44 Definite articles

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1 Introduction

The concept of definiteness is by no means exclusively expressed by articles. As has been shown by Krámsky (1972), various other grammatical phenomena can contribute to mark definiteness, amongst which word order, case inflection, verb agreement and stress or intonation. Definiteness as a nominal feature has been considered as the analogue of the perfective aspect in the verbal domain: both convey the grammatical function of quantification (Leiss 2000, 2007).

From a typological viewpoint, the grammatical category of the articles is rather uncommon. According to Dryer (1989), articles would be attested in only one third of the languages of the world. Only 8 % would have both a definite and an indefinite article. Moreover the spread of this phenomenon is geographically very unequal, with a high incidence in (Western-)European languages (for an overview, see Himmelmann 1997:195-207; Bauer 2007; Dryer 2008). From a historical viewpoint, it is established with respect to the European languages, for which written records enable us to observe long term evolutions, that, apart from Greek, the grammatical category of articles is a recent phenomenon. Hence, the existence of this category is not a feature inherited from Indo-European. On the contrary, a Semitic influence has been hypothesized for the Mediterranean area (Putzu and Ramat 2001). As to Romance, although the grammaticalization process is initiated in Late Latin (Selig 1992; Putzu and Ramat 2001), full-fledged definite articles appear only in the first vernacular texts, from the 9th Century on. In Germanic languages, they occur in Middle High German and Middle English around the 11th century[1]. According to Heine and Kuteva (2006), the Romance and Germanic model is replicated and spreads from West to East, affecting also non-European languages like Finnish. They observe that the influence is more important in the southern part of Europe (Albanian, Macedonian, Bulgarian) than in the North (Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian). Schroeder (2006) shows that there is geographical continuum: in Western-European languages, the definite article is formally distinct from the demonstrative (e.g. English, Spanish, French); in Central Europe, the definite article has the same form as the demonstrative pronoun (e.g. German); some Eastern European languages have a demonstrative but no definite article (e.g. Russian) or only an incipient article use of the demonstrative, limited to certain registers or used by younger speakers (e.g. Finnish, *cf.* Laury 1997).

Even though the grammatical category of articles as such is far from being universal, the grammaticalization process that leads to its development exhibits cross-linguistic regularities: in the majority of cases, the definite article originates from a weakened demonstrative, mostly the distal demonstrative or the 3rd person demonstrative, whereas the indefinite article derives from the unity numeral 'one'. Other sources are exceptional:

- From a formal viewpoint, definite articles originating from verbal or nominal lexemes are attested. The verbs involved are 'say' (e.g. Middle French *ledit* 'the said' described by Mortelmans (2008) and the Proto-Chadic demonstratives/anaphors analyzed by Frajzyngier (1996: 192)) and 'see' in its ostensive use (e.g. Sissala *ná* (Lyons 1999: 331; cf. French *voici / voilà* and Latin *ecce* prefixed to the demonstratives)). Frajzyngier (1996: 179) mentions also the article derived from the nominal lexeme 'hand' in the Chadic language Gidar, with a similar ostensive meaning.
- Semantically, definite articles can be derived from anaphoric markers, without deictic meaning. This is the case for the definite article derived from the verb 'say' mentioned above. Another instance of anaphoric marker having an article-like behaviour is the identity marker *ipse* in Late Latin (Selig 1992), which has been selected as the origin of the definite article in several Romance languages (varieties), amongst which Sardinian (Aebischer 1948).

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[1] There is however some discussion about the exact moment of their appearance. *Cf.* Philippi 1997, Leiss 2000, Abraham 2007.

The definite article is more widespread than the indefinite article. On the basis of the empirical data of Moravcsik (1969), Heine (1997) argues that a language that has a grammaticalized indefinite article is likely to have also a definite article, while the reverse does not hold. Even if there are exceptions (e.g. Turkish), this inference is valid in 95% of the languages of the sample.

