How definite is the definiteness feature on D(eterminer) in Polish? A brief look at the nominal structure of Polish and Bulgarian.

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The aim of this talk is to analyse certain aspects of the syntactic behaviour of Polish and Bulgarian in the context of their status as NP(DP) - languages (DP-Hypothesis, see Abney 1987). The discussion first revisits Tasseva-Kurktchieva and Dubinsky's (2018) analysis of the 'mixed behaviour' of Bulgarian with respect to the specific NP / DP criteria (e.g. exhaustivity presupposition, subextraction, see Bošković 2008 et seq.), which they attribute to the presence / absence of the definite article, the marker of definiteness. Their account presupposes a vital distinction between Bulgarian and English (a firm DP-language), i.e. while D in the former is inherently Def(inite) [DEF+] (interpretable, valued), it can be either [DEF+] (interpretable, valued) or [DEF−] (interpretable, unvalued) in the latter. Thus, in Bulgarian, whenever the definite article is missing, the DP simply does not get projected. In English, on the other hand, D may take its [DEF] value from elsewhere (e.g. the quantifier or the possessive), thereby rendering the DP-layer universally present. In the course of the analysis, certain relevant properties of Polish and Bulgarian will be compared (i.e. Negative Raising, sub-extraction – see 1 and 2 for Polish) and the two languages will further be compared with respect to the definite/indefinite contrasts in the context of sub-extraction, as well as exhaustive presupposition (see 3 for Polish).

1.
a.   *Sądzę, że ta książka nie jest warta złamanego grosza.*
     (I) think that this book not is worth red cent
     'I think that this book is not worth a red cent.'
b.   *Nie sądzę że ta książka jest warta złamanego grosza.*
     (I) not think that this book is worth red cent
     'I don't think this book is worth a red cent.'
2.   *Ilu$_i$ może t$_i$ kandydatów z jednego kraju pretendować do Nagrody Nobla?*
     How many can candidates from one country aspire to prize Noble
     'How many candidates from one country can aspire to the Noble Prize?'
     (Witkoś and Cegłowski 2007: 150)
3.   *Trzy obrazy Janka zdobią ściany naszej nowej siedziby.*
     three portraits John.POSS adorn walls our new head office.
     'Three portraits of John adorn the walls of our new head office.'

On the basis of the analysed data, it is suggested that (despite certain similarities between the two languages) Polish may seem to be closer to English in terms of the specific coding of the definiteness feature. Unlike in Bulgarian, DEF on D in Polish is not intrinsically valued (+int, +val), but rather receives a specific value in the course of the syntactic derivation. That explains the fact that NR with idioms (1b) and sub-extraction from the subject position (2) appear admissible. The status of the third test (exhaustive reading) is problematic, though, in that apparently both the readings (exhaustive/non-exhaustive) are allowed.

Selected references

Bošković, Željko (2008), What will you have, DP or NP? *Proceedings of the North East Linguistic Society* 37. 101–114.

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Witkoś, Jacek and Piotr Cegłowski (2007), On certain consequences of feature spread in phase-based syntax. *Poznań Studies in Contemporary Linguistics* 43/2. 149–172.