

Ad hoc Taxonomies: A Baltic Parallel to the Scandinavian Absolute Positives

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Abstract. The article deals with the extension of definite markers into the domain of indefinite NPs in Scandinavian and Baltic. Definite articles evolving further down the grammaticalization path typically become markers of specificity (Greenberg 1978, Himmelmann 1998), but the development of definite markers in Baltic and Scandinavian languages (formally divergent as Baltic uses definite adjectives as the principal grammatical means of marking definiteness whereas Scandinavian employs definite articles for this purpose) has taken a different direction. After a brief discussion of the different types of extension of definite markers beyond their core domain in Baltic and Scandinavian, we focus on a specific construction in Scandinavian, the so-called ‘absolute positives’. We suggest that this construction is paralleled by certain Latvian constructions with definite adjectives, the effect being, in both cases, that of evoking *ad hoc* taxonomies. Finally, we present some considerations on the possible origin of the constructions discussed.

1. Introduction

In a seminal paper dating from 1978 Greenberg describes the gradual changes that occur in the distribution and semantics of definite markers in languages: whereas initially they are restricted to (some types) of NPs with definite reference, they may gradually gain access to more and more usage contexts, including those which normally are not associated with prototypical definiteness. At some point of diachronic development, the extension of a definite marker into the domain of indefinite NPs may occur. This extension may consist in a definite article developing into a marker of specificity, also called ‘specific article’ (Greenberg 1978, Himmelmann 1998). Languages reported to have this kind of article include Tagalog

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(Himmelmann 1998) as well as Abkhaz and Dagbani (Gur) (Lehmann 1995, 39). This development does not seem to be restricted to languages with definite articles. According to Aljović (2003), the definite adjectives of Serbo-Croatian have evolved into markers of specificity rather than definiteness. A former marker of definiteness may eventually lose every association with the category of definiteness and evolve into a gender or nominality marker. The grammaticalization path for articles, as outlined by Greenberg (1978) and Himmelmann (1998):

Demonstrative → Definite article → Specific article → Nominality marker

However, the grammaticalization path proposed here is rather schematic, and further empirical investigations into different languages are required in order to find out which usage contexts beyond those of prototypical definiteness a definite marker can acquire, how these extended uses of definite markers are interrelated, whether they have parallels in other languages, to what extent the path of development of a definite marker depends on the type and locus of definiteness marking, etc.

2. Extension of definiteness markers into the domain of indefinite NPs

In the present paper, we will be dealing with cases where the use of definite-marked NPs cannot be accounted for in terms of definite reference. We will give examples from Baltic (mainly Latvian) and Scandinavian languages. The two language groups are typologically diverse in terms of grammaticalization of the category of definiteness. The Baltic languages do not have articles, but they have developed definite adjectives as the principal means of definiteness marking (Mikulskas 2006; Spraunienė 2011; Holvoet, Spraunienė 2012); besides, demonstrative pronouns show some signs of developing definite article functions in non-standard Lithuanian (Tumėnas 1988, Rosinas 1976, Spraunienė 2011)¹. The Scandinavian languages, on the other hand, have a fully grammaticalized category of definiteness with both postposed and preposed definite articles. Moreover, they have retained the possibility of marking the definiteness of an NP also in the form of the attributive adjective, the so-called weak form. Mostly, though, the adjectival form can no longer mark the definiteness of an NP by itself, as in most cases it is governed

by definite determiners (Haberland & Heltoft 2008). Other Germanic languages have either lost the opposition of strong and weak forms of the adjective, or retained it only formally, as is the case in Modern German (for a detailed discussion see Haberland & Heltoft 2008).

Both Baltic and Scandinavian languages are reported to have extensions of definite forms beyond the domain of definite NPs, though in Scandinavian this extension is more widely represented in the vernaculars rather than in the standard languages (see Holvoet, Spraunienė 2012 for Baltic and Dahl 2010 for Scandinavian). As far as the grammaticalization path of definite markers is concerned, it is important to note that both in Scandinavian and in Baltic, this extension seems to have taken another direction than that of specificity marking. The indefinite specific use of definite adjectives is not found, as a distinct type, in Baltic languages (Holvoet, Spraunienė 2012). Dahl similarly observes that the “expansion of the range of uses of definite articles [in Scandinavian dialects] goes in a different direction and cannot be described as ‘specificity’ in any sense” (Dahl 2010, 49).

