

Split-scope definites in Russian

Anita Soloveva

Computer Vision Engineer in Diagnocat Inc.

Abstract

In this talk, I focus on split-scope definites in Russian (*the rabbit in the hat* in a context with a plurality of rabbits and hats but only one rabbit in one hat), a construction that has not so far been studied. It presents fresh evidence for the importance of uniqueness in the semantics of Russian bare singulars.

As background, Soloveva, Polinsky and Dayal (to appear) find that: (i) Russian bare singulars are kind terms and are acceptable in generic statements, (ii) Russian bare singulars display the uniqueness and anaphoric potential typical of definites, (iii) Russian bare singulars can introduce new entities and are in that respect like indefinites, but they cannot take existential wide scope over other operators nor can they have partitive specific readings and are unlike indefinites in that respect. These conclusions are based on the (in)definiteness Questionnaire of Dayal (to appear).

While the inability of Russian bare singulars to take wide scope has been confirmed by Geist (2010), the reliance on uniqueness claimed in Dayal (2004) has been questioned by several authors, most recently in an experimental study by Simik and Demian (2020). In this talk I do not address the results and conclusions discussed in that paper. I focus instead on expanding the empirical landscape in which we observe that Russian bare singulars have a uniqueness requirement by considering a new type of construction.