Squibs
and
Discussion

Some Remarks on Specificity
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Enç (1991) offers an analysis of scopal specificity in terms of covert partitivity; NPs interpreted specifically are those that denote members or subsets of existing discourse groups. Enç applies her analysis to two additional cases in English: NPs containing the adjective *certain* are claimed to be specific (although here the analysis is modified; see below), and focus NPs in existential sentences are claimed to be nonspecific.1 There are problems for the semantics of this analysis in all three cases.

1 Scopal Specifics

The covert-partitive analysis does not adequately describe scopally specific NPs (i.e., indefinite NPs interpreted with wide scope with respect to negation or other sentence operators). There are failures of fit in both directions: indefinites with a clearly specific interpretation that do not fall under the covert-partitive analysis, and NPs that do fall under the partitive analysis that are clearly not specific.

Consider first the following examples that Enç gives to introduce the problem ((1a–c) are Enç’s (3a–c)):

(1) a. Sarah didn’t see a *hanger* lying on the floor, and she tripped and fell.
   b. Helen must beat an *athlete from UCLA who is trained by the Dogar brothers*.
   c. Jack wants to train with a *famous weight lifter who has won many prizes*.

Each of these sentences seems perfectly acceptable in a context in which no sets have been mentioned that contain the respec-

1 Enç also discusses case-marking phenomena in Turkish. Some of these facts are reviewed in Abbott, in press.
tive denotata. In fact, they may occur discourse-initially, or in response to a very general discourse initiator as in (2) (for (1a)).

(2) What’s the matter with Sarah?

On the other hand, we also find examples like those in (3), which are clearly nonspecific and yet would meet Enç’s conditions for partitivity.

(3) a. If you see one of my students at the lecture, please ask them to tell me about it.
   b. They would find, at most, two of the items they are looking for in any of those stores (so they should go to Meijer’s, where they could find them all).
   c. Mary wouldn’t tell any of the secrets.

The traditional scope analysis seems to provide a better characterization of this kind of specificity. Thus, each of the italicized NPs in (1a–c), understood as specific, is also interpreted outside the scope of the sentence operators, whereas the nonspecific NPs in (3a–c) are within the scope of other operators.

2 Certain

The main reason Enç gives for abandoning the scope analysis of specificity is the ability of NPs with certain to be interpreted within the scope of quantifiers or other sentence operators, as in the following examples ((4a–b) are Enç’s (4) and (5)):

(4) a. Each husband had forgotten a certain date—his wife’s birthday.
   b. For every committee, the dean must appoint a certain student to represent the students’ point of view.

The argument is the following:

Given these facts, there are two options. The first is to maintain the hypothesis that specific NPs have wide scope with respect to operators, but to reject the idea that indefinites with adjectives such as certain are specific. If this

2 An anonymous referee suggests that the revision in Enç’s analysis for certain NPs will also allow the examples in (1). However, it is not clear that this is so. First, Enç seems to clearly distinguish NPs containing certain (which she calls “relational” and for which the revised analysis was proposed) from others (called “partitive”). Second, the revision in question (following Hintikka (1986)) invokes a salient function linking referents of the certain NP with elements of the context as in the examples in (4) below. However, no such salient function is available for the examples in (1). And third, as noted in the text, the sentences in (1) can appear either discourse-initially or after a very neutral initiator such as (2), so in these cases there is nothing prior in the discourse to link the NPs to.
view is adopted, one independent way of identifying specific NPs is lost. The second option is to give up the hypothesis that specific NPs need to have wide scope and to construct an analysis of specificity that is independent of scope relations. This article will pursue the second alternative. (Enç 1991:3, footnote omitted)

The reasoning is only as sound as the crucial assumption that the occurrence of certain is a reliable diagnostic for the desired property, but there are at least two reasons for questioning that assumption. First, the certain NPs in these examples do not establish ordinary discourse referents (a traditional diagnostic for specificity). Second, certain NPs are problematic from Enç’s point of view because they do not fit the partitive definition of specificity given above.3

Enç recognizes this problem and opts for an analysis along the lines proposed by Hintikka (1986), according to which certain NPs in effect invoke a salient function mapping the referents of their “antecedent” onto their own referents. Thus, for (4a) the function would associate each husband with his wife’s birthday. This kind of example is also problematic for the traditional scope analysis, but the solution proposed by Hintikka does not seem inconsistent with the traditional analysis. Thus, examples like (4) and (5) call for supplementation in either case.