In line with this typological generalization, we can expect that, from a historical viewpoint, definite articles tend to emerge earlier than indefinite articles. In this context, it is interesting to consider French, which has a very complete article paradigm. Besides the definite article *le*, derived from the Latin distal demonstrative *ille*, and the indefinite singular article *un*, whose source is the Latin unity numeral *unu(m)*, there is also a non-singular indefinite article, called the partitive article, originating from the contraction of the preposition *de* and the definite article (*de le > del > deu > du*). The use of the articles is generalized to the point that zero determination, which was very common in Old French, has become exceptional. The emergence of the different articles and the progressive spread to new contexts of use can be accounted for in terms of the scale of individuation, as proposed in figure 1.

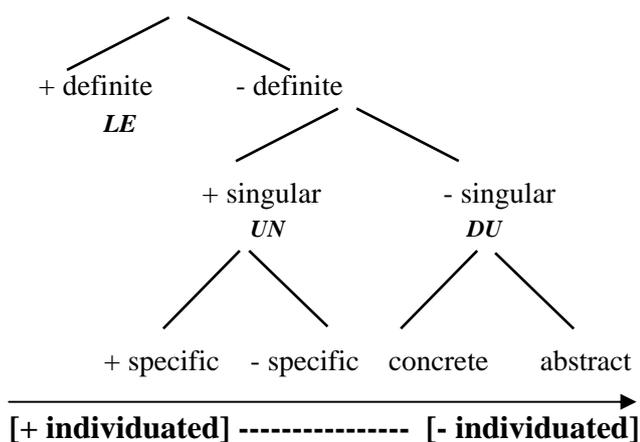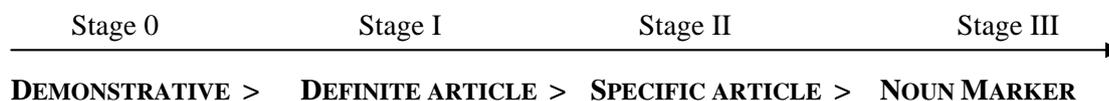**[+ individuated] ---------------- [- individuated]**

Figure 1. Scale of individuation.

The use of the article is older and more systematic when the entity referred to is highly individuated, and is more recent and more fluctuating when the entity referred to is low on the scale of individuation. Eventually, the presence of an article is generalized to all common nouns and the article tends to become a noun marker, indicating the left-side boundary of the NP. There is however frequently a residual domain of article-less nouns: the article may not be used in combination with nouns determined intrinsically (proper nouns), by their anchorage within the speech situation (vocative) or by another determiner (possessives, demonstratives, quantifiers, etc.).

According to the hypothesis of Greenberg (1978), the article derived from the demonstrative evolves along the following grammaticalization path:

| Stage 0 | Stage I | Stage II | Stage III |

DEMONSTRATIVE > DEFINITE ARTICLE > SPECIFIC ARTICLE > NOUN MARKER

The gradual spread of the article to new contexts according to Greenberg's model can also be conceived as a progress on the scale from more individuated (Stage 0 Demonstrative) to less individuated (Stage III Noun Marker). The specific or so-called "non-generic" Stage II article encompasses the first contexts of use of the indefinite singular article. At Stage III, the article extends to all common nouns and becomes a marker of nominality. This grammaticalization path will structure our contribution, although it will be refined and complemented on some points.

Cross-linguistically, articles can be characterized both semantically and morphosyntactically. From a semantic viewpoint, articles encode definiteness or specificity. Definiteness, which occupies in the individuation hierarchy above a higher position, is typologically the most widespread feature, but specificity is for instance common in the Austronesian and in some Bantu languages. From a morphosyntactic viewpoint, articles are adnominal and are different in this respect from pronouns.

They appear in a fixed position with respect to the nominal expression (either to the right or to the left) and can sometimes have the status of affixes. As such, they can function as noun markers or noun phrase markers. Whereas the semantic dimension is predominant in the first stages of the grammaticalization process, it can progressively fade out, which is reflected in a spread to new contexts where the articles convey neither definiteness nor specificity. The morphosyntactic role of noun marker or noun phrase marker becomes more important as grammaticalization proceeds and goes along with routinization and extension of the conditions of use.

