

'The' Paper: The Definite Article in American English Slang

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1. Introduction

Walking around the UCLA campus, one cannot help but hear expressions, such as “Natural Ice is the dank ass shit.” If the hearer is a student, he or she will probably walk by as if nothing out of the ordinary was said. In fact, they themselves have probably used “dank ass shit” in a previous conversation. However, if the listener is of an older generation (i.e., my parents’ generation), he or she will undoubtedly walk by and be confused as to what “the dank ass shit” is. Such an expression probably does not exist in their lexicon because it has only recently become popular amongst students of my generation. Why is there such a large difference between what the teenager and young adult and adult consider a part of the English lexicon? As throughout human history, trends change from generation to generation. What people considered cool in the past is no longer cool and might even be considered lame. For example, my parents, as well as many other parents, swiped some of their phrases from popular music and television shows around the time of their youth. Most people in my age range have never heard of these expressions before because it is no longer cool to watch “The Mickey Mouse Club” or listen to “The Beach Boys.” Since the television shows and popular television shows have changed since my parents were children, so too has the slang. Today, rap and hip-hop culture are very popular with American youth, as are television shows with minorities (e.g., African Americans and Mexican Americans). Because of the influence of a diversity in the media that did not occur in my parent’s youth, American English slang has started sprouting from more sources, such as the African American entertainer. For instance, someone may hear a student proclaim that, “the party last night was off the hook,” where *off the hook* is a popular expression in numerous rap songs. Thus, slang is constantly changing and creates a generation gap that makes communication and mutual understanding increasingly difficult between parent and child.

My purpose in this paper is not to discuss the difference in slang between today's young adults and adults from an older generation. Rather, I will attempt to analyze non-referential definites in a slang context (i.e., the use of *the* in *the dank ass shit*). I will begin with a definition of slang and then consider why it should be studied. Professor Pamela Munro defines slang as, "language whose use serves to mark the user as belonging to some distinct group within society" in the book, *U.C.L.A. Slang 4 (2001) 4*, which she edited (8). Most slang words are derived from other English words, but they are used with slightly different meanings and in different contexts. For instance, in slang, *blaze* means 'to smoke marijuana,' but in standard English, *blaze* signifies some type of fire or something burning. Other slang words come from deriving one word from the combination of others (1), blending two words with similar meanings (2), "acronymy" (3), metaphorical allusions (4), puns and other plays on words (5), African American English (of particular importance to this paper) (6), popular culture (7), and "true neologisms" (8).

Examples of each of the above include:

- (1) **kick-back** - 'relaxing gathering'
- (2) **ricocolous** - 'ridiculous' (coc(k) is substituted for dic(k))
- (3) **D.L.** - 'down low'
- (4) **smashed** - 'drunk' (derived from word meaning 'damaged')
- (5) **bling bling** - 'money' (imitative of sound)
- (6) **be da bomb** - 'be the best'
- (7) **go postal** - 'go crazy'
- (8) **feti** - 'money'

Most importantly, slang follows most grammatical rules of standard English (Munro 2001: 10-15). As the Linguistic Society of America stated in 1997, "all linguistic human systems ...are fundamentally regular. The systematic and expressive nature of grammar...has been established over the past thirty years" quoted in (Munro 2001: 19). The part of speech of the slang word is determined by context, much as in standard English, and these words follow strict grammatical rules. Just as in standard English, slang words and phrases can be divided into nouns, verbs,

adjectives, and adverbs. Slang verbs, like their standard English counterparts, are identified by their occurrence in grammatical patterns and take standard English inflections, such as *-ed* for past tense. However, slang grammar also contains some differences from standard English grammar. For example, in slang, it is possible to drop the verb *be* in expressions like *What up?*, which is a shortening of *What's up?*. In addition, standard English has sentences such as *Michael Jordan is the best basketball player of all time*. In this sentence, *be* plus *the* plus a noun is used to identify an entity that is unique and easily recognizable. However, slang has similar phrases with *be* plus *the* plus *noun*, where the entity is seemingly neither unique nor recognizable, such as *Eminem is the bomb* (Munro 2001: 19-25). As this is the crux of the paper, more will be said about such expressions later.

Hence, slang should be studied because of its grammatical differences from standard English. Due to the generation gap mentioned earlier, slang is often disregarded in linguistic theories. Since, slang generally follows grammatical rules but has a few key differences, it is as vital to these theories as standard English. It would be interesting to determine if linguistic theories, such as X-bar theory, still hold when they are tested with slang. Hence, this paper begins with a background on definiteness, which discusses current perspectives on the definite determiner. It then moves on to how definiteness is processed in the mind and then a short review of current X-bar and DP theories. After providing some general background on definiteness and linguistic theory, I move onto the central issue of this paper: whether my slang examples consist of an atypical use of the definite determiner or if they are merely idioms. I present numerous slang examples from fellow students, television, rap music, and the internet to explore this central issue. I conclude the paper by examining the implications my findings have on X-bar and DP theory and some possible fixes to these problems. Thus, although some slang

expressions can be regarded as idioms and others use the definite determiner as in standard English, some expressions have an atypical use of the definite determiner, and therefore, have major implications on linguistic theories.

2. Background on Definiteness

In Lyons' book, *Definiteness* (1999), Lyons outlines four competing theories (with some overlap) to try to explain definiteness, or the property of being definite.

2.1. Familiarity

The first theory he presents is the familiarity hypothesis. The point of this hypothesis is that for an object to be definite, it must be familiar to both the speaker and the listener.

(9) I went blind from staring at the sun too long.

In the sentence, *the sun* is part of everyone's general knowledge, and it is therefore familiar to both the speaker and the listener. Lyons notes that the familiarity hypothesis fails in certain conditions when the object is not familiar to the listener. Such examples can occur when someone (the listener) walks into a room, and the speaker asks for a certain item. Having just entered the room, the listener has no idea to what object the speaker refers.

2.2. Identifiability

A solution to this shortcoming of the familiarity hypothesis can be found in the identifiability hypothesis, which maintains that the definite article directs the listener to an object by signaling to him that he is in a position to locate it (Lyons 1999: 5-6). In the situation described above, where the listener walks into a room, and the speaker asks him or her for a particular object an example of identifiability would be:

(10) Please pass me the chainsaw so I can chop off your head.

If there is only one chainsaw in the room, both the listener and the speaker can clearly identify the object, even if the listener has just entered the room (Lyons 1999: 3-7).

However, the identifiability hypothesis also fails when the object is not identifiable at the time of the utterance. To account for such situations, Lyons introduces the reader to the uniqueness and inclusiveness hypotheses.

2.3. Uniqueness

Under the uniqueness hypothesis, the definite article signals that there is only one entity that satisfies the description that the speaker used. In other words, the object to which the speaker refers to is unique. Notice how this entity can be familiar or identifiable, but it need not be. An example where an utterance is neither familiar nor identifiable is:

(11) The winner of the competition will definitely lose a limb.

The competition has not yet ended, as noted by future tense, so the listener cannot possibly identify the winner. In addition, since the winner is still unknown, the listener cannot possibly be familiar with him or her. However, it is common knowledge that unless there is a tie, a competition only has one winner. Therefore, in the listener's mind, even though the winner has yet to be determined, he or she will be unique based on the fact that a competition only has one winner.

2.4. Inclusiveness

In stark contrast to the uniqueness hypothesis is the inclusiveness hypothesis, which applies to groups of items. With this hypothesis, a speaker refers to a totality or an aggregate of objects that satisfy his or her description. The referenced object is not unique because it refers to a group of objects. For example, if I mention dogs, I could be referring to a group of ten golden retrievers, a group of five poodles and five schnauzers, or any possible dogs. The only entity that

the listener can comprehend is that I am referring to a group of four-legged animals, with wagging tails, and a coat of hair. In addition, at a party, the host may exclaim:

(12) Hope your glasses are empty because we're serving the beer.

The beer in this sentence is not unique, not identifiable (assume it is in the refrigerator), and not familiar (it is still in the refrigerator). In this usage, the definite article is a type of universal quantifier meaning something like, 'all the beer.' Hence, the speaker is not referring to one specific or identifiable beer, but just the collection of beer in general (i.e., all of the beer in the cooler) (Lyons 1999: 7-12).

2.5. Anaphoric Definites and Generics

Lyons then moves on to discuss non-anaphoric definites and generics. He maintains that there are two main uses of the definite article, which are situational and general knowledge.

Both of these cases can be explained by the familiarity and identifiability hypotheses.

