
Inferable and partitive indefinites in topic position

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Freitag
 10.03.2017
 12:30 – 13:00
 B3 1, 0.14

AG2

Indefinite noun phrases can appear in topic position only when they are strong, specific, or discourse linked (Portner and Yabushita 2001). We argue that the type of discourse linking itself also influences the acceptability. We distinguish two types of linking: (i) inferential or conceptual linking, the defining property of inferable indefinites, and (ii) contextual linking, the defining property for partitives. Both parameters have two values (+/-), which yields four conditions:

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|-----|----|-----------------|--|
| (1) | a. | -concept (NONE) | <i>The police started an investigation after the scandal. A car dealer...</i> |
| | | -concept | |
| | b. | +concept (INFR) | <i>The government started a support scheme for art. A sculptor...</i> |
| | | -concept | |
| | c. | -concept (PART) | <i>There was a group of people standing near the entrance. A boy...</i> |
| | | +concept | |
| | d. | +concept (BOTH) | <i>There was a staff meeting in the newspaper. A reporter...</i> |
| | | +concept | |

We used Turkish as our target language, due to its clear indication of topichood and indefiniteness. We tested the acceptability of an indefinite direct object in contexts like (1a-d) in topic, i.e. sentence-initial, position and compared it to the acceptability of that indefinite in the canonical, i.e. immediately pre-verbal, position. Our results demonstrated that partitive indefinites (PART) are accepted in topic position, while unlinked indefinites (NONE) and inferable indefinites (INFR) are not. Surprisingly, when the partitive relation was also coupled by an inference (BOTH), the indefinite behaves like an inferable indefinite, rather than a partitive, i.e. it was not accepted in topic position. We account for this observation by proposing that the conceptual relation that licenses the inference overrides the contextually given part-whole relation expressed by a partitive.

References: • Portner, P. and Yabushita, K. (2001): Specific indefinites and the information structure theory of topics. *Journal of Semantics*. 18, 271-297.