2 From demonstrative (Stage 0) to definite article (Stage I)

2.1 The hypothesis of semantic loss

How does the demonstrative evolve into a definite article? The demonstrative signals that the identity of the referent should be established by making reference to the speech situation or the immediate context of utterance. It conveys typically a deictic meaning component, indicating the location of the referent in terms of distance with respect to the speaker or in terms of association with the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person. It is commonly assumed that the exophoric or situational use of the demonstrative, referring to entities in the extra-linguistic situation, is the basic use, giving rise to endophoric or intralinguistic uses, among which the anaphoric use (Diessel 1999: 109-11). Definite articles would be derived from adnominal anaphoric demonstratives.

A somewhat different view of the grammaticalization path is proposed by Lyons (1999: 161, 332). He argues that the shift from demonstrative to definite article is initiated in two types of uses: in the exophoric use when the referent is directly perceived in the physical surroundings and in the anaphoric use where the referent is straightforwardly recalled from the preceding discourse. Deictic information is redundant in these two contexts of use because the referent is immediately accessible. Hence, in the English example (1), the definite article, the distal and proximal demonstratives alternate to refer to an entity visible in the immediate situation. In the Late Latin examples (2a-b), the distal and the proximal demonstrative can be equally used to resume a referent introduced in the previous context.

(1) Pass me *the/this/that bucket*. (Hawkins 1978: 111)
(2) a. *Lucca* <u>*castrum*</u> *dirigunt, atque funditus subvertunt, custodes* **illius castri** *capiunt* (Fredegarius, *Continuations* § 25)
    'They go to <u>the fort</u> of Loches, they raze it to the ground and take prisoner the guardians of ***that fort***.'
    b. *Radulfus haec cernens,* <u>*castrum*</u> *lignis monitum in quodam montem super Vnestrude fluvio in Toringia construens, exercitum undique quantum plus potuit collegens, cum uxorem et liberis in* **hunc castrum** *ad se definsandum stabilibit.* (Fredegarius, § 87)
    'Observing this, Radulf put up <u>a fort</u> protected with a wooden stockade on a rise above the banks of the Unstrut, in Thuringia, and when he had assembled from everywhere an army as big as he could, he established himself with his wife and children within ***this fort*** to withstand a siege.'

These may act as "critical contexts" (Diewald 2002) or "bridging contexts" (Evans and Wilkins 2000; Heine 2002), where the deictic meaning component of the demonstrative can weaken, yielding the shift from demonstrative to definite article. The new definite article would first be restricted to these contexts and spread to other contexts later on.

In the framework of these two hypotheses, several facts remain nevertheless unexplained (Himmelmann 1997: 96-98).

(i) In some languages, there exists a demonstrative which has an exclusively anaphoric function and is devoid of deictic meaning (e.g. *is* in Latin). Given the hypothesis deriving the definite article from the anaphoric use of the demonstrative, how can we explain that this type of demonstrative does never develop into a definite article, as is noted by Himmelmann (1997: 98)?
(ii) From a typological perspective, the most common source of the definite article is the distal demonstrative or the third person demonstrative (Greenberg 1978: 61; Himmelmann 1997: 96-98). If we admit with Lyons (1999) that the shift from demonstrative to definite article is initiated in contexts of use that allow free alternation between proximal and distal demonstratives, how can we account for this widespread tendency?

(iii) It is widely accepted that the characteristic context of use of the definite article is the associative anaphor (Himmelmann 1997), where the definite article gives the instruction to retrieve the referent **indirectly**, by activating a frame of accessible knowledge which the referent is associated with in a univocal way (Hawkins 1978; 1991; Kleiber 1992; Epstein 2002). The demonstrative, by contrast, typically focuses the hearer's attention on the referent **directly**, without considering its structural links with a frame of accessible knowledge. Even if these structural links exist, the use of the demonstrative instead of the definite article deactivates them, as is illustrated by the following couple of examples, quoted from Charolles (1990).

(3) a.*We arrived in a village.* **The church** *was on a hill.*
    b.*We arrived in a village.* **That church***, really, how awful!*

Neither Lyons's hypothesis nor the hypothesis deriving the definite article from an anaphoric demonstrative referring to a previously mentioned discourse participant do account for this meaning shift from direct reference to indirect reference, which is crucial in the development of the definite article.

