The features of proper determiners in four varieties of Malagasy[*]

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SUMMARY

It is a striking characteristic of Malagasy that all proper names require a determiner. The paradigm of proper determiners varies, however, across the different dialects spoken in Madagascar. In certain varieties, the proper determiners encode features such as politeness and animacy, while in at least one dialect, Tandroy, the determiners encode case. Data from plural proper determiners are also considered and the implications for the structure of the DP are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

En malgache, les noms propres doivent porter un déterminant. Le paradigme des déterminant varie selon le dialecte. Dans certaines variétés du malgache, le déterminant encode des traits comme la politesse ou la nature animée du référent, mais dans au moins un dialecte, le tandroy, les déterminants encodent le cas. Il est aussi question des déterminants pluriels et des implications pour la structure du syntagme nominal.

1 INTRODUCTION

It is a striking characteristic of Malagasy that all proper names require a determiner. The paradigm of proper determiners varies, however, across the different dialects spoken in Madagascar. It is the goal of this paper to illustrate the different feature specifications of determiners in four dialects. I will also show that the determiners occupy distinct positions in the syntax.
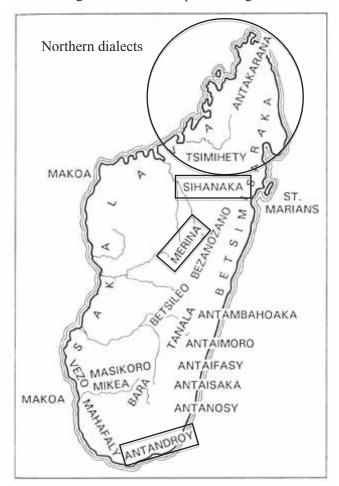
2   DIALECTS IN THIS STUDY

Malagasy is an Austronesian language spoken in Madagascar by approximately 18 million people. It is also spoken by the Malagasy diaspora around the world. There are many varieties of Malagasy spoken on the island (estimates range from ten to eighteen, but all classifications are strongly debated). The data in this paper come from four varieties; this is a convenience sample, but it does represent different regions in the country. The first is what is called Official Malagasy, the dialect taught in schools and used by the government. It is based on the Merina dialect of the central plateau region. Most linguistic research on Malagasy has focussed on Official Malagasy. The second dialect is Sihanaka, which is spoken to the northwest of the capital. The third is Tandroy (Antandroy), spoken in the south. And, finally, the "Northern Dialects" are spoken in the north (this grouping includes Antankarana, Sakalava, Betsimisaraka and Tsimihety). The geographic location of these varieties is indicated on the map in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Dialect map of Madagascar

2.1   OFFICIAL MALAGASY

Dez (1990) describes three proper name determiners, which are distinct from the common noun determiner *ny*. These are invariant for case and are only omitted when the proper name is used as a vocative. The determiner *i* is informal (familiar) and as well as occurring with names for humans, it can appear on names for cities, mountains and rivers and can also be used to anthropomorphize an animal. The determiner *ra* is more respectful and is also possible with an animal, but not with place names. Finally, *andria* is the most respectful determiner and is restricted to humans; in some descriptions it is further limited to males. The data in (1) illustrate the same proper name with the three different determiners. Normally *i* is written as a separate word (but not always, see (2)), while *ra* and *andria* are written as a single word with the name.

(1)   a.   tonga   i   Koto.
               arrived DET Koto
               'Koto arrived.'
        b.   tonga   Rakoto.
               arrived DET.Koto
               'Rakoto arrived.'
        c.   tonga   Andriankoto.
               arrived DET.Koto
               'Andriankoto arrived.'

The data in(2) illustrate *i* and *ra* with non-human proper names.

(2)   a.   Ivato
              DET.stone
              'Ivato' (city name)
        b.   iPiso
              DET.cat
              'Cat'
        c.   Ravano
              DET.heron
              'Mr. Heron'

I tentatively suggest the following feature specifications, following in part the analysis of proper determiners by Ghomeshi and Massam (2009).