In this paper we will focus on one type of Scandinavian constructions with extended definiteness markers referred to in the literature by the name of ‘absolute positives’ (Delsing 2003, 49; Dahl 2010, 155–158). We will show that similar phenomena can be observed in Baltic. Baltic can moreover shed more light on the mechanisms of extension of definiteness markers beyond their core domain because it has more types of extension and could therefore tell us something about the possible paths of development involved.

2.1. *‘Non-delimited uses’ of definite forms in Scandinavian.* First, we should say that there are two types of extension of definiteness markers in Scandinavian, neither of them associated with specificity. One of

1 Whether this also applies to Latvian is not known. Old Latvian texts show regular use of demonstratives in the function of definite articles, but this was due to German influence, most Old Latvian texts being slavish translations from German. In *The World Atlas of Language Structures*, Dryer (2011) classifies Latvian with languages that have a ‘demonstrative word used as a marker of definiteness’. But Dryer’s reference seems to be Bielenstein’s 1863 grammar, which does not reflect the living Latvian language but that of the clumsy Old Latvian translations from German. Whether, in addition to adjectival marking, modern Latvian also shows onsets of demonstratives developing into quasi-articles, has apparently not been investigated.

them apparently springs from the extension of generic definiteness. In some Swedish dialects, the definite form of a mass noun (or plural count noun) is regularly used to refer to a non-specified quantity of something. In this context, an indefinite form would be used in the standard Scandinavian languages, for example:

(1a)

Ja, bara jeg har fått in vedbörden, Swed
 yes only I have.PRS get.SUP in wood_bundle.DEF
så ska jeg värma mjölk åt honom.
 so shall.PRS I warm.INF milk for him

(1b)

Jå, bara I ha böra ein veabåla, Swed
 yes only I have.PRS get.SUP in wood_bundle.DEF
så skå I väärm mjölka åt 'n.
 so shall.PRS I warm.INF milk.DEF for him

‘As soon as I have got the wood bundle into the house, I’ll warm some milk for him.’ (Cat Corpus) (Skellefteå (NVb) cited from Dahl 2010, 55).

This usage type has often been called ‘partitive’ in the literature (see e.g. Delsing 2003, 15) due to its apparent correspondence to partitive articles in French and Italian. Dahl (2010, 56) argues that the term ‘partitive’ should be reserved for genuine partitive constructions and instead refers to this type as ‘non-delimited use of definite forms’. In his account, non-delimited “means that the noun phrase contains no indication of a quantity such as *a cup of* in *a cup of tea*.” According to Dahl (2010, 115 and 122) the most likely source of the non-delimited use of definites is the widespread use of definite forms in generic NPs which is attested in many ‘Peripheral Swedish’ varieties:

(2)

Guldið ir dyrt. Swed
 gold.DEF be.PRS.SG expensive.N

‘Gold is expensive.’ (questionnaire) (Älvdalen (Os), cited from Dahl 2010, 51)

Definite generics and the non-delimited use of definite forms also have a counterpart in Baltic – both Lithuanian and Latvian – but only when the kind name comprises an adjective. However, if a combination of adjective and noun does not form a unitary concept referring to a more or less established kind or type of individuals, the possibility of using definite adjectives in generic and indefinite contexts is lost in Lithuanian, cf.:

(3)

<i>Juod-ieji</i>	<i>serbent-ai</i>	<i>turi</i>	Lith
black-NOM.PL.M.DEF	currant-NOM.PL	have.PRS.3	
<i>gydom-ųjų</i>	<i>savybi-ų.</i>		
medicinal-GEN.PL.DEF	property-GEN.PL		

‘Blackcurrants have medicinal properties.’

(4)

<i>Prisiskynėme</i>	<i>juod-ųjų</i>	<i>serbent-ų.</i>	Lith
pick.PST.1PL	black-GEN.PL.DEF	current-GEN.PL	

‘We picked some blackcurrants.’

(5)

<i>Per karščius</i>	<i>geriau</i>	<i>valgyti</i>	<i>šalt-q</i>	Lith
during heat	better	eat.INF	cold-ACC.SG.INDEF	
/ *šalt-ąji		<i>maist-q.</i>		
/ *cold-ACC.SG.M.DEF	food-ACC.SG			

‘It is better to eat cold food when the weather is hot.’

(6)

<i>Paskubomis</i>	<i>pavalgėme</i>	<i>šalt-o</i>		Lith
hastily	eat.PST.1PL	cold-GEN.SG.M.INDEF		
/ *šalt-ojo		<i>maist-o</i>	ir	ėjome
/ *cold-GEN.SG.M.DEF	food-GEN.SG	and	go-PST.1PL	further

‘We hastily had some cold food and continued our journey.’

