Ana Aguilar-Guevara

Weak definites

Semantics, lexicon and pragmatics

This dissertation studies definite noun phrases like (reading) the newspaper, (answering) the phone, and (going to) the hospital. They are called weak definites because, in contrast to regular definite phrases, they can occur in contexts where more than one individual satisfies their descriptive content. In addition, weak definites exhibit a number of other peculiar properties. The main contribution of this dissertation is a compositional analysis of the meaning of weak definites, which is based on the intuition that these phrases refer to kinds of individuals. The analysis accounts for the special behavior of these phrases plus it makes a number of theoretical and empirical predictions, which this dissertation also aims to corroborate.

This work constitutes a relevant contribution to the literature on definite phrases and weak referentiality. It should also be of interest to any linguist, language philosopher and psycholinguist studying the interpretation of various noun phrases, genericity, adjectives, meaning enrichment, and the lexical meaning of nouns.

ISBN 978-94-6093-142-0