(In)definiteness in natural languages
Day 4

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Example from (Fodor 1970)

    (1)   Mary believes that *a friend of mine* is a bus driver.

What are the two interpretations available for the NP?

Interpretations of indefinites

Possible paraphrases:

(2)   a.   Mary believes of a friend of mine that he is a bus driver.
           (specific)
      b.   Mary believes that a friend of mine is a bus driver
           (non-specific)

(3)   a.   There is a friend of mine that Mary believes that is a bus
           driver.
      b.   Mary believes that there is a friend of mine who is a bus driver.

Morphological marking of specificity

Russian (Example from Borik 2016)

(4)   a.   Maša xočet vyjti zamuž za **kakogo-to/odnogo**
        Maša wants marry   PREP some/one
        izvestnogo bankira.
        famous   banker

        'Maša wants to marry a/some/one famous banker.'
        (there is a specific banker)

     b.   Maša xočet vyjti zamuž za **kakogo-nibud'** izvestnogo
        Maša wants marry   PREP some   famous
        bankira.
        banker

        'Maša wants to marry a/any famous banker.'
        (there is no specific banker)

Morphological marking of specificity

Notice that the use of the morphological marking of (non-) specificity is not obligatory and a bare NP may be interpreted as having different scope, same as the indefinite NP in English.

(5) Maša xočet vyjti zamuž za   izvestnogo bankira.
     Maša wants marry   PREP famous   banker
     'Maša wants to marry a famous banker.'

Spanish (first introduced in Rivero 1975 for Spanish, extended to other Romance languages in Leonetti 2012)

(6)   a. Me interesa ver una guía que **tiene** mapas.
             me interests see a   guide that has.IND maps

      b. Me interesa ver una guía que **tenga** mapas.
             me interests see a   guide that has.SUBJ maps

         'I am interested in seeing a guide that contains maps.'

Morphological marking of specificity

Other languages (from Farkas & Brasoveanu 2021):

- "Non-specific" markers: *ku* in St'át'imcets (Matthewson 1999), *algún* in Spanish (Alonso-Ovalle and Menéndez-Benito 2010), *some* in English (Farkas 2002), *vreun* in Romanian (Fălăuş 2010), *un* NP *quelconque* in French (Jayez and Tovena 2002; 2006), *eyze* in Hebrew (Kagan 2007), *irgendein* in German (Kratzer 2005), *egy-egy* DPs in Hungarian, *câte*-marked indefinites in Romanian (Farkas 2001).

- "Specific" markers: determiners such as *a certain* and its close equivalents in other languages (Hintikka 1986), *this* indefinites (Prince 1981; Ionin 2006), partitives (Enç 1991), and the non-*ku* determiners in St'át'imcets (Matthewson 1999).

Types of specificity

According to Farkas (1994):

- scopal
- epistemic
- partitive

Scopal specificity

- Whether a nominal is interpreted within or outside the scope of certain operators or quantifiers

(Examples from Farkas & Brasoveanu 2021)

(7) a. *Every* girl admired *a* teacher.

b. Amanda *wants* to talk to *a* teacher.

c. *If* Chris had talked to *a* teacher, he would have had the facts earlier.

d. Bob did*n't* talk to *a* teacher about this.

Scopal specificity

To disambiguate:

(8)   a. Delia wants to buy an apartment in San Francisco.

       b. Delia wants to buy *a certain* apartment in San Francisco.

BUT: *A certain* NPs may occur within the scope of universal quantifiers (Hintikka 1986)

(9)   Every man forgot a certain date. Namely his wife's birthday.

Epistemic specificity

- It does not tie the specific/non-specific distinction to scope.
- Introduced in Fodor and Sag (1982)

(10)   *A student in Syntax 1* cheated on the exam.
    a.   The speaker has a particular individual in mind.   (specific)
    b.   The speaker asserts that there is a cheater among the relevant
         students.   (non-specific)

▶ referential vs. quantificational indefinites
▶ the distinction is made on the basis of the scopal properties of
   indefinites

Epistemic specificity

- Referential indefinites can be compared with proper names or demostratives:

(11) *That student / Tom* cheated on the exam.

- They do not 'take' scope, they are interpreted as having wide scope simply in virtue of being referential.
- Quantificational indefinites (like other quantifiers) do not scope put of islands.