The NP *šaltas maistas* ‘cold food’ is not conceptualized as referring to a kind or type of food, therefore the definite form of the adjective is not

1999, 3, 20) just mentions such cases as lexicalised phrases without any further analysis. Dialectologists, however, do not dismiss this construction as marginal (see Delsing 2003, 49 and the references there). In many northern dialects of Sweden, the normal way of making an adjectivally modified definite NP is that of adjectival incorporation, e.g., *størhuse* big.house.DEF ‘the big house’. Absolute positives and NPs with superlatives are mentioned as the only cases where attributive definite adjectives are not formed by incorporation in those dialects (*ibid.*, see also Dahl 2010, 124ff for an elaboration of Delsing’s claims). Marklund gives the following examples of absolute positives in one of the northern dialects of Sweden, Skelletmål: *gode bitn* ‘a good (i.e., substantial) bit’, *store kæN* ‘a big man’, *tonge læsse* ‘a heavy load’, *blåa mjôLLka* ‘pure skim milk’, *raNe vættne* ‘pure (mere) water’, *rette såTTn* ‘the right sort’ (cited from Dahl 2010, 156).

Dahl also argues that absolute positives are a ‘productive construction with quite specific properties’ (Dahl 2010, 155). He describes the semantics of this construction in the following way: “The expressions give an emphatic impression and there seems to be a common element of ‘completeness’ or ‘maximalness’ to many uses of the construction, but there are also examples of combinations with negation where this element is not present” (*ibid.*), for example:

(9)

<i>Det</i>	<i>är</i>	<i>köLsvarte</i>	<i>mörkre</i>	<i>ne</i>	Swed
it	be.PRS	pitch-black.WK	darkness.DEF	down	
<i>ända</i>	<i>till</i>	<i>Mosjö.</i>			
all.the.way	to	Mosjö			

‘It is pitch dark [lit. the pitch-black darkness] down to Mosjö.’
[S44] (Hössjö (Umeå, SVb), cited from Dahl 2010, 155)

(10)

<i>Jeg</i>	<i>veide</i>	<i>bare 1440</i>	<i>gram</i>	<i>og</i>	<i>var</i>	<i>ikke</i>	Norw
I	weigh.PST	only	gram	and	be.PST	NEG	Bokmål
<i>store</i>	<i>gutten.</i>						
big.WK	boy.DEF						

‘I weighed only 1440 grams and wasn’t a [lit. the] big boy.’ (About the narrator’s premature birth) (Internet) (Bokmål Norwegian, cited from Dahl 2010, 156)

It should be mentioned that although absolute positives typically occur in predicative position, the construction is found in prepositional phrases as well:

(11)
Al du renn jär i twero bjärre? Swed
 shall.PRS you run.INF here in steep.WK mountain

‘Are you going to ski here on the steep mountain?’ (Älvdalen (Os), cited from Dahl 2010, 156)

Dahl does not attempt to explain the details of the rise of these absolute positives, but he argues – convincingly – that generic definiteness (or, more specifically, the ability of generic NPs to form ‘kind predications’ in the sense of Krifka et al. (1995)) is the most probable source of all the extended uses of definites in Scandinavian vernaculars (Dahl 2010, 155ff).

2.3. *Definite adjectives in Latvian as a means of establishing ad hoc taxonomies.* Dahl’s semantic characterization of the Scandinavian absolute positives is somewhat vague: the term ‘emphatic’ is used to refer to many types of effects, and the notions of ‘completeness’ and ‘maximalness’ are not enlightening either. We will attempt a slightly different characterization, availing ourselves of an interesting parallel that can be found in Latvian, a language of the Baltic group. Latvian has only one grammatical means of expressing definiteness, viz. the use of the so-called definite form of the adjective. If no adjective occurs, definiteness cannot be marked grammatically. This is in contrast to Scandinavian, where the adjectival form is usually governed by the determiner. Compare the following:

(12)
Vai tu redzēji meln-u kaķ-i? Latv
 Q 2SG.NOM see.PST.2SG black-ACC.SG.INDEF cat-ACC.SG

‘Did you see a black cat?’

(13)
Vai tu redzēji meln-o kaķ-i? Latv
 Q 2SG.NOM see.PST.2SG black-ACC.SG.DEF cat-ACC.SG

‘Did you see the black cat?’

