1 Introduction

This dissertation explores the formal mechanisms that make restrictive modification by nominals (in short, RMN) possible. Focusing on Greek definite nominals and in particular on a construction known as the polydefinite construction (as named by Kolliakou, 2004), I examine the syntactic-semantic properties of the definite determiner. As shown below, the Greek definite determiner typically appears with count nouns, proper names (cf. 1), as well as generic subjects and objects (cf. 2):

1. I Elena kalese tus sinaðelfus tis sto eksoxiko tis.
   the.nom.f Elena.f invited.3s the.acc.pl colleague.pl her in-the.n cottage.n her
   ‘Elena invited her colleagues to her cottage.’

2. Ta ðelfinja latrevun ti musiki.
   the.n.pl dolphin.n.pl adore.3pl the.f.acc music.f
   ‘Dolphins adore music.’

The definite determiner can also appear multiple times in a nominal giving rise to the polydefinite nominal construction (also called determiner spreading by Androutsopoulou 1995). As shown in (3), polydefinites consist of the determiner and the noun, and one or more sequences of the determiner and an adjective:

3. To paljo to skalisto to pjano
   the.n old.n the.n carved.n the.n pjano.n
   ‘the old carved piano’

The goals of this dissertation are to define the contribution of the Greek determiner in such nominals and offer a formal account that not only derives such constructions, but also uncovers the connections between two important properties of nominals, definiteness and restrictive modification by nominals.
Previously, the definite determiner has been argued to be a semantic expletive. For example, Roussou and Tsimpli (1994), who in their work discuss generic nominals, argue that the determiner is inserted for syntactic reasons only, since, as argued by Longobardi (1994), bare nominals are not allowed in non-lexically governed positions. Similarly, Lekakou and Szendrői (2007, 2008, 2010) who examine polydefinites, claim that the determiner is an expletive spelling out case, since it is also obligatory with proper names.

Both of these analyses provide us with interesting observations about the properties of generics and polydefinites. They also provide us with a syntactic argument concerning the distribution of the determiner. However, by stipulating that the determiner is a bare expletive, some substantial questions such as why there are constructions like polydefinites and definite generics and what they have in common remain unanswered. I argue that inflection is not the underlying reason for such constructions, since languages with no inflection may have some kind of polydefinites as well as proper names with the definite determiner (e.g. Scottish English etc.).

Additionally, an expletive account does not explain why Greek proper names can appear in predicative positions, as Lekakou and Szendrői (2010) also observe. Moreover, Roussou and Tsimpli’s (1994) expletive account does not answer why the article is also obligatory on generic objects, while their analysis also predicts that bare objects should be possible. Finally, if the definite determiner were truly an expletive, then indefinite interpretations of definite generics should be possible. English bare plurals for instance, are ambiguous between generic and existential interpretations. If the Greek determiner solely occupied a syntactic position, an existential indefinite interpretation should be readily available. These are important observations that need to be accounted for.

This dissertation then explores the possibility that the Greek determiner is not a semantic expletive. The result of this study is that the determiner contributes partial definiteness, and this is why polydefinites, proper names and generics headed by the article are possible.

2 The Analysis

Recent analyses of definiteness have observed that the uniqueness requirement (Heim & Kratzer 1998) alone does not suffice cross-linguistically to pick out a unique individual (see for instance Chung & Ladusaw 2004, Giannakidou 2004, Gillon 2006, 2009, Paul 2009). Familiarity (Heim 1982), whether it is a derived or a primitive notion, has also been argued to play an important role.