Moreover, empirical research on several languages (e.g. Laury 1997 for Finnish, Epstein 1993 for Old French and Jamul Diegueño, Trager 1932, Selig 1992, Vincent 1997 and Carlier and De Mulder 2010 for Late Latin, Faingold 2003 for the evolution from Latin to Spanish, Portuguese and Rumanian) has shown that the emergent definite article derived from the demonstrative is not merely a neutral tool for taking up previously mentioned referents, but that it has a strong textual function: it is used exclusively for important participants of a narrative, in particular when they are not currently in the focus of attention. The reasons of the pragmatic impact of the use of the definite article in its initial state are twofold. In a language stage where zero determination is the rule, the use of a determiner as such is significant. This highlighting effect is even stronger in the case of the incipient definite article, because it still owns the demonstrative force of its origin and attracts attention to the referent.

Although it is true that the grammaticalization of the definite article involves at some point a weakening of the demonstrative force of its source, more attention should be paid to the pragmatic factors that set off the grammaticalization process to understand the evolutionary pathway from distal demonstrative to definite article. According to Hopper and Traugott (2003), the early stages of a grammaticalization process have to be conceived in terms of pragmatic strengthening, and meaning loss or "bleaching" occurs only at later stages, as grammaticalization continues and forms become more routinized. In this perspective, it can be assumed that the incipient definite article, although it extends to new textual uses, is still endowed with a demonstrative meaning. We will take advantage of this hypothesis in order to understand the crucial meaning shift from direct reference to indirect reference (iii). In the light of this hypothesis, we will also take up the question why the distal demonstrative is cross-linguistically the most common source for the definite article (ii).

2.2 Pragmatic and semantic definiteness

Some languages have an opposition between two definite articles: a strong and less grammatica-lized article, on the one hand, and a weak and more grammaticalized article, on the other hand. This is for instance the case in some Germanic languages. In standard German, the opposition between the strong and the weak article is visible in certain prepositional phrases (Hartmann 1982; Löbner 1985): the weak article is enclitic with respect to the preposition (*zu der > zur, in das > ins, bei dem > beim, für das > fürs),* whereas the strong article keeps in the same context its phonological integrity. There are moreover several German dialects, amongst which the Rhineland dialect (Heinrichs 1954) and the Mönchen Gladbach dialect (Hartmann 1982), which have a systematic formal opposition between the strong and the weak definite article. This is also the case in a North-Frisian dialect, Fehring (Ebert 1971).

On the meaning side, the opposition between the strong definite article (*di/det*) and the weak definite article (*a*) is independent from the distinction between exophoric and endophoric reference. It can rather be described in terms of pragmatic *versus* semantic definiteness (Löbner 1985). The strong article, less grammaticalized, expresses pragmatic definiteness: it is used when the identification of the referent relies on the specific context of utterance; the weak article, more grammaticalized, conveys semantic definiteness: the referent of the definite expression is identified independently of the specific context of utterance. In the North-Frisian dialect Fehring, the strong article is used in the following cases:

