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Decomposing scalar approximatives in Greek

Artemis Alexiadou · Leibniz-Zentrum Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

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Greek has several less precise scalar approximator constructions (see Sauerland and Stateva 2007 for the term). Focusing on (1) and (2), I argue that the meaning of these constructions is built in the syntax. (1) and (2) are found in informal registers and involve determiners otherwise used as negative polarity items (Stavrou and Terzi 2008; Giannakidou 2013) (kan-Ds). Kan-Ds are not licensed by negation in these contexts (3). In (1), ka-mia combines with singular feminine nouns derived from numerals ending in -aria/-osti that are followed by NP<sub>Plural</sub>. In (2), singular kan-Ds combine with expressions of time or amount with which they agree in gender, yielding the interpretation of ‘around one’. Kan is not obligatory in (1).

(1) Agorasa ka-mia ikos-aria/ ekato-sti vivlia bought.1SG KAN-one.FEM twenty-FEM/ hundred-FEM books ‘I bought approximately 20/100 books.’

(2) Thelo kan-ena mina/ ka-mia ora/ kan-ena kilo want.1SG KAN-one.MASC month.MASC/ KAN-one.FEM hour.FEM/ KAN-one.NEUT kilo.NEUT apples ‘I need about a month/about an hour/about one kilo of apples.’

(3) * (Den) ida ka-mia gineka (neg) saw.1SG KAN-one.FEM woman ‘I didn’t see any woman.’

Stavrou and Terzi (2008) analyze the numerical nouns in (1) as classifiers. I propose instead that such nouns are derived syntactically, as in (4).

(4) [Quantity<sub>1P</sub> ka-mia [Q] [Div<sub>1P</sub> [nP<sub>1</sub> aria ] [Quantity<sub>2P</sub> eikos- [Div<sub>2P</sub> Number [nP<sub>2</sub> vivli-a ]]]]]

-aria/-osti realize a fixed gender/number n<sub>1</sub> (Kramer 2015), which has quantity semantics, following Kayne (2010). n<sub>1</sub> takes a Quantity<sub>2P</sub> as its complement. Numerals in Quantity<sub>2</sub> (Borer 2005) incorporate into -aria/-osti. Numerals obligatorily trigger plural on Greek nouns, hence ‘books’ bears plural (number in Div appearing on n due to Div-n fusion in Greek).

I furthermore propose that kan-Ds are complex: they contain ka(n), which combines with forms of the numeral ‘one’, cf. Martí (2015) on Spanish alg-un. According to Barouni (2018), ka(n) on its own is a minimizer and marks its associate as the endpoint of a scale. Numeral ‘one’ is in Quantity<sub>1P</sub>, (Borer 2005), agreeing in gender with n<sub>1</sub>, and ka(n) is a Q modifier attaching to the numeral. In (1), the scale is determined by the approximate interpretation of round numerals (Krifka 2007). Note that no D head is contained in the lower extended projection, hence the numerical noun does not have independent reference.
Support for this analysis comes from the observation that the numerical noun can be modified by adjectives (5), and that only nouns that can independently co-occur with numerals are licit (6).

(5) Diavasa ka-mia dekaria kvurias vivlia
read.1SG KAN-one ten new books
‘I read approximately ten new books.’

(6) a. * deka arheresies
ten caucus.PL
‘ten caucuses’
b. * ka-mia dekaria arheresies
KAN-one ten caucus.PL
‘about ten caucuses’

As [Stavrou and Terzi (2008)] note, in (1) the verb may agree with either the numerical noun as singular or the n$_2$ as plural (7). Nevertheless, the kan-D always agrees with the numerical noun and not n$_2$, and the numerical noun surfaces with nominal/accusative case, depending on its grammatical function. This suggests that Agree can either see the highest Q or bypass it and see the head closest to T (cf. [Klockmann 2017]).

(7) Mia dekaria atoma espefsan/espefse
one ten persons came.3PL/came.1SG
‘About ten people came.’

I propose a version of (4) is proposed for (2). Ka(n) is required here as Greek ‘one’ hasn’t yet fully grammaticalized to an approximative marker (cf. [Plank 2002] on Bavarian). Temporal/amount nouns, having fixed gender/number, also realize a fused n$_1$/Div$_1$; amount Ns may take a Div$_2$P as their complement; ‘one’ in Quantity$_1$ determines the endpoint of the scale.

References


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Artemis Alexiadou
artemis.alexiadou@hu-berlin.de
Humboldt Universität zu Berlin & ZAS
Unter den Linden 6, 10099 Berlin
Germany