In addition to such prototypical uses, however, Latvian adjectives show a number of curious types of use extending beyond the domain of definiteness. Some of them are strikingly similar to the Scandinavian ones discussed above. Consider, first of all, the following example:

- (14)
- | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|--|--|--|------|
| <i>Ne-esmu</i> | <i>nekād-s</i> | <i>liel-ais</i> | | | | | Latv |
| NEG-be.PRS.1SG | no-NOM.SG.M | big-NOM.SG.M.DEF | | | | | |
| <i>ekspert-s</i> | <i>par fotogrāfij-ām,</i> | <i>bet tā</i> | | | | | |
| expert-NOM.SG | on photography-DAT.PL | but this-NOM.SG.F | | | | | |
| <i>bild-e</i> | <i>man</i> | <i>tiešām</i> | <i>šķiet</i> | | | | |
| picture-NOM.SG | 1SG.DAT | really | seem.PRS.3 | | | | |
| <i>iespaidīg-a.</i> | | | | | | | |
| impressive-NOM.SG.F.INDEF | | | | | | | |

‘I’m not a big expert on photography, but this picture seems really impressive to me.’ (<https://twitter.com/kristapsk/statuses/34961769197731840>)

Here *lielais eksperts* cannot be translated as ‘the big expert’, because it occurs with the indefinite pronoun *nekāds* ‘not any, no kind of’. Normally the use of this indefinite pronoun would induce the use of the indefinite form of the adjective. Actually, with other indefinite pronouns, such as *neviens* ‘not a single one’, only the indefinite form of the adjective would be possible:

- (15)
- | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|--|------|
| <i>... mēs</i> | <i>tik tiešām</i> | <i>cenšamies</i> | <i>ne-atstāt</i> | | | | Latv |
| 1PL.NOM | really | try.PRS.1PL | NEG-leave.INF | | | | |
| <i>nepamanī-t-u</i> | | <i>nevien-u</i> | <i>svarīg-u</i> | | | | |
| NEG-notice-PPP-ACC.SG | | no-ACC.SG | important-ACC.SG.INDEF | | | | |
| (* <i>svarīg-o</i>) | | <i>notikum-u.</i> | | | | | |
| (*important-ACC.SG.DEF) | | event-ACC.SG | | | | | |

‘We really do what we can not to let any important event go by unnoticed.’ (<http://www.kurzemnieks.lv>)

The fact that this definite form is possible only with *nekāds*, which refers to kind, suggests that *lielais eksperts* in (14) is used to refer to a type – something like ‘not the kind of big expert’.

The use of definite adjectival forms discussed here is possible only with negation. This negation can also be indirect, but in this case as well, the noun phrase must occur with the indefinite kind pronoun *kāds* ‘some/any kind of’:

(16)

Te tad nu noritēja dzīvas valodas starp jauniešiem, tikai ne Latv
par priekšlasījuma tematu.

Ne arī viņi bija kādi uzmanīgie
nor also 3NOM.PL.M be.PST.3 any attentive-NOM.PL.M.DEF
klausītāji.

listener-NOM.PL

‘Lively talk was exchanged among the young, but it was not on the subject of the lecture, nor were they any kind of attentive listeners.’

(Augusts Deglavs)

Moreover, the most frequent and characteristic use of this construction is found in predicative position, as explicitly stated in the Latvian Academy Grammar (Bergmane *et al.* 1957, 438, 444). This is clearly reminiscent of the Scandinavian absolute positives, which are also used mainly predicatively. The Scandinavian construction is not restricted to negated clauses, though Dahl explicitly mentions a negative subtype.

In Latvian, a type of use of definite adjectivals very similar to the one just mentioned can also be found in affirmative clauses. This type involves the use of adjectives that have lost their original lexical meaning and just strengthen the meaning of the noun, suggesting that the object or person referred to is a particularly good example of the category referred to by the noun. Cf. the following example with the adjective *gatavs*, whose basic meaning is ‘ready’:

(17)

Kung-s jau gan mums, ļaudīm, Latv
squire-NOM.SG PCLE PCLE 1PL.DAT people-DAT.PL

tikpat kā tēv-s. Bet lielmāt-e –
as.good as father-NOM.SG but lady-NOM.SG

gatav-ais veln-s!
sheer-NOM.SG.M.DEF devil-NOM.SG

‘The squire is almost like a father to us folks, but her ladyship is a sheer devil,’ lit. ‘the sheer devil’ (Augusts Deglavs)

Other adjectives that can be used in this way are *baigs* ‘terrible’ and *tīrs* ‘pure’. The fact that the definite form marks the adjective off as having a merely strengthening function is probably just a side effect of a mechanism that manifests itself in other ways as well. The effect achieved by the definite adjective seems to be, in this case as well, ‘type-creating’.