- to refer to an entity perceivable in the immediate situation:
  - (4) *Smatst' mi ans* **det pokluad** *auer ?*
    Throw me once **the pencil** over here?
- to resume a referent previously mentioned, with the same denomination (5) or by means of a different denomination (6), which can add new information (7):
  - (5) *Peetje hee jister <u>an kü</u> slaachtet. Jo saai,* **det kü** *wiar äi sünj.*
    'Peetje has slaughtered <u>a cow</u> yesterday. It is said that **the cow** was not healthy.
  - (6) <u>Matje</u> *hee al wäler an näi bridj.* **Di gast** *kön a nöös uk wel äi fol fu.*
    '<u>Matje</u> has again a girlfriend. **That guy** cannot get enough of it.'
  - (7) *Heest dü wat faan <u>Teetje</u> hiard ? Je,* **di idioot** *hee uunrupen an saad dat hi äi kem wul ?*
    'Did you hear something about <u>Teetje</u> ? Yes, **that idiot** called me to say he won't come.
- to refer to a proposition (discourse deixis):
  - (8) <u>A jongen smeed me malmarter efter dön lööpern, wat uun an re för't lööperhool laai.</u> **Det spal** *käand ik noch äi.*
    '<u>The kids threw with marbles to marbles aligned before the marble hole.</u> I didn't know **that play**.'
- in first mention, in combination with a relative clause:
  - (9) *Rooluf hee* **det klook** *wechsleden, wat hi faan san uatlaatj fingen hee.*
    'Rolf lost **the watch** that he received from his grandfather.'
  The weak article appears in the following cases.
- to refer to a referent retrievable by its structural links with the immediate situation (10);
- for associative anaphor (11);
- to refer to unique entities within the discourse universe (12/13);
- for generic reference (14).
  - (10) **A hünj** *as auerkeerd würden.*
    '**The dog** got run over.' (for instance the speaker's dog)
  - (11) *Üüs wi bi* <u>det hüs</u> *uunkam, wiar diar ab seedel bi-d-***a döör***.*
    'Wen we came to <u>the house</u>, there was a message at **the door**.'
  - (12) **A san** *skiinjt.*
    '**The sun** shines.'
  - (13) **A köning** *kaam tu bischük.*
    '**The king** came for a visit.'
  - (14) **A kaater** *klesi.*
    '**Cats** scratch.'

The question arises whether the article expressing pragmatic definiteness should be considered as a weak demonstrative (as argued for by Himmelmann 1997:55) rather than a strong definite article. In the case of the Late Latin *ille*, the exact status of the pragmatic definiteness marker – demonstrative or definite article – has led to endless discussions. It is doubtful that this discussion is relevant, however, since the grammaticalization process from demonstrative to definite article is continuous rather than subdivided in discrete steps. More interesting is the observation that the range of uses of the pragmatically definite article corresponds to the uses of the emerging definite article. In particular, when the noun is determined by a relative clause, the use of the demonstrative becomes regular and the distal demonstrative is preferred to the proximal demonstrative. As has been shown by Himmelmann (1997), it is in this syntactic configuration that the distal demonstrative can take a recognitional interpretation. In the next section, we will show that the recognitional use of the distal demonstrative offers the key to understanding the transition from pragmatic to semantic definiteness or, in other words, to the status of full-fledged definite article.

2.3. From pragmatic to semantic definiteness

In order to comprehend the nature of the transition between demonstrative and definite article, we have to explain why the distal demonstrative in locative systems or the third personal demonstrative in person oriented systems is typologically the most common source for the definite article.

The distal demonstrative differs from the proximal demonstrative(s) in the following respect: whereas a proximal demonstrative e.g. *this book* denotes a referent that is wholly identified via elements in the context of its occurrence, the distal demonstrative e.g. *that book* signals that the referent cannot be identified solely on the basis of the immediate context of utterance (Vuillaume 1980, Kleiber 1987). In this way, the distal demonstrative can be understood as an invitation addressed

to the hearer to mobilize previous knowledge in order to retrieve the referent. This pragmatic inference is activated in the recognitional use and can be made explicit (cf. example (16), *you know / I talked you about her*).

(15)   English:
        I couldn't sleep last night. **That dog** *(next door) kept me awake* (Gundel *et al.* ap. Himmelmann, 1997:106)

(16)   French:
        Cette personne, <u>*tu sais*</u>, *Mlle E... <u>dont je t'ai parlé</u>, avec qui je devais prendre le thé dans la quinzaine chez Mme Chesneau qui la connaît, eh bien, j'ai appris hier qu'elle a un amant, un grand banquier de Paris, qui ne veut pas l'épouser.* (Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *Correspondance générale*)
        That person, <u>you know</u>, Ms E… <u>I talked you about her</u>, with whom I had to have tea within two weeks in the house of Mrs Chesneau who knows her, well, I heard yesterday that she has a lover, an important banker of Paris, who doesn't want to marry her.

