

Epistemic Specificity: An Example of, and a Guide Towards, a Communication-based Theory of Linguistic Meaning*

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The topic of this talk are epistemically specific indefinites. An indefinite NP counts as *used specifically* when the speaker has a particular individual in mind about which she wants to express some proposition, but chooses to use an indefinite for this purpose, typically, in order to signal to her audience that they are not expected to be able to identify who or what that individual is. This notion of epistemic specificity is *speaker-oriented* in the sense that it is part of the speaker's intentions. Matching it is an audience-oriented notion, that of *taking* the speaker to have made an epistemically specific use of an indefinite, and of interpreting that indefinite accordingly.

The talk will focus on two aspects of epistemic specificity: 1. An account of what interpreting an indefinite as epistemically specific amounts to; and what such an account presupposes about the nature and architecture of semantic theory. — Such a theory must be able to account for the interpretations that utterance recipients construct for the utterances they receive, roughly along the lines pursued by Discourse Representation Theory. We will illustrate how such a theory works for some examples of utterances containing epistemically specific indefinites.

2. The question when, if ever, epistemic specificity is explicitly marked. Simple indefinites in English with the determiner *a* or *some* are unmarked, and their use and interpretation as epistemically specific is therefore arguably a matter to be dealt with at the level of pragmatics. But in other languages (Russian and Romanian among them) specific indefinites can or must be morphologically marked. In such cases epistemic specificity would seem to have to be part of semantics. We will relate this apparent difference to some general observations about the nature of semantics, its demarcation from pragmatics, and the ways in which semantics and pragmatics interact.

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