

The definite interpretation carried by accusative is an implicature – Evidence from Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian

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In many Slavic languages, both accusative (acc) and genitive (gen) case can be used for objects of transitive verbs (e.g., Borschev 2008, Kagan, 2010; Khrizman, 2014). Novel data from Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS) show that while acc contributes the meaning that the amount of the discourse referent is familiar, gen triggers the interpretation that the amount is non-familiar. We analyze both inferences as scalar implicatures.

The non-canonical uses of gen (acc/gen alternation) is possible in BCS with the so-called intensional genitive, genitive of negation and partitive Genitive, the last one is exemplified below:

- (1) *Imam/Nemam vodu/vode haljine/haljina kašiku/*kašike.*
1SG.have/NEG water_{ACC}/water_{GEN} dresses_{ACC}/dresses_{GEN} spoon_{ACC}/spoon_{GEN}
'I (don't) have water/ dresses/ spoon.'

In previous literature on Russian, acc was argued to convey the definite interpretation of the discourse referent (Franks 1995; Bailyn 2004; Kagan 2005, 2010; Khrizman 2014). While acc nouns were analyzed as being of type *e* and hence referential and/or specific, gen were analyzed as being of type *<e,t>* and thus non-referential and unspecified (e.g., Borschev et al. 2008). By contrast, we propose that both gen and acc nouns in BCS are of the same type but they differ in the implicatures they trigger. The results of our fieldwork show that the choice between acc and gen in BCS relates to the (un)familiarity of the amount of the entities: gen is preferred in contexts with unfamiliar amount/number, acc is preferred for familiar amount/ number. We propose that the inferences of both acc and gen arise as scalar implicatures, as both can be canceled. In the talk, we will present the formal implementation of this idea. In particular, we will discuss the meaning of acc and gen, their competitors and how by Gricean reasoning, the inference that the amount of the entities is familiar/unfamiliar is derived. This novel analysis of the meaning of acc and gen in BCS as a scalar implicature contributes to the ongoing discussion on the semantics of acc/gen alternation in Slavic languages and the definiteness in a cross-linguistic perspective.

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