As mentioned above, both the Scandinavian and the Baltic extended uses of definite markers are typically used in predicative position. This fact is certainly significant. If the copula is used in its ascriptive (predicational) rather than specificational or equative function (on the taxonomy of copular constructions cf. Higgins 1979), the predicate nominal is inherently indefinite. When it is changed to definite, the predication will normally become equative. If, however, the predication can be unambiguously identified as ascriptive, then any definiteness markers occurring with the predicate nominal will become available to mark other meaning differences as it will be clear that the nominal refers to a class rather than to an individual. This means that in predicative position the conditions are created for oppositions between formal markers of (in)definiteness which cannot readily be transferred to other syntactic positions. We will elaborate on this further on.

What is interesting about Latvian examples like (13) is that the noun phrases in which the definite adjectival forms occur are clearly indefinite: they contain the indefinite pronoun *nekāds* ‘no, none’. Normally the use of such pronouns would induce the use of indefinite forms of the adjective. In a way, this situation is reminiscent of what we observe in the Scandinavian examples: they have definiteness markers on the noun and the adjective, but they have no determiner, which suggests that they are indefinite in their outer layer but definite in some deeper layer.

This type of situation, viz. the combination of an indefinite marker with definite marking on the adjective, is by no means exceptional in Latvian. It is frequently observed if the function of the definiteness marker is to provide a role-type definite description⁴ (we borrow this term from Rotschild 2006):

(18)

<i>Pirmdzimt-ais</i>	<i>var</i>	<i>būt</i>	Latv
firstborn-NOM.SG.M.DEF	may.PRS.3	be.INF	

4 Role-type definite descriptions have a unique referent in a certain situation or at a certain time, but their referent varies across situations and times, whereas individualized definite descriptions have a stable referent.

<i>krietn-s</i>	<i>liel-ais</i>	<i>brāl-is</i>
decent-NOM.SG.M.INDEF	big-NOM.SG.M.DEF	brother-NOM.SG
<i>vai lab-a</i>	<i>liel-ā</i>	<i>mās-a.</i>
or good-NOM.SG.F.INDEF	big-NOM.SG.F.DEF	sister-NOM.SG

‘The firstborn may be a decent elder brother or a good elder sister.’

It might be argued that such instances are really lexicalized. This cannot be denied, though it could also be asked why the expressions for ‘big brother’ and ‘big sister’ should have been lexicalized complete with definite ending. But examples like (14) show that lexicalization is not a condition for the retention of the definite ending in indefinite noun phrases (or, if one prefers, determiner phrases).

Role-type definiteness is certainly not involved in Latvian instances like (14), (16), or in Scandinavian instances like (9), (10). What is invoked here is a kind of *ad hoc* taxonomy, by which we mean that the speaker characterizes a person or object by affirming or negating that person or object’s membership in a category which the addressee is supposed to be able to identify when it is referred to.

This ‘ad-hoc taxonomy’ effect is frequently achieved by the use of demonstrative pronouns. Himmelmann (1996), who discusses such uses in detail, characterizes them as ‘recognitional’. An example taken at random from the Internet:

(19)

Linda Sharps is not one of those boring, unlikeable bloggers though.

Though there is perhaps no officially established category of ‘boring and unlikeable bloggers’, the addressee is here appealed to to make an effort at recognizing the category referred to. What is to be noted is that characterizing expressions basing on such an *ad-hoc* taxonomy comprise two layers: an indefinite referent is singled out by means of a partitive expression from a definite set. It seems to be characteristic of such *ad-hoc* taxonomies that they are evoked with the aid of demonstrative pronouns rather than definite articles. Whereas the use of the definite article would suggest contextual givenness (and would be natural, say, in the context of a discussion on a possible blacklisting of boring and unlikeable bloggers), the demonstrative pronoun prompts the addressee to search his/her mental space for a category that would fit

the description, as this category is not identified in the immediate discourse context.