Enç gives another example, however, which does seem more problematic for the traditional scope analysis ((5) is Enç’s (7)).

(5) John believes that there are unicorns living in his backyard. He claims that he can distinguish each unicorn from the others, and has even given them names. He believes that a certain unicorn is responsible for destroying his roses, and wants to catch him.

We are not able to invoke Hintikka’s function analysis for cases like this since there is no obvious relation between John and the unicorn in question that could serve to pick it out. (This may be an example of what Hintikka calls the “secondary usage” of a certain.) However, on closer examination this example seems to be equally problematic for Enç’s analysis. Enç assumes a semantics of the type proposed by Heim (see Heim 1982, Kamp 1981), which ultimately assigns truth conditions to sentences that are equivalent in most cases to those assigned traditionally. Thus, it is not clear that Enç’s analysis is in any better position when it comes to assigning (5) a reading that is specific while not entailing the existence of unicorns. We cannot simply assume that a file card for a group of unicorns is added to the discourse context; we need to worry about how that file card

3 A third problem with certain NPs from Enç’s point of view is their ability to occur in existential sentences. See the discussion below.
is going to be matched up against sequences of individuals, in other words what exactly the file change potential of this example (and hence its truth conditions) is going to amount to—something Enç does not go into.\(^4\)

### 3 Existential Sentences

Enç asserts that her covert-partitive analysis makes the correct generalization about existential sentences—namely, that the NPs it classifies as specific are exactly those that cannot occur in existentials.\(^5\) One counterexample to this claim is suggested by an example she gives (p. 8). Consider the following discourse:

1. Several children entered the museum.
2. There were three girls and one boy, and they all wanted to see the dinosaurs.

On Enç’s view the existential sentence in (7) should be ungrammatical, since the NPs in it denote respectively a subset and a member of the group introduced in sentence (6), but it is perfectly fine. Note that it is even possible to have an explicit partitive in an existential, as the following example shows:\(^6\)

1. Remember those bats that got loose last night? There was one of them in the fridge this morning!

Enç herself notes two other kinds of examples that pose problems for this claim given the rest of her account. One is shown in (9) (Enç’s (46), attributed to David Pesetsky),

1. There are the following counterexamples to Streck’s theory . . .

where the postcopular NP is specific under her analysis.\(^7\) The

\(^4\) The “rigidity” analysis of specificity proposed in Abbott, in press, according to which specific NPs denote constant individual concepts, appears able to handle examples like (5).

\(^5\) Enç states that “[t]he NPs defined as nonspecific in this article are exactly those that are allowed to occur in existential sentences” (1991:14). Although nonspecific is never explicitly defined, presumably it is to be taken to mean ‘not specific’, where, as noted above, specific NPs in this sense are characterized by Enç as those denoting a subset or member of a discourse referent (1991:7).

\(^6\) Although some partitives in English can appear freely in existentials, not all of them can. This is apparently a difference between English and Dutch (see de Hoop 1991). For more discussion of this issue, see Abbott 1993.

\(^7\) This follows from two other claims in the article: that “[n]ames, pronouns, and definite descriptions are definite NPs” and that “(22) [the definition of specificity] ensures that all definites are specific” (p. 9). The first of these claims is, in turn, a principled one in this context, the principle being that “the definiteness of the NP can be determined from the determiner in languages like English” (p. 16). (For some problems with this claim, see Abbott 1992.)
other problematic examples are ones containing NPs with *certain*, such as the following (Enç's (67)):

(10) There is a certain man at the door who claims to be your cousin from Albania.

As we have seen, although *certain* NPs do not fit the covert-partitive analysis of specificity, the assumption that they are nevertheless specific is crucial to Enç's argument and the analysis itself is modified to include them.

