Uniqueness without Maximize Presupposition in Ktunaxa

In this paper, I examine the determiner in Ktunaxa, arguing that it encodes uniqueness, but is not required in all contexts where a DP uniquely refers. Where uniqueness is recoverable from the situation or preceding discourse, the determiner is optional, whereas the determiner is necessary where the referent is unique, but the uniqueness of the referent is not recoverable from the preceding discourse or situation. This means that the distribution of the determiner violates Maximize Presupposition, contrasting with the distribution of English ‘the’ (Heim, 1991).

Ktunaxa is a language isolate traditionally spoken in the Kootenay region of British Columbia and areas in Alberta in Canada, as well as areas in Montana, Washington and Idaho in the United States (FPHLCC, 2008). Many nouns in Ktunaxa occur without a preceding determiner and can be interpreted as definite or indefinite, depending on the context. In (1a), for instance, ʔaʔunana can refer to any cup, whereas in (1b) ʔaquna ʔaʔunana ‘small cup’ is used to refer to a specific cup (one that is small compared to the other contextually salient cups) but need not be preceded by a determiner.¹

(1) a. Hamatikéun ʔaqunana.          (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
   give-1s.obj dish-dim  
   Pass me a cup. 

b. Hamatikéun (niʔi) ʔaquna ʔaʔunana.  (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
   pass-1s.obj det small dish-dim  
   Pass me the small cup. 

   Context: The speaker is asking for a particular cup out of a set on the table.

Similarly, noun phrases that refer to an entity that has been previously introduced in the discourse do not need to be preceded by a determiner. In a story about a little girl, for instance, (2a) alternates with (2b), both referring to the same individual.

(2) a. Qakini niʔi naʔutinana...    b. Qakini naʔutinana...  (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
   said det girl-dim said-ind girl-dim  
   The little girl said, ...  
   The little girl said, ...

   In fact, the determiner seems generally optional where the uniqueness of the referent is recoverable from the context. This is true in both immediate situational (3a) and larger situational uses (3b) (Hawkins, 1978). Thus, the determiner can precede kʔisqaimul ‘fridge’ in (3a) and ʔiʔm̑iʔit natanik ‘moon’ in (3b), but is not necessary; these sentences were both initially volunteered without the determiner.

(3) a. Cinaʔ ?iʔkiʔin kʔisqaimul.  (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
   go look cold-instr (fridge)  
   Go look in the fridge! 

b. Cʔiʔm̑iʔit natanik ʔiʔ qaʔpsqaqani haqalmukwaʔits.  
   night sunprt looks.like-ind light-obv  
   The moon looks like a light.

On the other hand, there are contexts where the determiner is necessary. The determiner must precede a noun phrase when a unique referent is intended, but the uniqueness of the referent cannot be determined

by the context; in an analysis where English ‘the’ encodes familiarity, these are contexts requiring accommodation from the addressee (Heim, 1988). In (4a), for example, the determiner is used to establish that there is a unique referent that speaker is asking about (perhaps because there is one empty chair in the classroom), rather than any student from the possible set of students who are away. In (4b), similarly, the determiner functions to restrict the reference to the particular man who will inherit the responsibilities of the chief, rather than the set of possible candidates.

(4) a. Kała *(niʔi) kitikéit k čił tu nawsanmiʔitkis. (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
Who is the student who is away today?

b. *(Niʔi) titqα k ėxałʔ in nasu:kins ėxał with hawiskini qapsins.  
The man who becomes chief will have a lot of responsibility (lit: will hold a lot of things).  
Context: There's an election coming up and the new chief has not been elected yet.

Since the determiner is necessary in those situations where the referent is unique, but not familiar from the preceding discourse, I propose that the determiner encodes uniqueness, rather than familiarity. However, the addressee must be able to identify a unique referent for the determiner to be used felicitously, so the determiner often occurs in contexts where the referent is familiar from the situational context or preceding discourse. (5), for instance, is infelicitous because the addressee does not have sufficient information to locate a unique referent.

(5) #Hamatikěun niʔi qanuhus ʔaʔunana. (Fieldnotes, 2015)  
Pass me a red cup.  
Context: There is more than one red cup in the set of cups on the table.

A striking feature of the distribution of the determiner in Ktunaxa is that it violates the maxim of Maximize Presupposition (Heim, 1991). The maxim states that the speaker must use a form that encodes a presupposition wherever the speaker has reason to presuppose and the hearer knows this. Heim proposes this maxim to account for the fact that uniquely referring DPs, such as ‘the sun’, cannot be preceded by an indefinite article in English, even though use of the indefinite does not presuppose non-uniqueness. Clearly, Ktunaxa speakers are not constrained by this maxim in deciding where to use the determiner. This could suggest that the maxim is subject to parametric variation, but a less radical conclusion is that the uniqueness component meaning of the Ktunaxa determiner is not a presupposition, but rather some other type of not-at-issue meaning. This requires further testing and is currently under investigation.