

From demonstratives to articles in the Celtic languages

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It is generally agreed on that the definite articles in medieval Celtic languages (Old Irish *in(t)*, Old Welsh *ir*, Old Breton *an*) must have originated from earlier demonstratives in **sindo-*, *-ā* (GOI §467). It is clear, in fact, that they are etymologically related to certain demonstratives in ancient Celtic languages, such as Gaulish *sinde* and (*s*)*indas* (Lambert 1994: 66). They would thus have followed a most frequent, well-known grammaticalization path DEMONSTRATIVE > DEFINITE ARTICLE (see, e.g., Heine – Kuteva 2004: 109-111).

Old Irish definite articles, however, display an interesting peculiarity – they can co-occur with indefinite referents (GOI §470). This has been variously explained (GOI §470, Ronan 2004) and Goldstein (2022) has recently proposed that they accompany referents that are the focal center of the discourse and also noun phrases that are a signal to the addressee to retrieve mental representation of the referent, which would be in line with Dryer’s (2014) reference hierarchy. In his analyses Goldstein has also applied Löbner’s (1985:298–299) distinction between pragmatically and semantically definite referents to identify the different types of definiteness that can trigger the use of the definite articles in Old Irish.

Our goal in this paper is to try to shed light on the grammaticalization processes that have led to the development of the definite articles of the Celtic languages. Although still quite limited in number, there are now more extant texts in continental Celtic languages, and they provide very interesting linguistic information. We have, therefore, collected and surveyed all the occurrences of demonstratives in the those languages: Celtiberian *so-* and *sto-* (Wodtko 2000: 338-334, Jordán 2019: 230-233, De Hoz in press), the various Gaulish forms (Lambert 1994: 66, Delamarre 2003), and maybe infixes Lepontic *-so-* (Lambert 1994: 66, *LexLep*, s.u. *tošokote*). We have analyzed all those instances in their context in relation to Dryer’s hierarchy and following Löbner’s frame and they appear to display an array of different uses. This allows for a comparison with the distribution of the definite article in Old Irish investigated by Goldstein (2022) and provides additional evidence for refining our understanding of the processes involved in the grammaticalization of Celtic definite articles.

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