(17)   Late Latin:
        Hic sunt carctas de illi thellenio de **illo mercatho** (*Les diplômes originaux des Mérovingiens,* éd. Ph. Lauer and Ch. Samarin, quoted by Selig 1992:166)
        Here are the documents of the toll of ***the*** (litt. ***that***) ***market*** (=of our market, of the well-known market organized on the day of the Patron Saint)

With respect to the other uses of demonstratives, the recognitional use of the distal demonstrative has a distinctive feature: the referent is not mentioned in the preceding context or present in the current discourse situation (Himmelmann 1997:61; 2001; Diessel 1999). It points to *"specific, presumably shared" knowledge of speaker and hearer* (Himmelmann 2001:833) – often based upon a common experience – that has to be activated by the hearer in order to identify the referent.

Hence, contrary to the proximal demonstrative, the distal demonstrative is able to denote a referent that is not fully identified or even not accessible within the immediate context of its occurrence. In order to achieve the identification of this referent, the distal demonstrative can mobilize specific knowledge shared by speaker and hearer. Because of these two features, the distal demonstrative is the appropriate candidate to be recruited as the source of the definite article.

As the distal demonstrative in its recognitional use, the definite article can denote a referent that is not accessible in the immediate context of utterance. The distal demonstrative becomes a definite article when the anchorage in the speech situation is lost and the use of article no longer requires specific knowledge shared by speaker and hearer to be activated to identify the referent of the noun phrase. Rather, the definite article conveys the instruction that the descriptive content of the noun allows the identification of the referent in a univocal way, in virtue of its structural links with a frame of accessible knowledge, these links being often of a stereotypical nature (Löbner 1985, Hawkins 2004:85).

By this shift from pragmatic definiteness to semantic definiteness, the definite article extends its use to contexts in which a demonstrative would be inappropriate:

-   to refer to a referent retrievable by its structural links with the immediate situation,
    e. g. *Close* ***the door***. *Beware of* ***the dog*** ('the door of the room we are in at the moment, the dog of the house we are approaching');
-   for associative anaphor, e.g. *We arrived in a village.* ***The church*** *was on the hill*;
-   to refer to unique entities within the discourse universe: *the sun, the king*;
-   for generic reference: ***Les chats*** *aiment le lait. /* ***The dog*** *is a domesticated form of the wolf.*

This analysis doe not preclude other factors from contributing to the emergence or the extension of the articles. Leiss (2007) argues that there is a trade-off between verbal aspect and nominal determination, since they partake of the same grammatical function of quantification: aspect-languages such as Russian tend to be article-less, whereas article languages tend to avoid aspect marking. In the light of this hypothesis, the emergence of the definite article in German has been explained as the result of the gradual disappearance of aspect marking (Abraham 1997; Philippi 1997; Leiss 2000, 2007). For Romance languages, it has been hypothesized that the extension of the definite article is correlated to the erosion of nominal inflectional marking of case and number.

3 From definite article (Stage I) to "specific" article (Stage II)

At Stage II of Greenberg's cycle of the definite article, the article is no longer restricted to semantically definite contexts but spreads to indefinite specific contexts. It includes in this way contexts of use that in other languages would be reserved to the indefinite article derived from the

unity numeral, such as the introduction of new referents in the discourse universe. An example of this stage of the grammaticalization is the Tagalog specific article *ang* (Himmelmann 1997: 103):

(18) Doón   ay   na-kita   nilá   ***ang***   isa-ng   ma-lakí-ng   higante
      DOC.LOC   PM   REAL.STAT-see   3.PL.POSS SPEC   one-LK   IRR.STAT-big-LK   giant
      'There they saw a great giant ...'

On the other hand, non-articulated forms still occur when there is neither definite nor specific reference.[2]

The progress in the grammaticalization process involves not only an increase of the contexts of use, but also semantic erosion. The following excerpt, quoted by Epstein (2002: 368), offers an example of a "critical context" where definiteness may be reinterpreted as specificity.