(3)   a.   *i* [proper]
        b.   *ra* [proper, animate]
        c.   *andria*[proper, honorific, human]

The determiner *i* is thus the least marked (it can occur in the most contexts), while *andria* is the most marked.[1]

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[1]If [honorific] is limited to humans, as seems natural, it may not be necessary to specify [human] as one of the features of *andria*.

2.2   SIHANAKA

Of the dialects discussed in this paper, Sihanaka is the closest to Official Malagasy, both geographically and in terms of lexical and grammatical similarities. According to Ranjivason (1984), there are three proper name determiners that are almost identical to Official Malagasy.

(4)   a.   *i*: familiar
        b.   *ra*: more respectful
        c.   *rie*: most respectful

The form *i* also occurs as a common noun determiner in Sihanaka, but it undergoes phonologically-conditioned allomorphy when it is a common noun determiner and not when it is a proper name determiner. There is therefore reason to believe there are two distinct *i* determiners. Ranjivason doesn't give many examples to illustrate the distribution of these determiners (e.g. with animals or place names), but based on their resemblance to Official Malagasy, I tentatively posit the same feature specifications.

(5)   a.   *i*: [proper]
        b.   *ra*: [proper, animate]
        c.   *rie*: [proper, honorific, human]

2.3   TANDROY

Tandroy (sometimes called Antandroy) is spoken in the southern tip of Madagascar and is often described as being quite distinct from Official Malagasy. Rajaona's (2005) description lists three proper name determiners. But unlike in Official Malagasy and Sihanaka, the form of the proper determiners is determined by case and not by features such as familiar or animate. The role of caseon determiners is similar to what we find in other Austronesian languages, such as Niuean (Gorrie, Kellner and Massam2010) and Tagalog (Himmelmann 1998).Note, however, that in Tandroythe common article *ty* is invariant for case.

In (6), I present a simplified description of the distribution of the proper determiners.

(6)   a.   *ty*: clause-final proper name subjects
        b.   *ʔi:* genitive or accusative proper names
        c.   *i:* proper names in other positions (e.g. pre-posed subjects, in a conjunction)

In (7), we see a clause-final subject, *Koto*, marked with *ty*. In (7)*Koto* is a direct object and a possessor, respectively,and therefore appears with *ʔi*. The example in (7) illustrates a clause-initial subject with *i*.

(7)   a.   marare ty   Koto
             sick   DET Koto
             'Koto is sick.'
        b.   mahatrea   ʔi   Koto raho
             see   DET Koto 1SG
             'I see Koto.'

  c. traño ʔi Koto
    house DET Koto
    'Koto's house'
  d. i Koto marare
    DET Koto sick
    'Koto is sick.'

Given that the proper determiners vary for case and not other features, such as familiar or animate, I propose the following features.

(8) a. *ty* [proper, nominative]
    b. *ʔi*[proper, acc/gen]
    c. *i* [proper]

The feature specification required to distinguish *ty* from *i* is assumed to be case: clause-final subjects bear nominative, while *i*appears on a range of nominals that plausibly bear default case (pre-posed subjects, nominals in coordination). Thus *i*is in some sense the least marked of the proper determiners. There may be other means to distinguish between*ty* and *ʔi*but in the absence of more information about case in Tandroy, I set this question aside here.

2.4 NORTHERN DIALECTS

I have little data on the proper name determiners in the Northern dialects. According to Botouhely (2007), however, there is a single proper determiner *i*. It appears that distinctions based on politeness or case are not relevant for the grammar. The only feature specification is [proper], to distinguish *i* from the common article.