(13) [The situation use occurs when someone walks into a room and is asked]

Pass me the beer.

This example is situational because it varies by context and is best explained with the identifiability hypothesis. That is, what the speaker refers to depends on which room the listener enters and to which item the speaker fancies. Thus, if we were in the garage, and there was no refrigerator and no beer, it would make no sense for the speaker to ask the listener to pass him or her the beer. Obviously, it would make more sense for the speaker to ask the listener to pass him or her the hammer, since both the speaker and the listener are in the garage, and a hammer is likely to be in a garage. On the other hand, general knowledge uses can be clarified with the familiarity hypothesis because the referenced object is familiar to both the speaker and the

listener. Everyone knows what the moon is, so it should be completely obvious what the speaker is referencing if he or she utters this sentence:

(14) The moon is full tonight, so there should be a lot of vampires lurking.

The moon is familiar to both the speaker and the listener because both have learned that the earth has one moon that illuminates the night in their fourth grade study of the planets. In the above examples, the range of noun phrases (e.g., *the beer*) can be characterized as definite because they can be described in terms of identifiability and familiarity. Lyons explains this as “semantic definiteness,” where the definite article is grammatical and carries a [+def] feature. The marker [+def] can segment the semantic field depending on which uses require a definite article because under “semantic definiteness,” a language does not need to treat these uses as grammatically definite (Lyons 1999: 158-60).

It is always best to have one theory that describes a phenomenon instead of multiple theories. However, familiarity and identifiability fail with generics. Generics are entities that are treated as unique and are consequently, definite. This occurs mainly with the definite singular generic, but it can also arise with the definite plural generic. For example, generics, such as *the dodo* and *the equator*, are both unique but not familiar or identifiable. There is only one dodo bird or equator, but the listener is not familiar with either one, since *the dodo* is long extinct, and *the equator* is an imaginary line on a world map and does not occur in the real world. However, from general knowledge and experience, the listener knows exactly to what the speaker refers (Lyons 1999: 188). In addition, such generics, with the exception of *the equator* seem to be used to refer to a collective group. Thus, the inclusiveness hypothesis must be used to interpret the sentence correctly.

(15) The dodo became extinct a long time ago.

(15) cannot possibly refer to only one dodo but must refer to the entire species in general. This sentence is analogous to the previously mentioned sentence, *The beer is in the refrigerator*, which could only be defined as definite under the inclusiveness hypothesis. Hence, throughout his book, Lyons informs the readers of several theories to explain definiteness and exemplifies them by applying them to non-anaphoric definites and generics.

3. How Definiteness is Processed in the Mind: Two theories & Lyons' General View

After outlining theories to attempt to explain definiteness, Lyons discusses how semantics and pragmatics can be used to process definite phrases in the mind. Lyons disagrees with both the semantic and pragmatic theories, and accordingly, he creates his own theory.

3.1. Discourse Semantics

Heim proposed the theory of discourse semantics to explain how phrases, such as definite phrases, are processed in the mind. She claims that our mind is like a filing cabinet. A numbered file card represents each discourse referent, with more recent referents stored near the top. When a new discourse element is encountered, the listener must add a new card to the file with the new information. Definites refer to entities that are either familiar to the listener and the speaker or unique. Hence, if the referent is definite, the listener need only update a pre-existing card and add new info about the current referent to that card. In a conversation, the listener uses a Boolean function (i.e., one that returns true or false) to search through the filing cabinet. He or she keeps searching for a match for the current situation (Lyons 1999: 268-70). The search continues until the listener finds a card that satisfies the search condition, meaning that it matches the current discourse information. If the listener finds no card that satisfies the current condition, the search function returns false, and the listener must create a new card. The most important aspect to this approach is that, through many uses of the filing system, the listener

creates semantic links between existing cards. These “bridges” between pre-existing cards ensure that the listener is able to extract information quickly enough to be able to follow the conversation. With more and more use of the filing system, similar entities become more tightly linked and access is even faster (Heim 1988: 274-94). For instance, in a conversation about a particular dog, the filing system would function in this manner:

(16) The dog bit me on the way home from school yesterday.

The listener hears the sentence and then would access his file with the referent dog, which is semantically linked to other names of dogs in his filing cabinet, as well as entities associated with dogs, such as teeth, four legs, fur, balls, and leashes. Having accessed the dog file, the listener then recalls that the dog named Rex bit the speaker yesterday, and that is why he now has rabies. In this manner, the listener knows exactly what dog the speaker refers to because of the associative links in his mental filing system.

3.2. Relevance theory

This is a pragmatic theory, where the speaker utters a sentence, which is in logical form. However, the uttered sentence does not contain all of the information that the listener needs to identify the referent. Thus, the listener must access further background information and combine this information with the logical form. In this way, the listener is able to identify what the speaker has mentioned. A linguist named Wilson supports the fact that processing of definiteness involves relevance theory, and it involves these steps. First, the listener hears the speaker’s utterance and comprehends it. Then, the listener retrieves background information about and mental images of the referent from memory and applies these to the utterance. With enough mental images and background information, the listener is able to clearly identify the

speaker's intended referent. In processing sentences with relevance theory, identifiability works, but inclusiveness does not.

(17) [In a room with three closed doors and one open door. The speaker walks into the room and states] Close **the door** for me, please.

In the sentence, the door to close is identifiable because it is the only open door in the room. On the other hand, inclusiveness fails because there is an aggregate of doors, but only one matches the speaker's description. Here, the mental image of the open door is most salient in the listener's mind, and so it is examined first. The listener then applies his knowledge that open doors generally need to be closed when someone mentions that a door should be closed. Hence, the listener applies his background knowledge and mental images to the speaker's utterance and can thusly determine which is the correct door to close. According to Lyons, relevance theory is a version of identifiability, where interpreting a definite noun phrase, such as *the door*, involves retrieving and constructing a conceptual representation of the referent, which uniquely identifies it (Lyons 1999: 271-3).

3.3. Lyons' View

Lyons notes that identifiability, familiarity, uniqueness, and inclusiveness cannot be combined into one theory, and he therefore, tries to provide a unified account of definiteness. He argues as follows (253):

After outlining some major approaches I will argue (following up hints dropped in preceding chapters) that the attempt to find a fully unified characterization of definiteness in semantic or pragmatic terms is misguided. I will propose an account of definiteness as a grammatical category which, like other such categories, cannot be completely defined in semantic or pragmatic terms, though it represents the grammaticalization of some category of meaning.

Lyons then presents two arguments for the separation of grammatical definiteness and semantic/ pragmatic definiteness. As previously mentioned, generics are semantically definite

but not necessarily grammatically definite (198). Second, he observes that definiteness marking overlaps in function with topic marking. Thus, the two do not tend to co-occur in languages. For instance, Lyons maintains that English can only render a Japanese noun phrase marked with the topic marker *wa* as definite or generic (233). Lyons claims that topics in Japanese are required to be identifiable, since topics in Japanese can be generic, and as stated above, generics are semantically definite but generally grammatically indefinite. Lyons asserts that this conflict between generics and Japanese topic marking points to a dissociation between identifiability (“semantic/ pragmatic definiteness”) and grammatical definiteness (233).

Based on the two arguments above, Lyons determines that definiteness is a syntactic concept, much like tense, mood, number, and gender. There is no one-to-one correspondence between grammatical definiteness and its semantic/ pragmatics concepts because the concept is grammaticalized, the process by which lexical items are reduced to grammatical status, and during this process, the concept takes on a new meaning. He has three examples explaining this occurrence:

- (a) A past tense form in subjunctive that describes a present or future event.
- (b) Pluralia tantum nouns, such as *trousers* and *pants*, which are plural even when used to refer to single objects.
- (c) Mass nouns, such as *water* and *sugar*, which are grammatically singular but not semantically singular.

Since there is considerable variation amongst languages in the use of such categories, grammatical and semantic/ pragmatic definiteness are in conflict. Moreover, just because something is identifiable does not always mean that it is definite. There are always a large central core of uses related directly to identifiability but not having anything to do with

definiteness. Finally, there is no way to unify uniqueness, identifiability, familiarity, and inclusiveness, which all represent semantic/ pragmatic theories (275-9). Therefore, because syntactic categories, such as tense and mood, are fairly universal across languages, it is best to grammaticalize definiteness and define it as a syntactic concept.

4. X-bar Theory and DP Theory

This section provides a brief overview of X-bar and DP theories and then mentions how Lyons modified DP theory to explain definiteness as a syntactic concept. I will only touch briefly on whether a noun phrase is part of a DP or NP, as this could be another paper in itself. Instead, I will follow my previous syntax classes and place all noun phrases under the DP category in a syntactic tree.

