Article drop in headlines and truncation of CP
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Introduction. In English newspaper headlines (and also in other instances of ‘reduced written register’ (RWR): text messages, recipes, conference posters etc.) articles can be dropped, which is impossible in spoken English. (1b, c) are from www.guardian.co.uk 7/18/09; constructed example headlines are marked with $^C$ throughout.

(1) a. $^\emptyset$ Man bites $^\emptyset$ dog$^C$
b. $^\emptyset$ British first world war veteran dies at 113
c. Purnell: I lost faith in $^\emptyset$ PM months ago

This is not just a matter of saving space or dropping articles randomly; there are distributional constraints:

(2) a. $^\emptyset$ Man bites a dog$^C$
b. *A man bites $^\emptyset$ dog$^C$

The above judgments both accord with English speakers’ intuitions and are demonstrated in a corpus study of headlines by Mårdh 1980. The pattern has been argued to be a linear restriction (no article-less DPs to the right of an article-ful one, Mårdh), or a c-command one (no article-less DPs in scope of an article-ful one, Stowell 1991). However, the following attested headlines shed doubt on these hypotheses (assuming to-phrases are c-commanded by the direct object, Larson 1988):

(3) a. $^\emptyset$ Storm gives a jolt to $^\emptyset$ lumber market (Wall Street Journal, 11/2/12)
b. Give a toy to $^\emptyset$ collection for children’s charities (Frome and Somerset Standard, 11/1/12)
c. $^\emptyset$ One-man show also gives a nod to $^\emptyset$ late dramatist (International Herald Tribune, 10/18/12)

The generalization appears to be: no a in subject position. This accords with Mårdh 1980’s corpus findings and investigation of Google News. the in subject position is attested, although rare:

(4) The Apple-Samsung Court Battles Expand to $^\emptyset$ iPhone 5, $^\emptyset$ Galaxy S III (wired.com, 11/19/12)

Interpretation of null article constructions. Article-less DPs in RWR have a different interpretation from indefinite article-ful DPs; in particular, article-less DPs cannot easily act as generics, while article-ful DPs can:

(5) a. Judge rules that a civil servant does not have the right to strike$^C$
(can be generic statement about civil servants)
b. Judge rules that $^\emptyset$ civil servant does not have the right to strike$^C$
(only about particular civil servant)
c. (diary register) In my day, (a/#$^\emptyset$) gentleman wouldn’t do such a thing.$^C$
(no generic reading for $^\emptyset$)
There is a difficulty in interpreting article-less indefinites as taking narrow scope under other quantifiers (6), but not an insurmountable difficulty (7):

(6)  a. $\emptyset$ Judge rules that $\emptyset$ nurse must provide care to all patients$^C$
    (the case involved a specific nurse)
  b. $\emptyset$ Judge rules that $a$ nurse must provide care to all patients$^C$
    (wide scope for patients, or generic property of nurses)

(7)  a. $\emptyset$ New drug found ‘every week’ in EU (Herald.ie, 11/15/12)
  b. $\emptyset$ Cadet platoon in every school (Ceylon Daily News, 11/18/12)

Furthermore, article-less DPs in imperatives seem to have only a referential interpretation:

(8)  a. Give a toy to $\emptyset$ collection for children’s charities (= (3b))
    (specific collection, about to be discussed in the article)
  b. Give a toy to $a$ collection for children’s charities$^C$
    (can be general exhortation – identity of collection unimportant)

Analysis of the null article as a choice function.  I analyze ‘absent’ articles as null determiners which introduce choice function variables (à la Kratzer 1998’s proposal for standard English).

(9)  a. $\emptyset = f_{(et,e)}$
  b. $\emptyset \text{ dog} = f(\text{dog})$
  c. $\emptyset \text{ man bites } \emptyset \text{ dog} = \text{ bites}(f(\text{dog}), g(\text{man}))$
    ($f, g$ choice function variables)

This accounts for the inability of article-less DPs to be generic – a choice functional indefinite will always pick out a specific referent rather than introducing a free variable à la Heim 1982, cp. (10a). It also accounts for the referential readings in imperatives, cp. (10b).

(10)  a. A particular gentleman wouldn’t do such a thing
  b. Give a toy to a particular collection for children’s charities

I assume that apparent low-scope readings can be accounted for by one of the mechanisms proposed in the literature for low scope reading of choice-functional indefinites (e.g. Winter 1997’s intermediate existential closure or Kratzer 1998’s parametrized choice functions), but will not choose between these here.

Analysis of the syntactic restriction.  I propose that syntactic structure is needed to license $a$ in subject position, which structure isn’t present in ‘reduced written register’. Following e.g. Beghelli & Stowell 1997, I assume DPs can bear uninterpretable features that need to be checked by higher heads, which drives quantifier raising. There is a hierarchy of syntactically projected positions for landing sites of QR (following Beghelli & Stowell 1997); and I assume (following ideas in Kayne 1998, Brody & Szabolcsi 2003, Butler 2004) that this series of projections is repeated at the VP level:

(11)  $[\text{RefP} [\text{DistP} [\text{CountP} [\text{TP} \cdots [\text{vP} [\text{RefP} [\text{DistP} [\text{CountP} [\text{VP}}$
    (Brody & Szabolcsi 2003)
I propose that overt *a* (whether quantificational or choice-functional) has an uninterpretable [indef] feature (cf. proposals in Kratzer 2005), which checks against a counterpart in the quantifier projections. For a quantificational indefinite, this provides its scope position.

(12)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{RefP} \\
| \\
[i \text{ indef}] \\
\text{TP} \\
| \\
\text{DP} \\
| \\
a \\
\text{dog} \\
\text{TP} \\
\text{vP} \\
v \\
\text{RefP} \\
| \\
[i \text{ indef}] \\
\text{VP} \\
| \\
bites \\
\text{DP} \\
| \\
a \\
\text{dog} \\
\end{array}
\]

In reduced written register, I propose that the high quantificational projections are not present, adopting the concept of a \textit{truncated root clause} adduced in discussions of subject drop in RWR (Haegeman 2007) and in child speech (Rizzi 1994). I argue that the pronounced determiner *a* in object position can check its [indef] feature in the VP layer of quantificational functional projections, but in subject position it can’t, resulting in the distribution we see: *∅ man bites (∅/a) dog* is OK, *a man bites ∅/a dog* is ungrammatical.

(13)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{TP} \\
| \\
\text{DP} \\
| \\
a \\
\text{man} \\
\text{TP} \\
\text{vP} \\
v \\
\text{RefP} \\
| \\
[i \text{ indef}] \\
\text{VP} \\
| \\
bites \\
\text{DP} \\
| \\
a \\
\text{dog} \\
\end{array}
\]

*a* in subject position is stranded and cannot check its uninterpretable [indef] feature, leading to an ungrammatical result. On the assumption that the null article has no such checking requirement, the null article can appear in any position unproblematically.
**Predictions.** On the present analysis, the null article isn’t itself dependent on truncation, so we expect to see it in RWR even if truncation is absent (signalled by wh-movement etc.) This is borne out (14). If truncation is a root phenomenon, we expect a to appear in subject position in embedded positions, also borne out (15).

(14) What role would∅ US play in∅ ground war in Gaza?  
(nbcnews.com, 11/17/12; in context second null article clearly indefinite)

(15) Steakhouse to pay $600,000 to settle claims that a male manager sexually harassed nearly two dozen male waiters over∅ eight-year period (nydailynews.com, 11/16/12)

**References**