(19)   The film's setting and the story both have a mythic simplicity. In the aftermath of a drought that leaves most people surviving by selling themselves into lifelong servitude, a farmer and a weaver escape and set up residence in a desert ghost town. Their only contact with the outside world is a trader who keeps them in debt to him while also keeping them supplied with essentials.
        Then **the woman** arrives, like a fleeing animal. Her family has been killed in a flood. She doesn't ask to stay, but they feel guilty after they rebuff her ('our first sin' they call it) and invite her to share their refuge. And so begins the slow spiral toward a disaster as ineluctable, no doubt, as the eternal cycles of drought and flood.
        (*Spectator*, Raleigh, North-Carolina, 14 February 1996, 11–12)

By using the definite article, the author indicates that *the woman* has a definite reference by association with a frame of accessible knowledge. However, the definite article does not provide any information about the nature of this frame of accessible knowledge and leaves it to the interpretative ability of the hearer/reader to reconstruct this frame. Since the reconstruction of the associative frame can be an open-ended process, this frame can fade out. The NP *the woman* will then acquire the interpretation of referring to a specific but unidentified woman.

This evolution can be described as a further step in the semantic erosion at work in the grammaticalization process. The distal demonstrative of Stage 0, in contrast to the proximal demonstrative, indicates that the referent is not plainly identified within the immediate context of its occurrence and can activate specific knowledge shared by speaker and hearer in order to achieve the identification of the referent. This anchorage in the speech situation is lost in the following stage: the definite article of Stage I implies that a frame of knowledge is accessible, which needs no longer to be specific to speaker and hearer and by means of which the referent can be identified as in a univocal way. For the specific article of Stage II, no frame of accessible knowledge is supposed to allow the identification of the referent so that the referent need not be pragmatically or semantically definite, but can be conceived as discursively new.

Himmelmann (1997:107) suggests that Stage II specific articles could evolve directly from pragmatically-definite used demonstratives, without passing through an intermediate Stage I definite article. In line with this hypothesis, Diessel (1999:139) proposes to analyze the indefinite use of the English proximal demonstrative *this*, first identified by Prince (1981), as a specific marker.

(20)   There was *this guy* in my class last quarter.

4 From "specific" article (Stage II) to noun (phrase) marker (Stage III)
The progressive spread to new contexts of use eventually leads to a situation where the articulated form becomes the normal form of the noun. The article will then have reached Stage III of Greenberg's cycle: it is a marker of nominality or gender, with no synchronic connection with definiteness or specificity (Greenberg 1978: 69).

5 Conclusion and perspectives
The distinction between different stages of grammaticalization should not obscure the fundamentally continuous nature of the grammaticalization process (Greenberg 1978: 61). In this context, it should be mentioned that the syntactic dimension of the article as a noun marker or a noun phrase marker,

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[2] For more details, see Greenberg (1978: 64-9), Schuh (1983) and Rijkhoff (2002: 92-7).

which is salient in Stage III, is already present in the early stages of the grammaticalization process. Indeed, among the first attestations of the Stage I article, we find the use of the article as nominalization marker of adjectives. The syntactic structure of the noun phrase and the morphosyntactic categorization of determiners and nouns are strengthened as the definite article develops. Himmelmann (1997) argues convincingly that, as this structure becomes more frequent and more entrenched, the use of the article may become a routine and it may expand outside the contexts where it was initially justified for semantic and pragmatic reasons.

Moreover, the definite article might not necessarily go through all the stages described above. In this respect, it should be examined to what extent the existence of other articles may slow down the grammaticalization process. For instance, does the existence of an indefinite article deriving from the unity numeral have an influence on the possible transition from the definite Stage I article to the specific Stage II article? Harris (1980: 83) has argued that the French deictically neutral demonstrative *ce* is on the point of becoming a full-fledged Stage I definite article, in the same way as the Latin demonstrative *ille* gave rise to the Old French definite article *li*. Can we expect the same evolution for the Modern French demonstrative *ce* given the existence of the definite article *le* (De Mulder and Carlier 2006)?

Finally, the general tendencies sketched here do not exclude idiosyncratic evolutions in some languages. For instance, the definite articles in some Romance languages acquire already in an early stage, from the 12th century on, a generic interpretation in contexts where this is still impossible for English, German and Dutch (e.g. English *(*The) Whales are mammals* versus French **Les baleines sont des mammifères**). This could possibly be explained by an early widening of the frame of accessible knowledge contributing to identification of the referent, since in the generic meaning this frame coincides with the universe.[3]

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[3] On the notion of widening of the knowledge frame and its role in the progression of the evolution of the definite article towards generic interpretation, see Renzi (1976) and Hawkins (2004).

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