4.1. X-bar background

This theory attempts to provide a skeleton for a syntactic tree in any language, despite word order. Under X-bar theory, words are restricted to a number of distributional defined categories, such as noun (N), adjective (A), and verb (V). Categories are combined to form phrases, and each category or phrase represents a “node.” For example, the noun *cat* can be a node by itself, and *the big cat* can also be a node. A tree is made up of constituents, one of the components out of which a phrase or sentence is built. In the prepositional phrase:

(18) into a tizzy

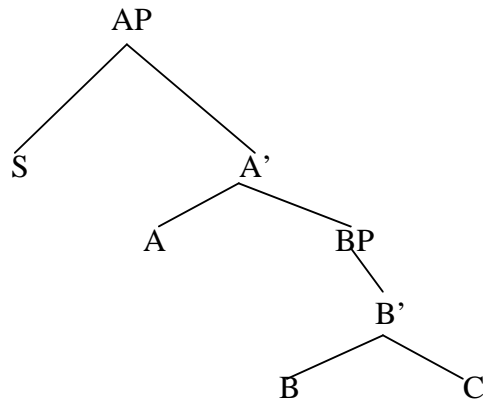
The constituents are:

- (a) tizzy
- (b) a tizzy
- (c) into a tizzy

Higher nodes in the tree dominate lower nodes. Each word is a head, and each head projects to a higher constituent of the same type. Following this logic, a noun of category N projects to a noun phrase of category NP. The way in which each head defines its projections has general

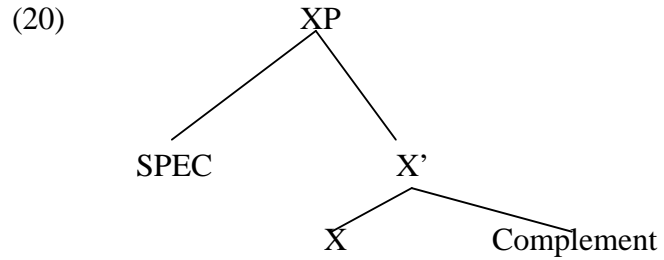
rules. Whenever there is a head X , there is also a maximal projection XP and an intermediate projection X' . Moreover, X-bar theory defines rules where complements may attach. With these rules, X' consists of X and its complement, and XP consists of X' and its specifier (Giorgi 1991: 8-10). In order to define complement and specifier, it will be necessary to define a few relationships in a tree.

(19)



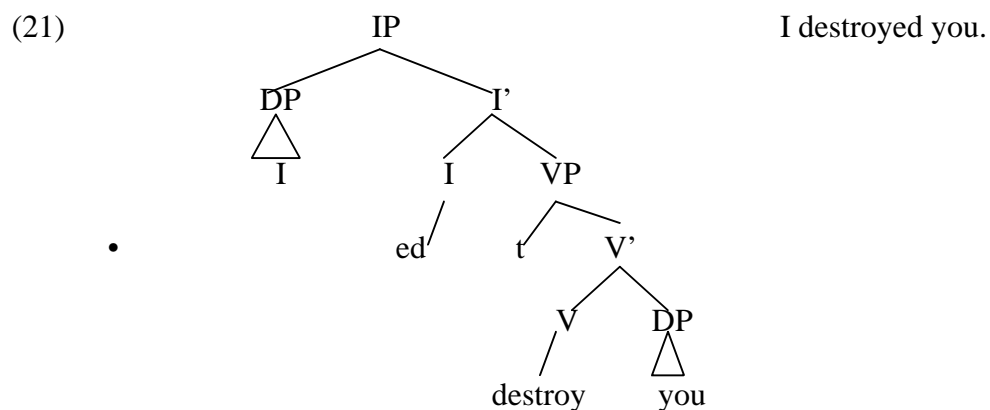
AP is the **root** of the tree (the one node with no parents), and it is also the **mother** of S and A' because it is the next node up from S and A' . S and A' are **sisters** because they are both daughters of AP . Keeping this tree in mind, the constituent C is the **complement** of a head B (and of any B' or BP constituent, which is a projection of B by extension) because B and C are **sisters**, and the **mother** of B is a projection of B . In addition, the constituent S is the **specifier** of the head A' (and of the AP constituent into which A' projects by extension) because S is the **sister** of A' and the **daughter** of AP (Radford 101-2).

As I mentioned earlier, the theory is a skeleton for phrase structure. The language and its parameters determine the branching direction within the skeleton. This paper focuses solely on English, which is a subject verb object (SVO) language, meaning that the complement (the object) branches to the right in the V' structure, and the subject appears in spec IP , which branches to the left. A general schematic for English is:



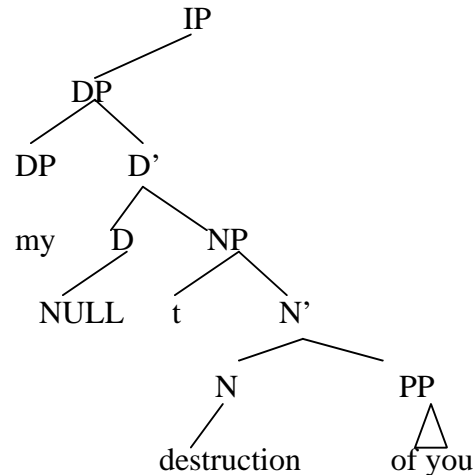
4.2. DP Theory

In his book, Lyons argues for a DP structure over a NP structure because it has three advantages over the NP structure. First, a DP structure ensures that a noun phrase is closely parallel in its structure to its clause. For instance, *destroy* and *destruction* should be parallel in phrase structure, since *destruction* is just the nominalized form of *destroy*. Under the DP structure, *destroy* and *destruction* are parallel in the sentences in that *destroy* is the head of a V' and *destruction* is the head of a N'. Thus, *destruction* truly is the nominalization of *destroy* in the phrase structure.



(22)

My destruction of you...



Moreover, a DP structure makes the theory of phrase structure more general, since all categories have phrasal projections. With the NP structure, determiners do not have phrasal projections, as they are just located in the specifier position of N'. Finally, with the DP structure, the analysis of pronouns is more straightforward. In this structure, pronouns are treated as determiners that lack a NP complement (290-1).

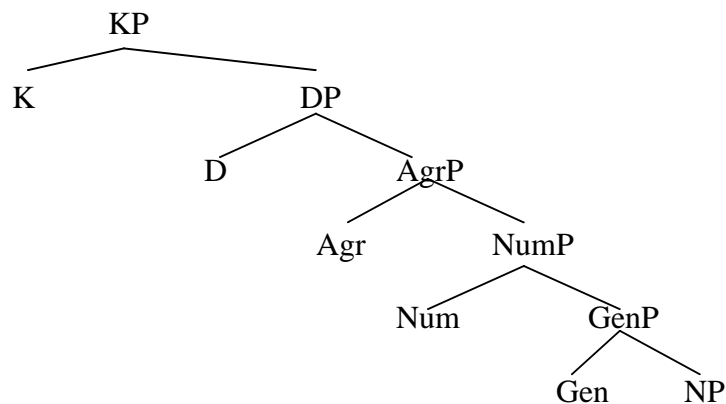
However, Lyons also highlights some weaknesses of the DP theory. In particular, languages like Swedish and Norwegian have double determination. D to N or N to D is only possible if both are heads, but there should not be an additional free form article. The current DP theory cannot explain such a phenomenon. Moreover, under the current theory, what makes something definite is the filling of a certain position

4.3. Lyons' Modified DP Theory

In an attempt to fully implement definiteness as a syntactic category, Lyons modifies the DP Theory. A noun phrase (NP) is still contained within the determiner phrase (DP) node, but D does not represent determiner, and instead, D represents the grammatical category of definiteness. In this modified theory, the grammatical category [+def] is represented in syntax as a functional head. Lyons supports this stance by mentioning that almost all other functional

heads correspond to grammatical or semantic categories rather than word categories. Now, a DP is not a determiner phrase, but it is a definite phrase. Ergo, only definite noun phrases will be DPs because indefinites have no [+def] feature and therefore, no DP projection. However, DP theory holds that definites and indefinites are of the same category, and it seems that with Lyons' proposed modification, definites and indefinites would be different categories. Lyons addresses this issue also by mentioning that definites and indefinites are still of the same category because both have KP (case) as the highest functional projection. K has the choice whether to select a DP or not. This theory seemingly unifies definiteness across languages, as a language only has a DP projection if that language has a definite article. Hence, since the theory is syntactic in nature, there is no longer any ambiguity between a semantically definite but grammatically indefinite phrase, such as the Japanese generic. Generics in Japanese are now regarded as indefinite because Japanese does not have any definite articles. In addition, a definite determiner does not need to be lexically specified [+def] because the DP by nature is a definite NP. Moreover, Lyons' theory solves a problem with definiteness from the standard DP theory. Under Lyons' modified theory, determiners and possessives both occupy the same position because both are definite. They both fall under the broad umbrella of definite phrase (DP). A drawing of the proposed tree structure would look something like this:

(23)



Thus, in this structure, KP selects either a DP complement, or a NP complement. If the language has no definite article, the KP has no choice and must select for a NP.

