

Inconsistencies of the Consistency Test

This paper examines the use of the Consistency test (Law of Contradiction, Löbner 1985; Dayal 2004) in the study of N/DP syntax and semantics in three classifier languages and shows that while it can provide insight how languages express definiteness, the Consistency test cannot determine whether a word is functioning as the definite determiner in a language.

Background. Identifying the definite determiner of a language is important for the type shifting analysis of definiteness by Chierchia (1998) and Dayal (2004). The Blocking Principle, (1), determines what type shifting operations are available in a language. Dayal (2004) used the Consistency test to claim that the Hindi demonstrative is not a true definite determiner and thus does not block ι type shifting in Hindi. The basis for the Consistency test is given in (2). This says that any one-place predicate P cannot be both true and false for the same individual term t . Since definite determiner *the* presupposes uniqueness in a context and is not deictic, two instances of *the NP* in one sentence can only refer to the same individual in (3). The deictic nature of the demonstrative in (4) allows reference to shift along with pointing. I claim that using the Consistency test here only tells us that deixis is available.

(1) BLOCKING PRINCIPLE (Dayal 2004): For any type shifting operation π and any X : $*\pi(X)$ if there is a determiner D such that for any set X in its domain, $D(X) = \pi(X)$.

(2) CONSISTENCY (Löbner 1985): If P is true for an individual term t , then $\neg P$ cannot be true for t

(3) #The child is sleeping but the child is not sleeping.

(4) That child is sleeping but that child is not sleeping.

Previous use. Looking at three classifier languages demonstrates the inconsistency of the test in determining determiner status. Jiang (2018) uses the Consistency test to identify the Nuosu Yi definite determiner, *su* in (5). However, the consistency test cannot account for its optionality in definite constructions (6). The Thai demonstrative can be used felicitously in the Consistency test (7), but it is also obligatory when expressing anaphoric definiteness (8) (Jenks 2015). The obligatoriness of the demonstrative in Thai anaphoric definite cases, suggests that the Blocking Principle is in effect, yet the Consistency test does not show that the demonstrative should be considered a definite determiner. In Shan, a Southwestern Tai language, it is clear that the Shan demonstrative behaves like a demonstrative in terms of the Consistency Test (9), but it is optionally available everywhere that the Thai demonstrative/determiner expresses definiteness (10) (Moroney to appear). The results of the Consistency test do not correlate with the obligatoriness of the demonstrative/definite in these definite contexts.

Another problem. When a demonstrative is used anaphorically, the Consistency test results in a contradiction (11). This is true in Thai and Shan as well. This is because a demonstrative has a fixed reference when used anaphorically. Would we want to say that the English demonstrative is a determiner in those uses but not in others? What this test tells us is whether a noun phrase has a rigid reference within a given linguistic context, but it does not tell us why.

Conclusion. The Consistency test can identify demonstratives, which allow for a shift in reference using deixis. However, it is not capable of identifying definite determiners or D elements in the syntax, so it should not be used this way in future work.

(5) NUOSU YI: CONSISTENCY TEST (Jiang 2018: (8b))

#*nga si-hni ma su hxie-vur, si-hni ma su hxie-ap-vu*
I girl CLF Su like girl CLF Su like-not
'I like the girl but don't like the girl.'

#(*khon nân*) *chalàat mâak.*

CLF that clever very
'Yesterday I met a student. That student was very clever.'

(6) NUOSU YI: ANAPHORA (Jiang 2018: (9a,b))

si-hni ma sini sse-vo ma i-go nyi, si-hni (ma su) jiy nra.
girl CLF and boy CLF room sit girl CLF Su very beau.
'A girl and a boy are sitting in the room, the girl is very pretty.'

(9) SHAN: CONSISTENCY TEST (Moroney to appear: (24))

kók hòj nâj pěn sǐ khăaw. kók hòj nâj pěn
cup CL.ROUND this be color white cup CL.ROUND this be
sǐ lăm.
color black
'This cup is white. This cup is black.'

(7) THAI: CONSISTENCY TEST (Jenks 2015: (3))

dèk khon nân nɔɔn yùu tɛɛ dèk khon nân mâi.dâi nɔɔn
child CLF that sleep IMPF but child CLF that NEG sleep
yùu.
IMPF
'That child is sleeping but that child is not sleeping.'

(10) SHAN: ANAPHORA (Moroney to appear: (14))

pâp-măaj lě kók nâm jù wâj nǎ phǎn. khaa qăw kók
book-note and cup water IMPF stay on desk 1.SG take cup
nâm (nân) he sàj pâp (nân).
water that spill in book that
'There is a notebook and a cup of water on the desk. I spilled the/that cup of water onto the/that notebook.'

(8) THAI: ANAPHORA (Jenks 2015: (17))

mâawaan phôm cəə kàp nâkrian khon nǎj. (nâkrian)
yesterday 1ST meet with student CLF INDEF student

(11) There is a child in the next room. #That child is sleeping but that child is not sleeping.

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