(12) a. Pauline has to talk to every diplomat who was in touch with a Chinese dissident.
         $\exists > \forall; \forall > \exists$

      b. Pauline has to talk to a diplomat who was in touch with every Chinese dissident.
         $\exists > \forall; *\forall > \exists$

- The ability to take different scopes is an illusion.
- Lexical ambiguity theory: two indefinite articles in the lexicon.
- If indefinites don't take scope, then it would be impossible to find a sentence with an 'intermediate' scope, but they exist Farkas (1981) and Abusch (1994).

(13)   Every professor rewarded every student who read a book on the
        semantics-pragmatics interface.

(14)   a. a book > every professor > every student
              There is a particular book on the spi such that every professor
              rewarded every student who read this book.

          b. every professor > a book > every student
              For every professor there is a certain book on the spi such that
              the professor rewarded every student who read this book

          c. every professor > every student > a book
              Every professor rewards every student who reads (any) book
              on the spi.

(15)   Every professor rewarded every student who read a book.

    a.   Every professor rewarded every student who read a book on the semantics-pragmatics interface that was discussed recently on the Linguist List.

    b.   Every professor rewarded every student who read a book that she had recommended.

    c.   Every professor rewarded every student who read some book.

Epistemic specificity

- Karttunen's (1976) idea: specificity is closely related to the 'referential intentions of the speaker'

- The speaker has a particular individual in mind.

- A specific indefinite makes reference to an entity known to the speaker and/or inherently identifiable.

Epistemic specificity

Note: There's also anti-specificity.

- Under this reading the speaker does not want the referent of the NP to be identified by the listener.
- von Heusinger (2011): the absence of any referential intent on the side of the speaker.
- Giannakidou & Quer (2013), Alonso-Ovalle & Menéndez-Benito (2013); Jayez & Tovena (2013); Etxeberria & Giannakidou (2017); Espinal & Cyrino (2021).

Some languages have markers for anti-specificity.

(16) Russian

> Maša xočet vyjti zamuž za **koe-kakogo** izvestnogo
> Maša wants marry PREP **anti-sp** famous
> bankira.
> banker

'Maša wants to marry a/one famous banker.'
... But I can't tell you which one yet.

Epistemic specificity

- Scopal specificity and epistemic specificity are related, but distinct phenomena.
- *Some*-indefinites in English
    - Epistemically non-specific.
    - Scopally ambiguous.
- *Certain*-indefinites in English
    - Epistemically specific.
    - Wide scope (although there are cases where these indefinites have a narrow scope).

Partitive specificity

- Enç (1991)
- Empirical goal: to characterize the class of NPs that receive Accusative case-marking in Turkish: definites and some indefinites.

(17) Ali bir piyano-yu kiralamak istiyor.
      Ali one piano-ACC to-rent   wants
      'Ali wants to rent a certain piano.'

(18) Ali bir piyano kiralamak istiyor.
      Ali one piano to-rent   wants
      'Ali wants to rent a (non-specific) piano.'

  - Out-of-the-blue: the scopal properties are the same as in English
  - (17) is also compatible with the narrow scope reading if there are two pianos between which Ali is trying to decide.

Partitive specificity

- An NP is partitive if its referent is a subset of a previously introduced referent.

(19) Susan wants to marry *one of Laura's brothers*.   (overtly partitive)

(20) A group of youngsters appeared on the stage. *A girl* began to sing.   (covertly partitive)

- Partitive specificity is independent of both scopal and epistemic specificity.

1. scopal specificity, defined in terms of wide vs narrow scope relative to particular operators (a heterogeneous notion due to the nature of operators)
2. epistemic specificity, defined in terms of whether the speaker has a particular entity in mind or not
3. partitive specificity, defined in terms of whether the referent of the NP is a subset of a familiar set of entities or not.

A note on *a certain N*

- It doesn't always have a wide scope.
- It's not always epistemic.
- It may be partitive but doesn't have to be (Enç 1991)

Example from Farkas (2002):

(21)   Borges closed his eyes and saw *a certain number of birds*. He
        quickly reopened them without having counted the birds he saw.

- Farkas (2002): The referent has to be in principle identifiable even if
  in the actual context there is no individual who can identify it $\rightarrow$
  Maybe another type of specificity: identifiability.

A note on indefinite *this*-NPs

Prince 1981

(22)   There is *this* giant spider in the cupboard.

- They introduce discourse referents.

Example from Geurts (1999):

(23)   ? Yesterday our little daughter brought [a giant spider]ᵢ into the house, and now there is [this giant spider]ᵢ in the cupboard.

- It's not possible for the *this*-NP to refer back to the previously introduced *spider*. It functions as an existential expression.
- *This*-indefinites behave more like specific that non-specific: they generally take wide scope.

