

Specificity in certain Articles of some Languages of the World

Dominik Schlechtweg, Universität Stuttgart

In the second half of the 20th century philosophical and linguistic scientific discussion became more and more interested in the semantic category of "Specificity". In English there was immense work on indefinites with respect to specificity. Scholars observed two clearly distinguishable readings of English indefinites in opaque contexts, one allowing for existential entailment and referential substitution and the other not as illustrated in (1).

(1) Maria wants to marry a Swede.

i. Maria wants to Marry a Swede, namely Eric.

ii. Maria wants to marry a Swede, but she doesn't even know one yet.

However, English hasn't grammaticalized the function of specificity in it's indefinite articles, since it is merely the context evoking non-specific or specific readings. With respect to specificity the English indefinite article a is ambiguous. Nevertheless, if specificity is really an ontological category of our thinking, there could or rather should be other languages encoding a distinction between specific and non-specific individuals into different morphemes possibly being what one would call "articles". This is where our job begins. We are trying to find those languages and describe the use of the articles with the respective kind of specificity encoded. It can be said, that we do part of the empirical research grounding a theoretical distinction in the languages of the world.

I will present some languages scholars suspected to encode specificity into their article system.