

At the Interface of Syntax and Phonology: Indefinites in Hittite

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Abstract

The object of this paper is the investigation of the peculiar distribution of indefinites within Hittite clause structure. In addition to serving as the relative and interrogative, the common form *kui-* also serves the indefinite function, although this function is equally filled by inflected *kui-* plus the indefinite marker (postfix) *-kki/-kka*. Regardless of this morphological distinction, both *kuiš* and *kuiški* display identical syntactic distributions. Descriptively, indefinites remain low in the clause, regardless of their syntactic function. When the Hittite indefinite *kuiš/kuiški* is used as a determiner, and the modified noun has no other modifying adjective, *kuiš/kuiški* immediately follows the noun. Indefinites in Hittite are also known to participate in the distraction (hyperbaton) of two constituents, whether it be a periphrastic perfect, postpositional phrase, genitival phrase, or a noun phrase composed of an adjective plus noun. When *kuiš/kuiški* is used substantivally, it is observed that the indefinite tends to take a position in the periphery of the finite verb even in the nominative case, which results in an atypical OSV linearization, or in the absence of an overt object in the surface order of V *kuiš/kuiški*. In many languages, both Indo-European and non-Indo-European, some indefinite pronouns are formally identical to interrogative pronouns. For these languages, disambiguation is achieved by syntactic differences and/or supra-segmental means. The interrogative pronoun is usually clause initial, whereas the indefinite pronoun must cliticize to the preceding word and hence cannot be clause initial. In Classical Greek for instance, the interrogative *τις* is always stressed, and the indefinite *τις* is always unstressed and enclitic, as shown by the spelling and its syntactic behavior. Using a generativist approach within the framework of Minimalist Syntax, the behavior of indefinites in Hittite is accounted for under the stipulation that they too are unaccented and enclitic. Thus under the present analysis, Hittite *kuiš/kuiški* aligns with its cognates Greek *τις*, Latin *quidam*, and other IE languages in that the indefinite pronoun is void of accentuation and its distribution is dependent on the interface between syntax and prosody. Furthermore, my proposal provides a more satisfactory account for the postverbal surface position of the indefinite, which is an unexpected position for a subject in an otherwise well behaved SOV language, as well as a syntactic and prosodic driven account to the instances of distraction of constituents observed in the corpus.