

Differential Object Marking in Spanish as a Scalar Implicature?

Marco García García

From an utterance like *Juan found a ring yesterday* it can be derived that neither Juan's ring nor another discourse-prominent ring is meant. Instead, the utterance seems to imply that the ring is an unknown, i.e. not-specific one. Obviously this conclusion is not based on a logical implication but rather on a pragmatic inference, i.e. a conversational implicature which can be accounted for with reference to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and the corresponding Maxims of Conversation. According to the (first) Maxim of Quantity, which postulates that a conversational contribution should be as informative as required, it is possible to reconstruct that in the example mentioned above there is no reference to a ring that belongs to Juan. Otherwise the speaker would not have been as informative as required. Following Gazdar (1979a) this type of inferences can be seen as scalar implicatures, which result from the fact that a relevant and logically stronger utterance, that could have been made in a given context, has *not* been uttered. Thus it is conversationally implicated that a logically stronger assertion like *Juan found his ring yesterday* is not true. Apparently an analogous explanation can also be sketched for differential object marking in Spanish ('DO+a'). Comparing utterances like *Juan busca una secretaria* ('Juan is looking for a secretary') vs. *Juan busca a una secretaria* ('Juan is looking for a specific secretary'), the latter assertion with *a* is obviously the more informative one, since it makes reference to a specific referent, i.e. to a specific secretary. Consequently, the former utterance without *a* induces the interpretation that the reference to a particular secretary does not hold. The conclusion that leads to this interpretation can principally, also be reconstructed as a scalar quantity implicature. Taking a closer look at the theory of conversational implicatures on the one hand and approaches which relate differential object marking to specificity, animacy and definiteness (cf. e.g. Heusinger & Kaiser 2003, Leonetti 2003) on the other, the aim of the talk is to expand the outlined analysis by questioning its explanatory force.