5. Central Issue to this Paper: *the* in Slang – Idiom or Atypical Use?

With a solid background in definiteness and some theories that aim to describe it, it is now possible to analyze the definite article in English slang in terms of identifiability, familiarity, uniqueness, inclusiveness, and Lyons' syntactic theory. Not much research has been done on the definite article in English slang because slang is often overlooked in devising semantic, pragmatic, and syntactic theories. However, Professor Pamela Munro at UCLA has at least thought about the question of whether the definite article is used atypically in English slang or not. Since 1989, she has edited four editions of a slang dictionary for the UCLA campus. She instructs a seminar, and the purpose of this class is to obtain a representative sample of UCLA slang in order to put together a dictionary. Over the four editions, she has wavered back and forth between calling slang phrases idioms and saying that the definite article is used atypically. In each dictionary, she has made sure to mention that slang does have grammar, and this grammar is as precise as the grammar of standard English because it contains notions, such as transitive and intransitive verbs. She writes in *U.C.L.A Slang 2 (1993)* that the definite article to be analyzed in slang occurs in predicates following *be*. In this edition of the dictionary, she remarks that expressions like *be the bomb*, should be regarded as special idiomatic verb phrases. Moreover, the definite article is a feature of the lexicon and not a productive change in the meaning of the definite article (17-18).

Munro continues with this analysis in *U.C.L.A Slang 4 (1997)* when she mentions that in standard English, *be* plus *the* plus noun identify a subject with a specific, unique position or description. Slang has a similar constructions, such as *be the shit* and *be the man*, that are similar

to the standard English superlative in that only one shit or one man seem to fill the role in question. Both standard English and slang have a large number of fixed predicative expressions beginning with *be*, such as *be the dank ass shit* and *be cake*. It appears that *cake* could be an ordinary noun or adjective depending on context, but *cake* does not behave like a typical adjective or noun. Slang speakers do not refer to *a cake* meaning ‘an easy thing,’ which would be possible if *cake* were an ordinary noun. Moreover, slang speakers do not speak of a **cake class*, which would be possible if *cake* were an ordinary adjective. Instead, a student refers to *a midterm that was cake*. Hence, expressions, such as *be the man* and *be cake*, occur as units, and it is easy to sidestep the exact status of *the man* and *cake* (22).

In two other renditions of the dictionary, she changes her view again. Munro maintains that expressions, such as *be the man* indeed include unusual affective uses of the definite article. More importantly, these uses are distinct from usage of the definite article in standard English.

(24) Eminem is the man

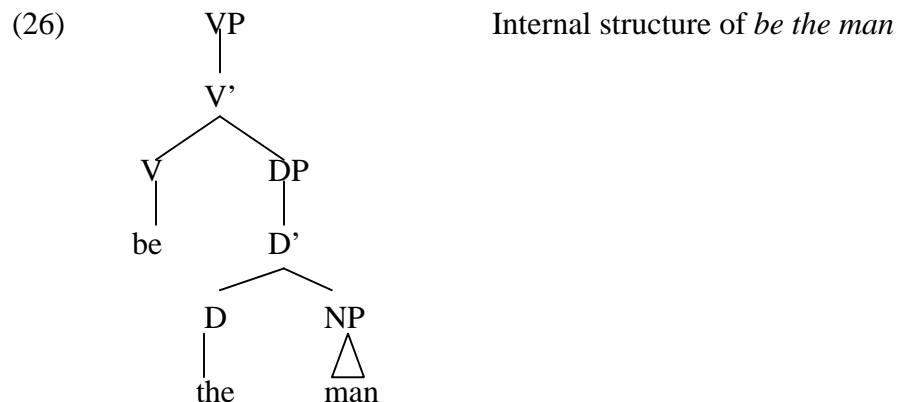
Munro claims that the use of the definite article in the above sentence is emphatic and not definite. Hence, the definite article does not convey one unique, particular, or specific item (i.e., one particular/ specific ‘man’), but it conveys the meaning of ‘Eminem is on top, the best’ (Munro 1989: 11). In both cases (idiom and unusual affective use), Munro merely writes what she believes but does not provide much evidence for either case. She even writes herself that “this construction demands more study” (Munro 2001: 25).

Whether the usage of definite article in slang is idiomatic or an unusual use has major implications on linguistic theory, in particular X-bar theory. Foremost, if the expressions are idioms, as Munro has claimed on a couple occasions, then X-bar theory need not be changed because idioms can be treated as lexical chunks. For example, if *be the man* is an idiom, then X-

bar theory would treat it as a verb phrase that must remain together as a chunk. It could be syntactically drawn as in (27).



Notice how *be the man* occurs as a unit, so whether *the man* is a DP or not is a moot point because the expression is treated as a large verb phrase. On the other hand, if slang expressions do employ an atypically affective use of the definite determiner, changes will have to be made to X-bar theory. Since the expression is no longer a unit, attention must be paid to the internal structure of expressions like *be the man*. Such expressions can no longer be treated as verb phrases with no internal structure. Additionally, if this truly is an unusual affective use of the definite article, then slang has incorporated a productive change in the meaning of the definite article. Thus, X-bar theory needs to change to incorporate this new productive meaning of the definite article in slang.



However, there is a problem with this structure because the unusually affective definite article of slang is located in the exact same location in the tree as the standard English definite article. If slang expressions really do contain an unusual affective use of the definite article, then X-bar theory will have to be modified to account for the difference in the slang definite article and the

standard English definite article (more about this later in the paper). Since slang mirrors standard English grammatically, slang, much like standard English, has idiomatic expressions and definite uses of the definite article. Conversely, unlike standard English, slang does seem to have some expressions with atypical affective and intensifying uses of the definite article. Moreover, linguists only used standard English expressions in devising the theories outlined in Lyons' book. For a linguistic theory to be valid, it must hold universally. For this reason, familiarity, identifiability, uniqueness, and inclusiveness cannot claim to describe definiteness until they have been tested with slang expressions. Lyons already highlighted some weaknesses in the theories and developed his own based on a plethora of languages. However, he also neglected English slang.

6. Slang Examples with 'the': idioms, typical uses, and atypical uses

I tested my data with four constituency tests for DPs: a) coordination, b) substitution of one DP for another, c) adjective insertion before the DP, and d) pseudoclefting. I then made judgments on whether the expressions seemed to be an idiom or a DP. If it was a DP, I decided if the phrase was a typical use of the definite article in terms of standard English, or whether it was an atypical use of the definite article special to slang.

6.1. Idioms

According to Nunberg, et al, idioms are marked by six distinct properties. First, the sum of the parts does not make the whole. An idiom's meaning cannot be entirely predicted merely by looking at each constituent in isolation and determining that constituent's meaning. Second, idioms are inflexible in that they only appear in a limited number of syntactic frames. For instance, *John kicked the bucket* 'John died' is perfectly grammatical, but **The bucket was kicked* is not (at least in an idiomatic sense). Third, idioms involve the use of metaphors and

other figurative language. Listeners may not know why a particular metaphor, such as *kicking a bucket* has a particular connotation, but they do perceive that a metaphor is involved. Fourth, idioms are proverbial, meaning that they are used to describe recurrent events or social interests compared to concrete entities and relations. Fifth, idioms are informal and are associated with popular speech. Finally, idioms depict situations or events affectively and are accordingly not used to describe neutral events, such as reading a book (Nunberg 1994: 492-3). Naturally, not all of these properties must be present for an expression to be labeled an idiom. Most of my examples of idioms come from rap music or *U.C.L.A Slang 4 (2001)* and are as a result informal and used by many speakers on a daily basis. The grand majority are verb phrases that either begin with *be*, begin with another standard English verb, such as *choke*, or begin with a preposition, such as *on*.

