The Albanian definite articles as constructional pairings

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From the angle of usage-based approaches, grammatical and lexical structures are perceived alike, contentful, pairings of form and content. Although Construction Morphology claims no construction status below word level (Booij 2009, 2010, 2013; Masini & Audring 2019), this paper argues that the Albanian (definite) article is a construction of its own.

Albanian has about a dozen articles, not very similar to the SAE pattern (Haspelmath 2001, Akademia 2002, Demiraj 2002). It is not structured based on the strict, straight opposition definite/indefinite. It is post-posed in nouns, precedes adjectives and many pronouns and establishes a genitive relationship between two nouns. The present views in Albanian grammar (based on structuralist approaches) define articles as multifunctional, but this is re-evaluated towards a reductionist position. The paper argues that the Albanian articles are constructional pairings of form/content. We identify the content that is specific to this form, which is recurring/replicated in all its occurrences. The evidence shows that such content is clear and distinct, as a bound morpheme, as well as a separate word, just like a preposition in terms of its structural status.

The article 'i', for instance, has its _inherent content_ contributed directly from its core constructional pairing – similar to that of definiteness, but with significant language-specific peculiarities, as it is drawn from the wide range of uses. As the postposed article to nouns, 'i' assigns cognitive attention. As a pre-posed article, it precedes adjectives and pronouns, as well as particular groups of nouns. It tags (thus providing attention to) the targeted adjective/pronoun, and even realizes the genitive relationship between two nouns, equaling the prep. 'of'. What is common in all these uses, is the kind of cognitive attention projected on the tagged noun or adjective/pronoun, and this cognitive highlighting serves either to single out the target referent from the rest of its abstract class, or to assign some relational highlighting, thus connecting (or 'confirming this connection) this targeted adjective/pronoun to its governing noun. In the latter case, it is relational content.

The evidence also hints that there is additional content contributed from outside the constructional pairing, as the nouns tagged with this constructional form, enter paradigmatic relations, from where this form assumes additional content relating to gender, number, case-related roles. Hence, it is associative content. The paradigmatic frames developed for each article vary widely, and so varies the complex resulting content – it is usage-based construal. For some articles, the main content from the constructional pairing is gender related rather than definiteness, explained by the fact that markedness is asymmetrical (Greenberg 1963, Croft 1996, Haspelmath 2006, 2016). In some articles, the gender-related or case-related content is missing, because the speakers either failed to develop or to retain sufficient cognitive attention for nominal classification. The present pattern/schema or construal is hardly predicted by structure – it can be motivated only by the asymmetrical context of usage. The most complete is the article 'i', with its core constructional content of 'definiteness' and added content contributed from paradigmatic frame (outside its own pairing) relating to gender, number, case (and here it is the unmarked side). Some other articles lack gender-related content, case related content, or, have less complex case-related content, as contributed from a reduced frame of 2 paradigmatic elements instead of the standard 5-element case frame.

Keywords: _Albanian definite article, constructional pairing, Construction Morphology, markedness, nominal classification_

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