendly **to the to-the** politician is

'No politician x can expect from a journalist y that y is friendly to x'

- (9) *Jeder Student hat einen Schreibtisch, den er so hinstellt, dass*  
every student has a desk that he so sets-up that

*er den ganzen Tag an dem / ≠ am Schreibtisch verbringen kann.*  
he the whole day **at the at-the** desk spend can

'Every student x has a desk y set up so that x can spend all day at y'

### C Co-variation of NCF without binding

Only **NCF** can co-vary with an antecedent **without c-command**:

- (10) *Hans muss einen Politiker finden und in der nächsten Woche*  
Hans must a politician find and in the next week

*ein Interview von dem / #vom Politiker bekommen.*  
a interview **from the from-the** politician get

∀<sub>w</sub>MUST: Hans find a politician x and get an interview from x'

- (11) *Die meisten Studenten haben einen grossen Schreibtisch und*  
the most students have a big desk and

*verbringen den ganzen Tag an dem / ≠ am Schreibtisch.*  
spend the whole day **at the at-the** desk

'Most students x have a desk y and spend all day at y'

## D NCF as DONKEY anaphor

Only **NCF** can co-vary with antecedent in **donkey sentences**

- (12) *Jeder Journalist, der einen Politiker interviewt, ist manchmal*  
every journalist that a politician interviews is sometimes

*unfreundlich zu dem / #zum Politiker.*  
unfriendly **to the to-the** politician

'Every journalist that interviews a politicians is sometimes unfriendly to the politician.'

- (13) *Wenn ein Student einen grossen Schreibtisch hat, verbringt*  
When a student a big desk has spends

*er den ganzen Tag an dem / ≠ am Schreibtisch.*  
he the whole day **at the at-the** desk

'When a student has a big desk, he spends the whole day at the desk.'

## 3) The Contracted Form (CF)

### I Unique Referents

Only **CF** can refer to previously unmentioned referents that uniquely satisfy the description (globally or in the situation):

- (14) *Hans muss heute #zu dem/ zum deutschen Bundeskanzler.*

Hans must today **to the / to-the** german chancellor  
'Hans must go to the German chancellor today.'

- (15) *Wir sehen uns dann #in dem/ im Institut.*

We see us then **in the / in-the** institute  
'We'll see each other in the institute then.'

### II Accommodating CF

Only **CF** can be accommodated:

- (15) Calling Hans's house for the first time, his wife answers and says:

*Einen Moment, Hans ist #in dem / im Garten*  
one moment Hans is **in the in-the** yard  
'Just a moment, Hans is in the yard.'

- (16) During your first visit to the town hall, the receptionist says:

*Damit muessen Sie #zu dem / zum Ordnungsamt*  
with-this must you **to-the / to-the** order-office  
'With this, you have to go to the Ordnungsamt.'

### III Bridging CF

Only **CF** can be used for Bridging:

- (17) *Hans hat ein neues Auto. #An dem / Am Kühler prangt ein Stern.*  
Hans has a new car **at the /at-the** radiator displayed a star  
'Hans has a new car. It has a star on the radiator.'
- (18) *Das Haus ist alt. #an dem / am Dach gibt es undichte Stellen.*  
the house is old **at the /at-the** roof there-are leaky places  
'The house is old. The roof has leaks.'

### IV Co-variation with situations

Only **CF** for co-variation without an antecedent: (13) vs. (13')

- (13') *Wenn ein Student viel zu tun hat, verbringt er den ganzen Tag*  
When a student a-lot to do has spends he the whole day  
**#an dem / am Schreibtisch.**  
**at the at-the** desk

'When a student has a lot to do, he spends all day at the desk.'

- (19) *Auf Reisen treffen sich Hans und Karl meistens*  
On trips meet Refl. Hans and Karls usually  
**#an dem / am Bahnhof.**  
**At the / at-the** train-station

'On trips, Hans and Karl usually meet at the train station.'

## 4) Theoretical Issues and Implications

### Dynamic Theories

**NCF** and Dynamic views of Donkey anaphors (Heim 1982, Kamp 1981)

- 'def NP' picks out an already present (i.e. familiar) discourse referent (DR)  
→ All definite DPs come with an index that has to match the index of a previously introduced discourse referent.  
Using the same form (**NCF**) for discourse anaphors, donkey anaphors, and bound DPs (**A-D**) is completely expected

**CF**, unique referents, Accommodation & Bridging in Dynamic Accounts

- Accommodation & Bridging: Insert discourse referent when needed
- Unique referents: globally unique: accommodated or implicitly present  
in context: discourse referents already present

→ **Binding Theory of Presupposition** (van der Sandt 1992, Geurts 1999):  
Presupposition resolution as anaphora resolution

**PROBLEM:** Contrast between **NCF** and **CF** can't be captured in these terms!

- The anaphoric **NCF** does not accommodate or bridge and can't pick up unique referents (**A–D**)
- The non-anaphoric **CF** picks up unique referents, accommodates and bridges (**I–III**), but can't be linked to existing discourse referents (**A–D**)

### **E-type Theories**

**NCF** and E-Type views of Donkey anaphors (e.g. Elbourne 2005)

- Donkey DPs  $\cong$  DPs referring to uniquely described individual in a situation  
→ Co-variation of individuals via co-variation of situations.
- Donkey DPs  $\neq$  discourse anaphors & bound DPs

### **PROBLEMS:**

- How can there be a form like **NCF**? Can be donkey anaphor (**D**) but CANNOT pick up uniquely described individuals (**I**)!
- No way to account for grouping by the morphological distinction: donkey & discourse anaphora and bound DPs vs. uniquely referring DPs

**CF**, unique referents, Accommodation & Bridging in E-Type accounts

- Uniquely described referents (**I**):  
hallmark case for E-type semantics
- Accommodation (**II**):  
If the relevant situation does not contain a unique  $x \in P$ , expand it minimally so that it does
- Bridging (**III**):  
Natural in a situation semantics (situations containing a unique car will contain a unique radiator)

### **5) Some Conclusions:**

German exhibits a **morphological distinction between different definites:**

- NCF requires a linguistic antecedent, presumably via a DR
- CF cannot pick up linguistic antecedents.  
→ This provides an empirical test for several theoretical issues
- Donkey anaphors involve a real formal link to linguistic antecedent (contra E-Type)
- Accommodation does not involve inserting a DR and referring back to it
- Bridging does not involve an anaphoric link  
→ **A unified account of definites no longer is feasible!**

### **The bigger picture**

- Recent debate about distinguishing different presupposition triggers, based on their different properties (in particular w.r.t accommodation)
- **NCF** vs. **CF** is a minimal pair of triggers that vary in their ability of being accommodated  
→ General account?  
**Non-anaphoric triggers accommodate, anaphoric ones don't**  
(following Kripke 1991)

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The research presented here is work in progress, and comments would be most welcome ([florian@linguist.umass.edu](mailto:florian@linguist.umass.edu)).