(27) be off the heezy (v.) – be crazy, really fun

- a) *The party **was off** [_{DP} **the heezy**] and [_{DP} the ladder].
- b) *The party **was off** ***my heezy/ it**.
- c) *The party **was off the rusty/ red/ cool heezy**.
- d) * [_{DP} **The heezy**] was what the party was off.

The constituency test fails in all four cases here meaning that *the heezy* cannot be coordinated with another DP, it cannot be substituted for by another DP, it cannot be modified by an adjective like a normal DP, and it cannot be pseudolefted like a normal DP. Since, nothing can be inserted or extracted from *be off the hook*, it must be treated as a chunk. Notice, however, how slang does have standard grammatical rules, since verbs, such as *be*, can be used in the past tense. Therefore, *be off the heezy* is an idiomatic VP in slang and must be treated as a chunk.

(28) be on the rag (v.) – be in a bad mood

- a) ??Sally **is on** [_{DP} **the rag**] and [_{DP} the ladder]
- b) ??Sally **is on my rag/ it**.
- c) ??Sally **is on the dirty/ red/ hot rag**.

d) [_{DP} **The rag**] is what Sally is on.

The above example maintains the six properties of idioms outlined above, especially inflexibility and informality. None of the constituency tests fail per se, but the sentences all sound forced and awkward. Nunberg mentions that the object and the verb must co-occur so that the literal meaning of ‘being on the rag’ can map in a one-to-one manner onto the metaphorical meaning of ‘being irritable.’ The ‘irritable’ meaning is metaphorical because it involves the extended belief that a woman having her period is irritable and thus the notion of irritability can be extended to women not having their periods and to men as well. Without *be* the literal meaning of the idiom is not expressed and the metaphorical meaning has no argument to map. *Be on the rag* then becomes ungrammatical in an idiomatic sense. Moreover, pseudoclefting as in part d) is impossible because the idiomatic meaning of *the rag* only occurs within the idiosyncratic VP-construction type. However, agreement occurs because the idiomatic VP construction inherits general properties of VPs that are specified for agreement features. In other words, *the rag* cannot be fronted because its idiomatic meaning is derived from context. Therefore, since the verb and object are dependent for semantic reasons (namely the verb lends the object its idiomatic meaning via a one-to-one mapping from literal to idiomatic meaning), the verb and object must co-occur and consequently must be treated as a chunk. Hence, *be on the rag* should be treated as a large VP and the internal nature of *the rag* is moot.

(29) choke the chicken (v.) – masturbate (of a male)

- a) Rajiv **choked** [_{DP} **the chicken**] and [_{DP} the Giraffe].
- b) ???Rajiv **choked my chicken**/ it.
- c) **Rajiv choked the large/ red/ cool chicken.**
- d) [_{DP} **The chicken**] is what Rajiv choked.

(29) also maintains the six properties of idioms listed above. *Choke the chicken* is another phrase that must occur as a unit because a semantic dependence between the verb and the object.

It is my belief that the mapping here may be semantic and visual at the same time. Mapping the literal meaning of ‘masturbate’ onto the figurative meaning of ‘choking the chicken’ does not do much to illustrate why the particular metaphor was chosen to mean ‘masturbate.’ However, the visual of a farmer choking the skinny neck of a chicken evokes a similar image of a male “choking his own chicken,” (i.e., gripping tightly onto the shaft of his penis). Without *choke* the literal meaning of the idiom is not expressed, and the metaphorical meaning has no argument to map. *Choke* the chicken hence becomes ungrammatical in an idiomatic sense. Pseudoclefting is not possible because *the chicken* only derives its idiomatic meaning from its position within the VP containing *choke*. Agreement occurs because the idiomatic VP construction inherits general properties of VPs that are specified for agreement features. Therefore, *choke the chicken* must occur together as a unit for semantic reasons and can thus be treated as a VP, leaving the internal properties of *the chicken* a moot point.

(30) go to the big house (v.) – go to jail

- a) Dave **went to** [_{DP} **the big house**] and [_{DP} the market].
- b) Dave **went to my big house/ it**.
- c) Dave **went to the rank/ damp/ epic big house**.
- d) [_{DP} **The big house**] is where Dave went.

The expression is definitely informal and inflexible. For the idiomatic meaning to be preserved, the verb and its object must co-occur. The verb *go* is mapped onto the literal meaning ‘go,’ and *the big house* derives its meaning when it is mapped onto the literal meaning ‘jail.’ There is consequently a semantic dependence between the verb and the object, or no one-to-one mapping between the literal and figurative expressions can take place. Without *go* the literal meaning of the idiom is not expressed, and the figurative meaning has no argument to map. The expression then becomes ungrammatical in an idiomatic sense. As in the other two examples, pseudoclefting is not possible because *the big house* derives its idiomatic meaning from the verb

go and its internal position within the idiomatic VP containing *go*. Thus, to maintain its idiomatic meaning, *go to the big house* must occur as a chunk into which nothing can be inserted or extracted. The exact status of *the big house* can be sidestepped because *go to the big house* is treated as a VP.

(31) *be in the house* (v.) – make one’s presence known at a gathering or party

- a) 2Pac **is in** [_{DP} **the house**] and [_{DP} the theater].
- b) 2Pac **is in my house/ your house/ it**.
- c) 2Pac **is in the large/ red/ messy house**.
- d) [_{DP} **The house**] is what 2Pac is in.

(31) is also informal and inflexible. The object and the verb must co-occur so that the literal meaning of ‘making one’s presence known’ can map in a one-to-one manner onto the metaphorical meaning of ‘being in the house.’ Without *be* the literal meaning of the idiom is not expressed, and the metaphorical meaning has no argument to map. The expression therefore becomes ungrammatical in an idiomatic sense. Moreover, pseudoclefting as in part d) is impossible because the idiomatic meaning of *the house* only occurs within the idiosyncratic VP-construction type. However, agreement occurs because the idiomatic VP construction inherits general properties of VPs that are specified for agreement features. In other words, *the house* cannot be fronted because its idiomatic meaning is derived from context. Therefore, since the verb and object are dependent for semantic reasons (namely the verb lends the object its idiomatic meaning via a one-to-one mapping from literal to idiomatic meaning), the verb and object must co-occur and thus must be treated as a chunk. Hence, *be in the house* should be treated as a large VP and the internal nature of *the house* is moot.

(32) *hit the grind* (v.) – begin activities done on a daily basis

- a) E-40 **hit** [_{DP} **the grind**] and [_{DP} the wall].
- b) E-40 **hit my grind/ his grind/ it**.
- c) E-40 **hit the special/ large/ messy grind**.

d) [DP **The grind**] is what E-40 hit.

This expression is the first to really adhere to the property that an idiom's meaning cannot be determined merely by looking at an idiom's individual parts. The DP *the grind* makes absolutely no sense by itself, and therefore the meaning of the entire idiom cannot be determined from this constituent by itself. Again there is a semantic dependence between the verb and the object, and the meaning of the idiom is derived from a one-to-one mapping from the literal expression 'doing activities on a daily basis' to 'hitting the grind,' where *hit* is mapped to *begin* and *activities* is mapped to *the grind*. Without *hit* the literal meaning of the idiom is not expressed, and the figurative meaning has no argument to map. It is ergo not grammatical in an idiomatic sense. On a similar note, pseudoclefting also produces a non-grammatical sentence idiomatically because *the grind* derives its meaning from its proximity to the verb and its position within the VP. Therefore, the verb and object must occur together and can be treated as a unit. Under this analysis, *hit the grind* is a large VP, and the internal status of *the grind* can be sidestepped.

(33) shoot the shit (v.) – have a casual conversation

- a) BOZO **shot** [DP **the shit**] and [DP the bird].
- b) BOZO **shot my/ your/ his shit**
- c) BOZO **shot the stinky/ odoriferous shit.**
- d) [DP **The shit**] is what BOZO shot.

This is another example of slang modifying the meaning of a standard English word or phrase.

In standard English, *shit* is human waste that should be disposed of quickly. Slang has also altered the standard meaning of *shoot* to mean 'to throw around' or 'to fling.' In slang, *to shoot the shit*, roughly means 'to fling around waste.' It is important to note that in a casual conversation, the participants never discuss anything of substance (i.e., shit). Hence, conjoining the two modified slang phrases (shoot and shit), yields a phrase with the meaning, 'to have a casual conversation.' To maintain the modified meaning, the verb and object must occur

together (to remain in the same positions as the literal meaning) in order to be able to map onto the literal meaning ‘have a casual conversation’ (i.e., *shoot* maps onto ‘have’ and *the shit* maps onto ‘a casual conversation’).

