

Bare Singular Indefinites in Argument Positions: The Case of Russian

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It has been assumed that Russian is an articleless language, in which bare singular NPs can occur in argument positions. However, although NPs are not explicitly marked for (in)definiteness in Russian, their interpretation with respect to (in)definiteness must be determined in the context. In this paper, I focus on the conditions that trigger the indefinite interpretation of bare argument NPs. While the definite interpretation depends on the broader discourse and is not subject to further restrictions, the indefinite interpretation seems to be restricted with respect to the information structure of the sentence. Bare NPs referring to individuals may be interpreted as indefinite only when they appear in focus position but not in background position. To account for this restriction, I assume (i) that bare NPs in Russian are variables, which may get bound by whatever operator is in the sentence to bind them (analogous to Heim's 1982 analysis of English indefinites) and (ii) that the focus part provides the default existential binding of variables. For the latter assumption I modify the Mapping Hypothesis by Diesing (1992), which is based on the syntactic partition of a sentence in NPs and VPs, and argue instead that the semantic partition of a sentence into a restrictive clause and a nuclear scope is determined by the information structure in Russian.