

# Definiteness in the absence of uniqueness

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The purpose of this paper is to examine what kind of concepts stand (or do not stand) behind the apparent definiteness of Russian bare nominals. A classical analysis of definiteness (Frege 1892, Strawson 1950) implies that definiteness is associated with the uniqueness presupposition, which is built into the meaning of the definite article, as in English. If the uniqueness presupposition in languages without articles is part of the semantic contribution of the article, in the absence of the article we do not expect any uniqueness effects. If uniqueness is built into a semantic operator (a  $\iota$  operator), we can still expect uniqueness effects associated with definites to appear in languages without articles, assuming that the same semantic operator triggers definiteness in all languages. Coppock & Beaver (2015) allow us to explicitly distinguish these two options. Following them, we assume that definiteness as uniqueness is associated with the  $\iota$  shift.

We argue that in Russian uniqueness cannot be the concept underlying definiteness. Compare examples from English (1) and Russian (2):

- (1) **The author** of this book gave an interview. #The other author/#the second author/another author appeared in a TV show.
- (2) **Автор** этой книги дал интервью Новой газете.  
author this.GEN book.GEN gave interview to NG.  
*Другой автор* выступил в эфире Эха Москвы.  
Other author appeared on radio 'EM'

The crucial contrast is that in (1) the uniqueness of the author cannot be overruled and *another author* can only refer to *another* author of *another* book. In Russian, however, *другой автор* (other author) can refer to another author of the same book, cancelling any apparent uniqueness effects associated with the first subject in (2). This suggests that uniqueness in Russian is not semantically encoded. This, in turn, means that the *iota* shift, an operator with a universal semantic contribution, does not apply in Russian.

Note that other (i.e., not uniqueness-based) types of definites do exist in Russian. We consider the following sources of definiteness in Russian. First, anaphoricity, when the referent is provided in the previous context. Second, topicality, which strongly favours a definite interpretation (cf. Reinhart 1981). Finally, unique objects like *the sun* are known to be unique in the world. Their uniqueness, however, is not semantically derived or determined, it is simply 'reflected' by means of the definite article. In Russian, there is nothing to reflect the unique status of such objects in the world, so they appear bare.

**References:** • Coppock, E. & D. Beaver. 2015. Definiteness and determinacy. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 38. 377–435. • Frege, G. 1892. Über Sinn und Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift für Philosophie und philosophische Kritik* 100. 25–50. Reinhart, T. 1981. Definite NP anaphora and C-command domains. *Linguistic Inquiry* 12(4). 605–635. • Strawson, P. 1950. On referring. *Mind* 59. 320–344.