(34) on the D. L. (adj.) - confidential

- a) *Keep this info **on** [_{DP} **the D.L.**] and [_{DP} the hit list].
- b) *Keep this info **on my/ your/ D.L.**
- c) *Keep this info **on the secretive/ epic/ tragic D.L.**
- d) * [_{DP} **The D.L.**] is what this info is to be kept on.

The constituency test fails in all four cases here meaning that *the D.L.* cannot be coordinated with another DP, it cannot be substituted for by another DP, it cannot be modified by an adjective like a normal DP, and it cannot be pseudolefted like a normal DP. Therefore, *on the D.L.* is an idiomatic AP in slang and must be treated as a chunk because nothing can be inserted into or extracted from the expression. When a listener hears *on the D.L.*, he or she treats it as a large adjective, and the exact status of *the D.L.* can be sidestepped.

6.2. Typical Uses of the Definite Article in Slang

In these examples, the combination of the definite article plus the noun refers to something definite that is familiar or identifiable to the listener. The use of the definite article mirrors its use in standard English.

(35) The Yay Area (n.) – The San Francisco Bay Area

- a) Too Short represents [_{DP} **the Yay Area**] and [_{DP} the Bronx].
- b) Too Short represents **my/ his Yay Area/ it.**
- c) Too Short represents **the epic/ ballin/ fun Yay Area.**
- d) [_{DP} **The Yay Area**] is what Too Short represents.

All four constituency tests pass, so *the Yay Area* is a DP. Most importantly, the DP keeps its intended meaning, is specific, and refers to something definite. Anyone who listens to rap and comes from Northern California knows that *the Yay Area* refers to the geographic area known as

the Bay Area. This area includes cities, such as San Francisco, Oakland, and San Jose. The reason that it is *Yay Area* instead of *Bay Area* is that *yay* is slang for *cocaine*. Rappers in *the Bay Area* are known to sell cocaine to support themselves, so these rappers began calling it *the Yay Area* instead of *the Bay Area*.

(36) The 411 (n.) – information

- a) I gave Jack [_{DP} **the 411**] and [_{DP} the stats] on Jill.
- b) ??? I gave Jack **my/ his/ your 411** on Jill.
- c) I gave Jack **the informative/ useful 411** on Jill.
- d) [_{DP} **The 411**] is what I gave Jack on Jill.

Three of the four constituency tests pass, so *the 411* is a DP. Most importantly, the DP keeps its intended meaning, is specific, and refers to something definite. It is common knowledge that the number for information is 411. If a person would like information on the location or the phone number of a particular location, he or she dials 411, and the operator gives the caller the information he or she seeks. Slang amended the meaning of 411 a bit by meshing the act with the end product (i.e., the act of calling with the end product of receiving the information). The middleman, the operator, is cut out, but the seeker still receives the information. In concrete terms, the speaker is like the caller, and the informer is like the operator in that he or she has the information. This adaptive use of 411 falls under using old terms or concepts in new, novel ways, and it is one of the hallmarks of slang.

(37) the C-N-N (n.) - CNN

- a) Dylan watches [_{DP} **the C-N-N**] and [_{DP} the weather].
- b) Dylan watches **his/ my/ your C-N-N**.
- c) Dylan watches **the tragic/ monopolist/ boring C-N-N**.
- d) [_{DP} **The C-N-N**] is what Dylan watches.

All four constituency tests pass, so *the C-N-N* is a DP. Most importantly, the DP keeps its intended meaning, is specific, and refers to something definite. Normally, in standard English,

people talk about watching CNN or MTV without the definite article. On the other hand, people mention that they watch, *the Weather Channel* and *the Golf Channel*. In addition, people refer to *the WTO* but *NATO*. It seems odd that some concepts are mentioned with a definite article but others are not. Slang resolves this problem by using the definite article in front of every concept that is definite (i.e., it is possible to say that someone watches *the MTV*). According to the familiarity hypothesis, both the speaker and the listener need to know the referenced object if it is mentioned with the definite article. *CNN*, *MTV* and *NATO* are all general knowledge and are thus familiar to both the speaker and the listener. Therefore, unlike standard English, slang follows the familiarity hypothesis and places a definite article in front of a well-known object or concept.

(38) the 405 (n.) freeway in Southern California

- a) I drive on [_{DP} **the 405**] and [_{DP} the street].
- b) *I drive on **my/ your/ his 405**.
- c) I drive on **the congested/ large/ pot-hole-filled 405**.
- d) [_{DP} **The 405**] is what I drive on.

The most important thing to note here is that there is a dialect difference between Northern and Southern California. Southern California uses the definite determiner in front of all freeway names, whereas Northern California does not. Therefore, in Northern California, people talk about *280*, *101*, and *17*. The definite article in front of a freeway name serves no real purpose, but it only makes the freeway name more definite and specific. Whether or not the article is used before the freeway seems to be a parameter that is set before birth because everyone in Northern California drops the article, while everyone in Southern California keeps it. In some cases, it makes sense to use the article because everyone knows about the freeway and its path. For example, *the 405* is world famous, and the use of the definite article just makes it that much more definite.

6.3. Atypical Use of the Definite Article in Slang

English has three uses of the definite article, and the proposed theories can account for only two of them. The first use is referential.

(39) I bought [_{DP} the car] yesterday.

In (39), the car refers to a particular car that is either identifiable by the speaker and the listener, familiar to the speaker and the listener, or unique. The speaker either referred to the car in a previous sentence, or the listener has knowledge of the car from some other source (perhaps he was present when the speaker bought the car). Finally, maybe the speaker had been talking about buying a very custom car for a while with only three wheels. In this case, the referenced car is unique because there is no other car like it in the world. As a result, familiarity, identifiability, or uniqueness are all able to explain the use of the definite article in this case based on the context.

The second use is in generics, and I discussed this earlier in the paper. The definite article can be used because the generic is part of the speaker's and listener's general knowledge. Thus, although it may not be familiar or identifiable, the object is either unique or inclusive.

The third use of the definite article is the most important to this paper, and it is non-referential. Theorists often skip this use, and none of the previous theories can explain why the definite article is needed in this case. In this section, I will present some non-referential examples from English slang of two types: typical non-referential and a special affective use of the definite article.

6.3.1. Definite Determiner Used Non-referentially in English Slang

Expressions in this category do not seem to warrant the use of the definite article because they do not refer to anything specific or definite. However, in both standard English and slang, such expressions require the definite article.

(40) get off the corner (v.) – move because the police are coming

- a) The police told Wayne to **get off** [_{DP} **the corner**] and [_{DP} the building].
- b) The police told Wayne to **get off his/ my corner/ it**.
- c) The police told Wayne to **get off the dope-slanging/ hot corner**.
- d) [_{DP} **The corner**] is what police told Wayne to get off.

Based on the above constituency test, *the corner* is clearly a DP, but it does not seem to be definite or specific. More than one corner seems to be capable of fulfilling the speaker's requirements, but only one seems capable of the job. Hence, the corner seems to depend on the speaker and the context. This use is quite similar to the generic use in that the speaker seems to be speaking of corners in general. However, unlike generics, this corner is neither unique nor inclusive. This corner, then, is included in the category corner, location where two streets meet, but the listener must infer more information than the speaker divulges. In this case, the listener must somehow realize that he or she is to leave the corner because of illegal activity and a strong police presence. Obviously, this does not include every corner in the category, and the corner varies from context to context, so it is non-referential. Perhaps *the corner* comes from the speaker's past experiences. The listener must then infer that his or her situation is similar to that of the speaker's. The listener puts the two situations together (his corner and the speaker's corner) and realizes that his or her corner must be vacated.

(41) pain in the ass (adj.) – major nuisance, annoyance

- a) Eric is a pain in [_{DP} **the ass**] and [_{DP} the head]

- b) Eric is a **pain in my/ his/ your ass**.
- c) Eric is a **pain in the large/ red/ smelly ass**.
- d) [_{DP} **The ass**] is what Eric is a pain in.

