

Why not be more specific? On the thin line between identifiability and indeterminacy
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This study analyses the use of deictic and indeterminate constructions for speech participant profiling and reveals the importance of (inter)subjectivity in this respect. Whereas deictics (expressed in verb inflection, and subject and object pronouns) are more prototypically associated with speech participant profiling, it also appears that indeterminate constructions play a significant part (including generic 2nd person forms, generic *uno* 'one', (medio)passive *se*-constructions, periphrastic passives and non-specific 3rd person plural subject). I examine both the referential scope of these forms and the conceptualisation they entail. The analysis is based on a corpus of Spanish multi-person interaction, including informal interaction (UAM), TV-debates (UAM) and parliamentary debates (Congreso 2001 & 2005).

At first glance, deictic forms and indeterminate constructions seem to radically differ as to identifiability and referentiality. Deictic forms are considered given in context (Chafe 1987), whereas indeterminate constructions remain vague as to the understood agent. However, two major observations are to be made. In the first place, deictics (especially plurals) present conceptual vagueness. In the second place, I show by means of a data-driven analysis that the referential scope of vague forms is often delimited at the level of the utterance or the discourse context, thus creating a more precise interpretation, e.g. by means of *En España* 'in Spain' in (1).

(1) *En España se besa a los hijos...* (UAM) 'In Spain, children are being kissed...'

Since the analysis in terms of referential scope points at referential overlap between deictic and indeterminate constructions, it calls for a more nuanced view of (the importance of) identifiability and vagueness in speech participant profiling. I therefore focus on other issues at stake in the choice for a deictic vs. an indeterminate construction, namely the conceptualisation entailed and differences in terms of (inter)subjective effect (Benveniste 1966, Lyons 1982, Traugott 2003).

Through an analysis of the predicates with which these forms are found to pattern in the data, I show that singular deictic forms are closely linked to the explicit expression of (inter)subjective stance. Both plural deictics and indeterminate constructions, however, are preferred constructions for the expression of deontic meanings. Their vagueness permits a profiling of the event where the addresser/addressee is not solely responsible for realising the modal expression. While not explicitly profiling the coparticipants' attitudes or beliefs, this conceptualisation implies an (inter)subjective choice as it pays attention to the addresser/addressee's attitudes.

In conclusion, the analysis of how the referential scope is realised at discourse-level (rather than at the level of separate forms or constructions) in spoken interaction reveals new dimensions in the analysis of deictic vs. indeterminate constructions: not only identifiability but also the (inter)subjective choices made in interactional discourse prove to be crucial.

References

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