3 PLURAL

We have thus far looked at proper determiners in singular contexts. All of the varieties, however, have the means to indicate plurality on proper names, which allows for associative plural reading (Daniel and Moravcsik 2011) among other interpretations. That is, the specific reading is underspecified, but plural proper names can be used to refer to a family (like English 'the Kennedys') or the person named plus one or more "associates" (typically friends or family). Official Malagasy has a single dedicated plural marker for proper names, *ry*, illustrated in (9).[2]In Sihanaka, a plural demonstrative precedes the proper determiner(9). Tandroy has a plural *ry* that appears between the proper determiner and the proper name(9). And finally, the Northern dialects use *iry*(which could be decomposed into the proper determiner *i*plus plural*ry*), as shown in (9).[3]

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[2]In Official Malagasy, *ry*is also used as a vocative, both with common and proper names, singular and plural.
[3]The Northern Dialects also have a demonstrative *iry*, but it appears post-nominally, like all demonstratives in this variety.

(9)   a.   OFFICIAL MALAGASY
              ry   Ratsimba
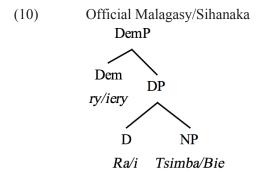   PL   DET.Ratsimba
              'the Ratsimba family'
        b.   SIHANAKA
              iery   i   Bie
              DEM.PL DET   Bie
              'Bie and his consorts'
        c.   TANDROY
              ty   ry Koto
              DET   PL Koto
              'Koto and his friends'
        d.   NORTHERN DIALECTS
              iry   Jao
              DET.PL Jao
              'Jao and his consorts'

The overall pattern fits with how number is marked in Malagasy. Nouns are unmarked for number – demonstratives, however, are morphologically marked for plural (in Official Malagasy via the infix *re*, e.g. *ito*'this' vs. *ireto* 'these'). BaholisoaRalalaoherivony (p.c.) informs me that one other possible plural reading (e.g. *I know three Marys*) does not take the plural proper name determiner in Official Malagasy. The name is treated as a common noun and is therefore bare. I do not have data from the other varieties, but it seems reasonable to assume they pattern in the same way.
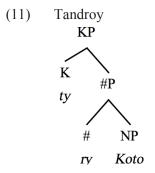
4   DP STRUCTURE

Based on the previous discussion, I now explore some of the consequences for DP structure in the different varieties of Malagasy. I propose that proper determiners in Official Malagasy and Sihanaka are merged below the topmost projection in the DP layer, in D. We can see that they are preceded by a demonstrative in the plural, which I suggest appears in a higher functional projection, DemP.[4] I remain agnostic about higher functional structure, such as KP, for these dialects.

(10)   Official Malagasy/Sihanaka

                    DemP
                   ╱╲
              Dem
                      DP
              ry/iery
                     ╱╲
                  D   NP
               Ra/i   Tsimba/Bie

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[4]Demonstratives in Malagasy merit an in-depth study, something I will not undertake here.

Proper determiners in Tandroy, however, encode case. Moreover, they precede number as shown in (9). I therefore propose that they are merged in K˚, where KP dominates #P.

(11)   Tandroy

         KP
        / \
       K   #P
       ty   / \
           #   NP
           ry   Koto

It is less clear to me how to analyze the Northern dialects. If *iry* is in fact a monomorphemic determiner that encodes proper and plural, it could be merged in D. If, however, it is a complex form that includes a determiner (*i*) and a plural marker (*ry*), then we have a third possible DP structure, where DP dominates #P.

5   CONCLUSION

The varieties of Malagasy spoken in Madagascar share many syntactic properties, including the presence of proper name determiners. What is striking is that in spite of these commonalities, there are several small points of divergence. I have tried to show that some of these differences lie in the feature specifications of the determiners, that is, in the morphological component. Moreover, data from plural marking suggests syntactic differences between these varieties, at least in terms of the functional projections in DP. These kinds of morphological and syntactic differences between closely-related varieties of a language are to be expected and fall under what is often called "microvariation". Although some initial studies of such microvariation in Malagasy have been undertaken (e.g. Travis 2015), much more remains to be done.

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