

Guest Editors' Introduction

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The concept of specificity was introduced in the late 1960s by transferring the *de re-de dicto* distinction from definite NPs to indefinite NPs. A specific reading of an indefinite NP is pretheoretically characterized by the 'certainty of the speaker about the identity of the referent'. This characterization is also reflected in the semantic properties of specific indefinites. They are assumed to take wide scope, or alternatively, they are assumed to be referential terms. Specific indefinite NPs seem to have some properties of definite NPs; but they are still indefinite NPs. Thus, their analysis is a challenge for any NP-semantics. The 1970s and early 1980s showed a great interest in the semantics of specificity, which was analysed either as a scope relation, or as the contrast between two kinds of indefinite NPs: existential or referential. In the following years, the interest in this semantic category declined. With new analyses of indefinite NPs in terms of discourse semantics and the issue of 'narrow scope specific indefinites' the discussion about specificity provided a new challenge for semantic theory. Thus, specificity has received a new interest in the 1990s. A successful analysis of specific indefinites would account for a more fine-grained structure of indefinite NPs, and for the interaction of different parameters that determine the interpretation of indefinites, such as scope, domain restriction, information structure and referential dependency. Furthermore, such an analysis has also to account for the place of specificity in the interpretation process and its representation, as well. Specificity has also become a central concept in referential hierarchies, which rank expressions according to their referential properties. This volume contributes to the discussion of the interaction of specific indefinites with different parts of grammar and their formal analysis.

Three papers (Farkas, Portner and Stark) were originally presented at the workshop 'Information Structure and the Referential Status of Linguistic Expressions', which we organized during the Annual

Meeting of the German Society of Linguistics (DGfS) in Leipzig in February 2001. One paper (von Heusinger) was presented at our workshop 'Sentence Type and Specificity' at the Zentrum für Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft und Typologie (ZAS) in March 2001 in Berlin. One paper (Schwarzschild) was invited since it fits very well into this special issue on specificity.

Donka Farkas shows that there is great variety of indefinites, each coming with slightly different properties. The common thread uniting these distinctions is the notion of variation in value assignments for the variable introduced by the noun phrase. The distinctions concern the nature of the variation involved. Farkas first discusses the distinction between definite NPs and indefinite NPs, and proposes a dynamic parameter of 'determinacy of reference'. This parameter unifies the notion of uniqueness and familiarity. She then describes a typology of indefinites in terms of constraints imposed on evaluation properties of the variable they introduce. Finally, she provides observations on Hungarian, Lillooet Salish and English, that show that her constraint based account of special indefinites is to be preferred over ambiguity-based approaches.

Klaus von Heusinger argues against the traditional picture that takes specificity as a subcategorization of indefinite NPs. According to this view, definite NPs are used if both the speaker and hearer can identify the referent, specific indefinite NPs express that the speaker, but not the hearer can identify the referent, while non-specific indefinites indicate that none of them can identify the referent. He shows that definiteness (and specificity) cannot be reduced to the concept of identification. Instead, definiteness expresses the discourse pragmatic property of familiarity, while specificity mirrors a more fine-grained structure of the items used in the discourse. A specific NP indicates that the item is referentially anchored to another discourse object. This means that the referent of the specific expression is linked by a contextually salient function to the referent of another expression.

Paul Portner presents arguments based on data from Mandarin Chinese for the idea that specific interpretations of indefinites arise when the domain of quantification for the indefinite is a topic. In particular, when the sentence has a topic (overt or covert) which represents a small fixed set or function from contextual parameters to sets, and an indefinite quantifies over this set, the indefinite will seem to get a fixed reference and have wide scope. The Chinese distributive marker *dou* is especially helpful in developing this hypothesis because it shows various complex interactions with indefinites, topics, and

specificity; these interactions allow us to uncover evidence for crucial components of the analysis of specificity.

Roger Schwarzschild investigates the possibility that the apparent unique scope-taking abilities of indefinites can be explained in terms of quantifier domain restriction, without departing from the classical view of indefinites as existential quantifiers over individuals whose scope is syntactically constrained in the same way as other quantifiers. The key idea is that when the domain of a quantifier is reduced to a singleton set, it becomes effectively scopeless. Indefinites, on this view, are freer than other quantifiers to make use of this option. He argues that alternative accounts which put the action in the semantics or the syntax of indefinites still need a pragmatic mechanism of quantifier domain restriction, so that to demonstrate the necessity for such approaches, one needs to explain why domain restriction down to singletons is not possible.

Elisabeth Stark shows the necessity to assume an intermediate phase between the early facultative marking of important referents and fully grammaticalized article systems in the process of nominal determiner grammaticalization in Italian. In this intermediate phase, especially indefinite determiners seem to be distributed in a rather clear-cut way according to the specificity of the referents introduced by the respective noun phrases. Statistical evidence for this is drawn from the distribution of the indefinites *uno*, *alcuno*, *certo* and bare noun phrases in a corpus of three Old Tuscan novella collections. Specificity is understood as the semantic property of non-varying, operator independent interpretation of the variable introduced by an indefinite noun phrase.

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