There are other problems with the claim that it is exactly nonspecific NPs that can occur in existential sentences. As noted above, specificity in indefinite NPs has traditionally been associated with the establishment of a permanent discourse referent (see, e.g., Karttunen 1976). Clear examples of nonspecific indefinites either do not establish a discourse referent, as in (11), or establish only a temporary one, within the scope of other operators, as in (12).

(11) ?Sue couldn't find a pencil that would work. *It was on the floor.*

(12) a. Kim is looking for any remaining errors.
    b. . . . *They* must be corrected.
    c. ? . . . *They* are on page 6.

However, indefinites in (positive) existential sentences typically do establish permanent discourse referents, as in (13).

(13) a. There's a pencil that works sitting on the desk. Shall I hand it to you?
    b. There's a millionaire living in the mansion downtown. *She* drives a Rolls.

Note too the naturalness of "indefinite-*this*" NPs, which are argued by Prince (1981) to be unambiguously specific, in existential sentences.

(14) a. There are these great sweaters on sale at Meijer's.
    b. There was this weird friend of my sister's at the party.

In fact, introducing new entities into a discourse context seems to be one of the main functions of existential sentences, and whether or not these entities are related to existing discourse entities (either as members or subsets of existing discourse sets or by some other relation, explicit or inferred) seems to be simply irrelevant. Hence, Enç's suggestion (16) that the "definite-ness effect" in existentials ought really to be understood as a "specificity effect" does not seem to be well supported whether
specificity is understood partivitely or scopally or in terms of discourse referents.8

References


8 Of course, ultimately we would want an explanation for any constraints on NPs in existential sentences, and this may be the source of this problem for Enç's suggestion. Enç hypothesizes that specific NPs (in her partitive sense) are ruled out of existentials because they "presuppose existence, and we may assume that presupposition of existence is incompatible with the assertion of existence" (p. 14). The problem is that Enç does not say exactly what it is whose existence is being presupposed. One can introduce a discourse group without specifying its members. The existence of the group is then presupposed, but not the existence of any unmentioned members. Hence, such members may be introduced with a specific (and implicitly partitive) NP in an existential sentence as in (7) above, and indeed, there is no reason not to expect them to be. See Abbott 1992, 1993, and the works cited there, for more extensive discussion of the so-called definiteness effect in existential sentences.
Binding, Expletives, and Levels

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Chomsky’s (1993) leading empirical arguments against the level of syntactic representation known as S-Structure come from the domain of the binding theory. Chomsky shows that the case for S-Structure application of the binding theory collapses with the reintroduction of a version of the “copy theory” approach to movement (see Chomsky 1955) and that an inspection of the properties of certain idiomatic constructions with respect to binding forces the conclusion that the binding theory should in fact be operative solely at the LF interface. In tandem with the abolition of D-Structure, this then makes it possible to reduce the inventory of linguistic levels to those whose adoption is a “virtual conceptual necessity,” namely, the interpretive components PF and LF. In this squib I present evidence from the domain of the binding properties of expletive there constructions that, on Chomsky’s own assumptions concerning the LF representation of such constructions, would be incompatible with the view that the binding theory applies exclusively at LF. These binding facts will be advanced as evidence against an “expletive replacement” approach to there expletive constructions. Toward the end of the squib I will sketch the contours of an alternative analysis of there constructions in terms of there raising (represented in Moro 1989, 1990, Hoekstra and Mulder 1990, and Zwart 1992), which is compatible with the empirical facts and with the desirable theoretical view that the binding theory applies at LF only, and which is supported on independent grounds. A brief discussion of the binding properties of Norwegian nominal expletive constructions closes the squib.

English raising constructions with an indefinite subject may surface in two ways: either the subject may raise to Spec IP, as in (1a), or it may fail to do so, in which case the Spec IP position is occupied by the expletive there, as in (1b).

(1) a. Some applicants seem to me to be eligible for the job.
   b. There seem to me to be some applicants eligible for the job.

When we now replace me in the examples in (1) by the reciprocal

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