A note on indefinite *this*-NPs

(24)   If this giant spider is in the cupboard, Betty will go berserk.

    a. There is a giant spider at large, and if it's still in the cupboard, Betty will go berserk.

    b. If there is a giant spider in the cupboard, Betty will go berserk.

- (24a) seem to be a better paraphrase.
- Specificity and definiteness are related phenomena.

Bare NPs

Bare plurals in English

- BPls are different from ordinary indefinites.
- Empirical evidence: scope.

(25)   a. Mary didn't buy books. (only narrow)

        b. Mary didn't buy a book. (wide and narrow?)

        c. Mary didn't buy some books. (only wide)

(26)   a. John is looking for a policeman. (both scopes)

        b. John is looking for some policemen. (both scopes?)

        c. John is looking for policemen. (only narrow scope)

(27)   a. Some lego pieces are in each box. (only wide scope?)

        b. A lego piece is in each box. (wide or narrow?)

        c. Lego pieces are in each box. (only narrow scope)

Chierchia's (1998) analysis
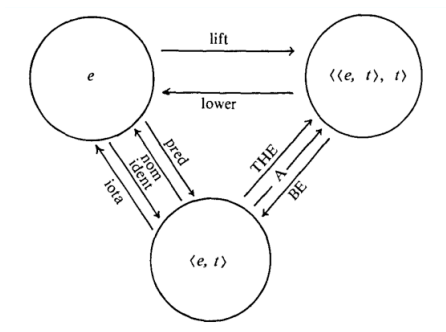
- Carlson's (1977): BPls in English have a generic and an existential reading

(28) a. Dogs are common.   *generic*

      b. Dogs bark.   *generic*

      c. Dogs are barking.   *existential*

- Chierchia (1998): Bare plurals in English are (proper) names of kinds. Kinds correspond to maximal individuals. Even though they are the same semantic object as definite plurals, they are of a different *sort*.

- NPs may be properties ($< e, t >$), individuals (e) and quantifiers ($<< e, t >, t >$). Their denotation may shift according to certain principles.

Chierchia's (1998) analysis of English BPIs

(29) Type-shifting operators

    a. ι: properties to individuals (deriving definite NPs)

    b. $\cap$: properties to kinds (deriving kind-referring NPs)

    c. $\exists$: properties to existential quantifiers (deriving indefinite NPs)

(30) *Semantic derivation of plural definites*

$$\iota \left\{ \begin{array}{ccc} & a + b + c & \\ a + b & a + c & b + c \end{array} \right\} = a + b + c$$

such that a + b + c belongs to the set of individuals

(31) *Semantic derivation of kinds*

$$\cap \left\{ \begin{array}{ccc} & a + b + c & \\ a + b & a + c & b + c \end{array} \right\} = a + b + c$$

such that a + b + c belongs to the set of kinds

(32) English
(*The) birds evolved from **(*the)** dinosaurs.

(33) Spanish

*(Los) pájaros evolucionaron de ***(los)** dinosaurios.
the.M.PL birds evolved from the.M.PL dinosaurs

(34) Russian

Pticy proizošli ot **dinozavrov**.
birds.NOM evolved from dinosaurs.GEN

Chierchia's (1998) analysis of English BPls

Chierchia (1998), Dayal (2004): languages lexicalize operators differently.

(35) a. English lexicalizes ι but not $^\cap$ by the definite article, $\exists$ by the indefinite article

   b. Spanish lexicalizes both ι and $^\cap$ by the definite article, $\exists$ by the indefinite article

   c. Russian doesn't lexicalize ι, $^\cap$, or $\exists$ as it has no articles. (The type shift is applied covertly).

Chierchia's (1998) analysis of English BPls

Derivation of existential meanings for BPls in English

- Bare plurals are *always* kind-denoting.
- The covert operator $^\cap$ is applied.
- How can they combine with individual-level predicates?

(36) John collected mushrooms yesterday.

    a. Kind interpretation:
       John collected $^\cap$(mushrooms) yesterday.
       #John collected "the mushroom-kind" yesterday.'

    b. Intuitive interpretation: $\exists x$: x is a mushroom (plural object)
       and John collected x yesterday

- Chierchia's proposal: kinds are mapped back to properties that gave rise to them by applying $^\cup$.

Chierchia's (1998) analysis of English BPls

- Derived Kind Predication (DKP)

(37) $\exists x$: x is in [$^{\cup\cap}$(mushrooms)] and John collected x yesterday, where [$^{\cup\cap}$(mushrooms)] could be read as the set of instantiations of the mushroom-kind.

Next time bare NPs in languages without articles