This expression has a similar problem to the one above. It is clearly a DP, but the object is neither specific nor definite. Moreover, *the ass* varies from speaker to speaker, so the listener must infer what the speaker intends based on the context. Again, *the ass* seems to be a collective group of asses, and the one that the speaker refers to, is the one that fits the context of the utterance. Since there is no particular ass, the speaker cannot be referring to anything specific, and the DP is non-referential. It is the listener's job to notice that while someone may have been a pain in the ass in the past, this generalization need not hold in present context. Pain brings annoyance to mind, and then the listener matches the ass that the speaker mentions to the proverbial ass in his or her mind. In this way, the listener is able to infer the meaning of the utterance without the speaker referring to one specific ass.

(42) take (something) to the max (v.) – go all out, maximize effort

- a) Barry Bonds takes it to [_{DP} **the max**] and [_{DP} the theater]
- b) Barry Bonds **takes it to my/ his/ John's max**.
- c) Barry Bonds **takes it to the grandiose/ epic/ heroic max**.
- d) [_{DP} **The max**] is what Barry Bonds takes it to.

From the constituency tests, *the max* is a DP, but like (41) and (42) it is neither specific nor definite. *The max* varies from person to person, and two people may not even agree on what someone or something's max is. Slang has altered an economics term, 'to max out,' so that it applies to people and their effort. Normally, *to max out* or *maximize* refers to profits such that the owner or investor makes the most possible money from an investment. Upon hearing *the max* the listener ponders what the speaker intends, and then checks to see if the speaker's definition matches his own. Accordingly, disagreements frequently occur between the speaker and the listener. For example, the speaker might say: *Barry Bonds takes it to the max every*

game, and the listener might reply *No he doesn't, he's just a loafer*. Both people are watching the same person, but they base their opinions on their personal concept of what *the max* means.

(43) be all about the bling bling (v.) – be involved in something just for money, sell out

- a) Kid Rock is all about [_{DP} **the bling bling**] and [_{DP} the women]
- b) Kid Rock **is all about his/ Eminem's/ my bling bling**.
- c) Kid Rock **is all about the flashy/ epic bling bling**.
- d) [_{DP} **The bling bling**] is what Kid Rock is all about.

Bling Bling passes all four constituency tests for DPs, so it is a DP. However, like the above three examples, it is neither specific nor definite. Someone's definition of selling out may be completely different from another person's. Thus, the exact nature of the phrase varies from person to person. Therefore, the speaker has something specific in mind when he or she utters the phrase. The listener then interprets what the speaker has said in his own terms, and this determines whether the listener agrees with what the speaker has said. The definite article may be used because although the object is not specific or definite to everyone, it is specific and definite to the speaker. Hence, in the speaker's mind, he or she is mentioning something definite and specific, and it is the listener's job to interpret the utterance based on his or her own definition of the DP. The expression is non-referential in nature, but it is referential in the speaker's mind because of his or her personal definition and concept of *bling bling*.

(44) break out the bank (v.) – get out the money

- a) Dan broke out [_{DP} **the bank**] and [_{DP} the prison cell].
- b) Dan **broke out his/ my bank**.
- c) Dan **broke out the shiny/ miniscule bank**.
- d) [_{DP} **The bank**] is what Dan broke out.

Once again, the tests show that *the bank* is a DP, but it is not definite or specific. The bank normally refers to an institution that houses money, and slang has slightly altered the definition so that bank just means money, the item the bank holds. However, *the bank* is non-referential

because the speaker does not refer to a specific bank or money. In addition, the amount varies from time to time, so the listener does not have a set concept in his or her mind of what specifically *bank* is or even how much money it represents. Hence, the listener must be in tune with the speaker and know that *bank* means ‘money,’ and the amount will vary by context. Therefore, slang employs a non-referential use of the definite determiner that is non-specific and non-definite but still requires the definite determiner.

6.3.2. Definite Determiner Used Affectively in English Slang

A website named Linguistics defines *affective meaning* as ‘the information conveyed by a linguistic expression about the attitudes and emotions of the producer towards the content or the context of expression’ (Chan: 1997). This section will present a few examples of expressions labeled affective for now. The next section will then discuss the appropriateness of this label. Affective expressions seem to mirror the superlative construction of standard English. However, they are still non-referential, yet require the use of the definite determiner. As I already mentioned in the paper, they take the form of *be* plus *the* plus noun.

(45) be the bomb (v.) – be cool, be the best, irresistible, divine

- a) Eminem is [DP **the bomb**] and [DP the great white hope].
- b) *Eminem is **my/ his/ John’s bomb**.
- c) Eminem is **the explosive/ large/ best bomb**.
- d) [DP **The bomb**] is what Eminem is.

The use here is not typical because more than one object (i.e., bomb) can fulfill the requirements, but only one object seems capable of the job. That *the bomb* passes all but the second constituency test demonstrates that it is a DP, which is neither definite nor indefinite. A sentence like *Eminem is a bomb* is equally ungrammatical as *Eminem is my bomb*. In addition, although the speaker does not refer to a specific *bomb* that fills the role, he or she seems to convey his or her emotions and beliefs in the expression. The subject is not just some bomb, but it is *the bomb*.

The phrase has certain elements of the superlative; therefore, the definite article may be necessary to highlight this similarity. For instance, in the sentence *I am the best* there can be only one person who is the best. The definite article is justified because the object is unique. Since the speaker places special emphasis on expressions, such as *the bomb*, in his or her mind, there may be only one object that fits the role. Hence, in his or her mind, the object requires the definite article because it is unique, and this is done irregardless of the fact that the object is not unique, familiar, or identifiable to the listener. A similar analysis follows for expressions, such as *be the shit*.

(46) be the homie (v.) – be a very good friend

- a) Ice Cube is [_{DP} **the homie**] and [_{DP} the pimp]
- b) Ice Cube **is my/ your/ his homie**.
- c) Ice Cube **is the realest/ best/ baddest homie**.
- d) [_{DP} **The homie**] is what Ice Cube is.

Again, there is a special emphasis by the speaker that conveys an emotion or belief. In the speaker's mind, Ice Cube is a very good friend and perhaps his or her best friend. Accordingly, to convey this to the listener, he or she uses the definite article to imply that Ice Cube is the only person on the planet who fits this role. The listener, of course, has his or her own opinions and may have a different person who fits the role in his or her lexicon. Therefore, *the homie* is non-referential in its surface form, but it is referential in the speaker's mind. The listener interprets such a phrase by comparing it to the standard English superlative and realizing that for the speaker, Ice Cube is the only person who fits the role. A similar analysis can be used for expressions, such as *be the man*.

(47) quite the __N__ (n.) the definitive example of __N__ MOVE TO AFFECTIVE

- a) Alex is quite [_{DP} **the keystone**] and [_{DP} the loser].
- b) *Alex is **quite my/ your/ his keystone**.
- c) Alex is **quite the flaming/ gay/ cool keystone**.

d) *[_{DP} **The keystone**] is quite what Alex is.

This expression seems to fit the definition of affective meaning perfectly, in that the speaker is conveying his or her belief that Alex is the definitive example of a keystone. There may be other keystones in the world, but in this speaker's opinion, Alex is the very best. *Quite* and *the* must be fronted together, or the resulting sentence is ungrammatical. Thus, *quite the* seems to act as a complex DP that serves to convey the speaker's emotional feeling about a particular person or context. The listener, even if he or she does not know Alex, cannot help but to infer that in the speaker's humble opinion, Alex is the best keystone in the world. Hence, *quite the* mirrors the superlative construction in standard English, in that only one person or object seems capable of filling the defined role (here keystone). The difference between this construction and the standard English superlative is that here more than one person or object seems capable of filling the role (the one that the speaker designates). However, in standard English, only one object or person is capable of filling the defined role. Hence, *quite the* can be treated as a complex DP because it can be coordinated with other DPs, can be modified by adjectives, and fronting it produces a grammatical sentence as long as *quite* and *the* remain together.

6.3.3 Appropriateness of the *Affective Label*

The *affective* label seems perfectly acceptable in describing the above expressions. Each expression above is a DP as determined by the constituency tests, but the DP does not seem to be the same as the one of standard English. Instead of referring to an object that is definite and specific to both the speaker and the listener, the definite article seems to be conveying the speaker's emotions and personal beliefs about the situation or object he or she is describing. To one person, *E40 is the bomb* meaning 'E40 is the best,' conveying the speaker's personal opinion about a particular person. However, the listener might completely disagree with the speaker's

opinion, and ergo the sentence does not hold for him or her. Perhaps the object is definite and specific in the speaker's mind, and it is up to the listener to come up with a similar definite and specific object of his or her own. In this way, the object is definite in intention (the speaker's intention) but non-definite on the surface (how the speaker interprets the expression). For example, in the listener's mind, *Jay-Z is the bomb* and not E40.

