

Why do we mark specificity?

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My talk will address functional questions about the semantic category *specificity*. My point of departure is the observation that special morphosyntactic forms, like the spanish preposition *a* or the turkish case suffix *yu*, seem to always encode [+specific] expressions, often in interaction with the referential property [+animate]. In the relevant literature, no explicit forms are discussed that mark [-specific] expressions. If this reflects a cross-linguistic fact, one would deduce from markedness theory that non-specificity is the default case in human discourse. This is striking, since intuitively we would expect that we rather speak about referents known to us or to some other referent in discourse.

I will try to discuss the functional motivation of developing [+specific] NPs by creating language games that combine the three relevant categories of animacy, definiteness and specificity in different ways.