On the (in)definiteness of bare nouns in Dholuo

Introduction. The following paper investigates the (in)definiteness of bare nouns in Dholuo (Nilo-Saharan), an article-less language. Dayal (1999, 2004, 2011, 2017) posits that bare nouns in article-less languages (e.g., Hindi and Russian) are kind denoting and definites, but not true indefinites. Based on this, she further argues that Chierchia's (1998) ranking of covert type-shifts (1a) should be revised to (1b). In this paper, I demonstrate that Dholuo bare nouns are definites and indefinites (as well as kind denoting). At first glance, this appears to go against the ranking of covert type-shifting and the findings from Dayal (1999, 2004, 2011, 2017). However, I argue that there are structural differences between Dholuo and certain other article-less languages (i.e., Hindi and Russian). With Bošković's (2008, 2012) NP/DP parameter in mind, I argue that Dholuo is a DP language whereas languages like Hindi and Russian are NP languages. Therefore, the DP structure in Dholuo is made visible by N-movement operations, whereas Hindi (and Russian) must rely on covert-type shifting, since they lack both ways that DP can be made visible (articles and N-raising). This is why Hindi and Russian adhere to (1b) and Dholuo does not.

(1) *Ranking of covert type-shifts*:
   a. nom > {iota, ∃} (Chierchia 1998)
   b. {nom, iota} > ∃ (Dayal 1999, 2004, 2017)

(In)definiteness of Dholuo bare nouns. Dholuo is an article-less language, as is demonstrated in (2). While the example (2) seems to suggest that bare nouns are both definites and indefinites in Dholuo, it is crucial to apply well-attested diagnostics to data from the language in order to determine if bare nouns are truly both definites and indefinites. I utilize several diagnostics from (Dayal 2023) and Dayal (2017).

(2) auma n-o-gwejo n-a **mpira**$_i$ to n-a-gwejo **mpira**$_i$
   auma past-3sg-kick to-1sg **ball** and past-1sg-kick **ball**
   'Auma kicked a ball to me and I kicked the ball back'

To test whether bare nouns are true definites, three clear diagnostics can be used: anaphoricity, bridging, and homogeneity tests – two of which I illustrate here (anaphoricity and homogeneity). In (3), the anaphoricity test is applied. In the second sentence of (3), a definite is required. Thus, the grammaticality and felicitousness of the bare noun *ɲako* 'girl' in (3) suggests it is definite.

(3) Wuowi kod ɲako n-o-dondʒo e ot. **ɲako** n-o-bet
   boy and girl PAST-PFV-enter in room **girl** PAST-PFV-sit.down
   'A boy and a girl came in the room. The girl sat down.'

Applying the homogeneity test provides similar results (4). (4a) is infelicitous, as *Auma* is a proper name and denotes an individual. The only way for (4b), with a bare noun, to be felicitous is if each instance of *ɲako* refers to a different girl. An interpretation where both instances of *ɲako* refers to the same girl is infelicitous (definite use). Therefore, the bare noun can be a definite.

(4) a. #**auma** nindo to **auma** somo
   auma is.sleeping and **auma** is.reading
   '#Auma is sleeping and Auma is reading'
   b. **ɲako** nindo to **ɲako** somo
   girl$_i$ is.sleeping and **girl**$_{\#i/j}$ is.reading
   '#The girl is sleeping and the girl is reading'
   'A girl is sleeping and a girl is reading'

The example (4b) already hints at the fact that Dholuo bare nouns can be indefinites, as the indefinite interpretation is felicitous. Diagnostics such as the partitive specificity test, referential specificity test, and intermediate scope test confirm this notion. Consider first, the partitive specificity test (5).

(5) ne nitie ɲiθindo maŋen e rum to **ɲako gi wuoji** ne tugo
   PAST are child.PL many in room and **girl and boy** PAST playing
   'There were several children in the room. And **a boy and a girl** were playing'

If there were several kids in the room, there must be a plurality of girls or boys or both. The fact that we get a partitive specificity reading suggests that the bare NPs *ɲako* 'girl' and *wuoji* 'boy' are indefinites.

(6) Ka **wat-na** othoo, a-biro bet ma-kuyo
if **relative-my** die 1SG-will be REL-sad
'If one of my relatives dies, I will be sad'

Considering referential specificity, for a sentence like (6), a speaker can have a specific relative in mind that the hearer does not know about. This suggests that the bolded bare NP is an indefinite.

For more clarity on the status of Dholuo bare NPs as indefinites, I look at cases of intermediate scope. The intermediate scope reading of the English sentence in (7) allows the choice of topic to vary between students.

(7) Every student has read every article on a current topic.

Likewise, turning to Dholuo, the intermediate scope reading of (8) also allows the choice of topic to vary between students. This is illustrated by the fact that (9a) and (9b) are both true within the context of (8).

(8) kila ŋato n-o-somo kila buk e **topik ma-sani**
every person PAST-PFV-read every book on **topic REL-current**
'every person read every book on a current topic'

(9) a. omolo n-o-somo buge duto ma-wuojo kuom jiero
omolo PAST-PFV-read book.PL all REL-regards about election
'Omolo read every book about the election'
b. auma n-o-somo buge duto ma-wuojo kuom weche mag judo mwandu
auma PAST-PFV-read book.PL all REL-regards about once about getting wealth
'Auma read every book about the economy'

Based on these selected tests, and others not provided, Dholuo bare nouns appear to be both true definites and indefinites.

Evidence of N-to-D raising in Dholuo. Dholuo has a strict postnominal modifier order, as is demonstrated in (10). I argue that this strict pattern is due to N-to-D raising [cf. Carstens (1991, 1993, 2008) for Bantu].

(10) **N Num Adj Dem**
bug-e adek marakwar -go ei sanduk
book-PL three red -those in box
'those three red books are in a/the box'

Furthermore, Dholuo has construct state nominals (CSNs), in which the head noun precedes the possessor (11). Applying Ritter's (1991, 1993) analysis of Hebrew CSNs, I posit that Dholuo CSNs provide additional evidence of N-to-D raising in the language. More specifically, Ritter (1991) demonstrates that Hebrew CSNs containing a derived nominal taking two arguments have a surface order of (N)oun > (S)ubject > (O)bject. She argues that this NSO surface order is parallel to the VSO order found in Welsh sentences, and provides an analysis in which N raises to the functional head that governs it (D). Dholuo CSNs containing a derived nominal taking two arguments have this same NSO order (12). In this paper, I provide several tests to demonstrate that N does, in fact raise to D in Dholuo CSNs.

(11) bug ŋato
book man
'the man's book'

(12) **[N] [S] [O]**
hera omolo mar jaode
love omolo MAR wife
'Omolo's love of his wife'

Conclusions. Based on semantic properties and ordering of elements in the nominal domain in Dholuo, I argue that it is a DP language with N-to-D movement. Even in lieu of the NP/DP parameter, this is not entirely surprising, as Bošković (2018) highlights Bantu as a possible exception to the NP/DP parameter for very similar reasons. Assuming (a less strict version of) the NP/DP parameter, this would mean Dholuo is structurally different than other article-less languages (i.e. Hindi and Russian). Therefore, I argue that there are silent articles in Dholuo and its structure (namely DP) encodes (in)definiteness features and it does not rely on covert type-shifting like an NP language (i.e. Hindi and Russian), which is in line with Chierchia's (1998) Blocking Principle. Such that Dholuo does not use covert type-shifting because D is overtly expressed by the raised N being pronounced in this position. This explains why Dholuo does not adhere to Dayal's (1999, 2004, 2011, 2017) covert type-shift ranking.

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