6.3.4 Definite Determiner Used as Intensifier in English Slang

In this expression, it seems that the only real purpose of the definite determiner is to make the expression more definite and to intensify it.

(48) the fuck (i.) – expression of anger (i.) = intensifying expression

- a) *What [_{DP} **the fuck**] and [_{DP} the dog] are you doing?
- b) *What **my/ your/ his fuck** are you doing?
- c) *What **the stupid/ boring/ epic fuck** are you doing?
- d) *_{DP} **The fuck** is what you are doing?

Here 'expression of anger' is not a definition per se, but it is an identifying label. Normally it makes sense to define an expression with a word or phrase that can be substituted for the entry word in an example without a loss of meaning. However, there do not seem to be such words or expressions that can replace *the fuck* other than expressions of the same type, such as *the hell*. *The fuck* failed all four constituency tests, so it cannot be regarded as a standard DP. The phrase occurs together as a unit, and its sole purpose is to express annoyance or anger. Thus, I have labeled it an intensifier because it seems to indicate that the speaker is extremely angry as opposed to just angry. Such an exclamation is only uttered when someone has been repeatedly angered or annoyed, and it almost serves as an ultimatum. The first few times a speaker might exclaim *What are you doing?* However, if this has no result, *What the fuck are you doing?* Lets the listener know that the speaker is serious, and that the annoying behavior better stop, or the speaker will take action to stop it him or herself.

7. Implications of Atypical Uses on Definiteness Theories and X-bar Theory

Hence, slang challenges traditional theories with unexplained non-referential uses of the definite determiner and special affective uses, as well as interesting intensifying uses of the definite article. The aforementioned theories about definiteness still hold for idioms because such phrases can be treated as units, and the semantic or syntactic role of the definite determiner has no bearing. Idioms are a standard part of the lexicon, and the speaker and listener stores these units in their minds as having specific meanings. Therefore, idioms, such as *drive the bus* can be treated as special VPs into which nothing can be inserted and out of which nothing can be extracted. Current theories explain these expressions without a problem, so idioms do not challenge current linguistic theories.

On the other hand, non-referential uses of the definite article pose serious problems for current definiteness and X-bar theories. Phrases, such as *get off the corner* cannot be explained by familiarity, identifiability, uniqueness, or inclusiveness. The constituent, *the corner* is not familiar to the listener because the speaker has not mentioned which corner he or she is talking about. For that same reason, *the corner* is also not identifiable by the listener. Moreover, *the corner* is not unique because it has a different meaning to every person who hears the utterance. Finally, although at face value, *the corner* is generic, it is not inclusive because it does not include every *corner* in the *corner* category. Furthermore, it is not clear why the speaker uses the definite article in the first place, since the object is neither definite nor specific. Hence, Lyons' modified DP theory fails too because there is no place to place *the corner* in the tree. Since it is not definite, *the corner* cannot be placed in the DP node under Lyons' theory. However, it is also not indefinite meaning that it cannot be placed in the NP node because only indefinite phrases can be placed there. Therefore, non-referential DPs seem to be caught in the

middle – they are not definite on the surface, but they have an implied definite meaning signaled by the definite article. Lyons' theory has no answer for such non-referential DPs, so it either fails outright, or it must be modified.

7.1. How to Incorporate Non-referential DPs

This is a challenging issue, and it is no wonder that linguists choose to ignore it than trying to resolve the problem. In my opinion it seems like it would be easiest to modify the uniqueness theory in order to incorporate non-referential DPs. Familiarity and identifiability would only work in some cases in which the speaker and the listener have know each other for a long time, and the listener and the speaker are on the same wavelength. In this situation, both the speaker and the listener know which object the speaker is mentioning because it has been broached frequently in the past, discussed thoroughly, and both the speaker and the listener have come to a mutual understanding. For example, *the corner* could become familiar and identifiable if both the speaker and the listener work the same corner and have both had similar issues with the police in the past. Therefore, familiarity and identifiability hardly provide the universality a linguist seeks when defining a theory. Moreover, inclusiveness will seemingly fail the majority of the time too. In the example, *the corner* does seem like it could be any corner in the world. However, the speaker has a particular corner in mind and thus, uses the definite article. With the inclusiveness theory, the speaker would have to intend 'corner' in general (i.e., a place where two streets cross) with this utterance, and that is clearly not his or her intention. Uniqueness theory has the most potential because in the speaker's mind, *the corner* is unique. In processing the sentence, the listener can match the speaker's unique corner with a corner from his own personal experience. This way, *the corner* does not have to be the same corner for both the speaker and the listener, but it is still unique to both of them. The theory would still maintain

that the definite article must be used when an object is unique. The changes to the theory would incorporate non-referential DPs by not mentioning ‘object referred to’ in the definition and by stating that the speaker and the listener can have different concepts of the same object. Hence, *the corner* is unique in that *get off the corner* invokes different mental images for the speaker and the listener and both create a concept of a particular ‘corner’ that is unique to them.

Lyons’ DP theory must also be adjusted to incorporate non-referential DPs. I disagree with Lyons that definiteness is a grammatical concept that is neither semantic nor pragmatic. Part of definiteness must come from semantics because otherwise, there would be no special affective use of the definite determiner in slang. Lyons has attempted to make an ambiguous topic clear by only providing two options: definite or indefinite. Unfortunately, real life is not that simple, as there are always intermediaries, such as non-referentials. It is impossible to classify non-referentials with Lyons’ theory because on the surface, they appear to be indefinite, but they seem to be definite in intention. Hence, semantics is needed to separate non-referential DPs from generic and referential DPs. The next problem occurs when deciding how to draw the syntactic tree with non-referential DPs. It makes no sense to create a new node for these expressions because creating a new node produces a conflict. The issue would be why in some trees the definite article is placed in the DP node, and in other trees, it is placed in the new node. On the surface, the definite article would look the same, so there would be no justification for placing the definite article in two separate places in two separate trees.

The solution must combine semantics and syntax. Since the two definite articles look the same on the surface, it makes no sense to place them in separate nodes of the tree. As long as it is clear which definite article is in a particular tree, it may still be possible to place both uses of the definite article in the same node. In this way, the DP, definite phrase, of Lyons’ theory

becomes rubbish, and DP returns to signifying determiner phrase. To distinguish between the two uses of the definite article, two new semantic labels would be created for the non-referential uses. The first would be a [+nref] label to signal that the definite article does not refer to anything in particular. In addition, a [+affec] label would signify that a non-referential use of the definite article also has a special affective meaning. Consequently, a definite article has three options for labels: no label means that the definite article is being used in the standard way, a [+nref] label means that it is non-referential, and a [+nref, +affec] label indicates that it is both non-referential and has a special affective meaning. With the new labels, the atypical uses of the definite phrases are placed in the tree at the same location as the typical uses of the definite article. The only difference is in the meaning, which is denoted by the [+nref] and [+affec] labels. Therefore, it is possible to maintain the DP phrase structure despite the non-referential DPs, as long as the difference between the typical use (to denote specificity and definiteness) is distinguished from the atypical use (non-referential and affective meaning).

8. Conclusion

This paper has explored definiteness from both a theoretical and concrete viewpoint. After outlining four theories to explain definiteness, I explained how X-bar theory represents it. The main goal of the paper was to test current theories against examples from slang with the rationale being that slang is often disregarded in both creating and testing theories. From my examples, I discovered that the use of the definite article in slang covers four areas: idioms, typical use, non-referential uses (including affective) and an intensifying use. Idioms and typical use do not affect current theories because current theories describe such expressions without problems. However, the other two uses do pose a problem for current theories because current theories cannot satisfactorily describe why such expressions use the definite article. To account

for such uses, I attempted to modify current theories. I felt that the uniqueness hypothesis was the one theory that was most readily adaptable to explain non-referential DPs and tried to modify it accordingly. I adapted DP theory by introducing semantic labels to describe non-referential uses. In this way, non-referential expressions can still be situated in the same location in trees as typical DPs. This analysis is far from complete and is only meant to shed some light on an issue that is often disregarded in linguistics. Future work will need to incorporate further examples from slang as well as examples from other languages. Perhaps after further research, current theories can be additionally modified to fully explain non-referential DPs. Moreover, with more examples, current theories might be found to be inadequate and additional theories can be created to truly explain non-referential DPs. Until more work is done with other languages, however, it will be impossible to construct a theory that can explain atypical use of definite articles across English (standard English and slang) or even across languages for that matter.

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