There is *a priori* no reason why ordinary definiteness markers (definite articles) should not be put to use in invoking *ad hoc* taxonomies. Their use for this purpose would, however, be misleading because of their suggestion of contextual givenness. The use of demonstrative pronouns is a sign for the addressee that he/she must mentally switch from contextually given information to background information. It is, perhaps, a distinguishing feature of the adjectival marking of definiteness that it can more readily be used to express *ad-hoc* taxonomies. As we have seen, Scandinavian instances like (9) and (10) lack the proposed definite article that should normally be used whenever a definite nominal is modified by an adjective. This might be because the article would be interpreted as a marker of contextual givenness, and its lack seems to trigger the interpretation of the definiteness of the remaining elements of the noun phrase as reflecting non-situational, taxonomic definiteness. In Latvian the same effect is achieved by adding an indefiniteness marker to a noun phrase containing a definite adjective.

2.4. *The possible origin of the Baltic and Scandinavian constructions.* An interesting question is that of establishing the path of development leading to the uses of definite adjectives discussed here. As mentioned above, Dahl traces all the extended uses of definiteness markers in the Scandinavian vernaculars back to generic uses. This sounds quite convincing, but we would like to venture that genericity is perhaps not the only possible source. Another group of expressions in which definiteness markers may spill over into the domain of indefiniteness is that of plural definite descriptions.

(20)

... sutart-į	ratifikavo	ne	kokie nors	Lith
agreement-ACC.SG	ratify.PST.3	NEG	INDEF.NOM.PL.M	
išrink-t-iejį,	o	taut-a	balsavo	
chosen-PPP-NOM.PL.M.DEF	but	people-NOM.SG	vote.PST.3	
referendum-u.				
referendum-INS.SG				

‘[Ireland took a completely different course –] the agreement was not ratified by a group of chosen ones, but the people voted in a referendum.’ (<http://www.balsas.lt/naujienu/425233>)

In this example the adjective is nominalized ('chosen ones'), and this is probably one of the factors licencing the extension of the definite endings (the definite ending acting, in a way, as a substitute for the suppressed head noun, cf. Mikulskas 2006, 60). The definite ending presumably appears because this expression originated as a plural definite description 'the chosen ones'. When this definite adjectival expression is made indefinite, the definiteness marker is retained because the reference mass from which the indefinite referent is singled out is still defined by the definite description: the meaning of *išrinktasis* is 'one of the chosen' rather than 'a chosen one'. Though the path of development outlined here (one in which the nominalization of the adjective is crucially involved) is peculiar to Baltic, it suggests that plural definite descriptions could also be a possible source of extended uses of definite adjectives. Actually, there is evidence (which, for want of space, we cannot dwell upon here, but the reader is referred to Holvoet & Spraunienė 2012) that this is the type of use underlying the Latvian constructions in (14), (16) and (17).

That *ad hoc* taxonomies may be based both on plural definite descriptions and on D-generics, stands to reason. An *ad hoc* taxonomy need not be well-established in the background knowledge of the speaker and the addressee (which is characteristic of D-generics⁵, cf. Gerstner & Krifka 1993, 968): any subset of a larger category, say, people, bloggers etc., may be singled out and established as a category in its own right on the basis of a more or less accidental, situation-bound feature.

Definite adjectivals invoking *ad-hoc* taxonomies must probably be licenced in some way if they are not to cause ambiguity in communicative situations. In the Scandinavian examples, the lack of the proposed article might be a formal feature licencing such an interpretation, as is the indefinite pronoun in Latvian examples (14) and (16). In Latvian examples like (17), additional licensors are evidently superfluous because it is obvious that the adjectives are not used in their original meaning but just as a strengthening device; it is therefore also clear that the definite form of this adjective cannot underly a definite description, and the adjective correspondingly ceases to be interpreted as a definiteness marker.

5 A definite generic expression or D-generic is a generic expressions grammatically marked as definite (e.g., *the elephant is very big*). D-generics differ from I-generics (indefinite generics, as in *An elephant is very big*) in that they are inherently generic at noun phrase level, whereas I-generics derive their genericity from a generic operator functioning at clause level.

It is probably not a coincidence that a parallel for the Scandinavian absolute positives can be found in the Baltic languages, which share with Scandinavian the adjectival marking of definiteness. A characteristic feature of this type of definiteness marking seems to be the possibility of formally bringing out the layered structure of many noun (or determiner) phrases with regard to definiteness, with generic definiteness in an inner layer opposed to contextual indefiniteness in the outer layer.

Abbreviations

ACC – accusative, DAT – dative, DEF – definite, F – feminine, GEN – genitive, INDEF – indefinite, INF – infinitive, INS – instrumental, IPF – imperfective, M – masculine, N – neuter, NEG – negation, NOM – nominative, PCLE – particle, PL – plural, PPP – past passive participle, PRS – present, PST – past, Q – interrogative, SG – singular, SUP – supine, WK – weak form

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