

Structuring making reference

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In Carlson et al (2006), and in Klein et al (2007), a series of experiments are reported on the phenomenon of "weak definite" noun phrases (Pesio, 1994; Barker, 2005; Carlson and Sussman, 2005). The experiments collectively show that there is a distinction among definite noun phrases in English, between those that are used to make reference to individual objects in a discourse, which involve a uniqueness or familiarity presupposition, and those which apparently trigger no such presupposition. The experiments also distinguish the weak definites from indefinites, despite their truth-conditional similarities. The strong similarity of the weak definites to bare singular noun phrases (Stvan, 1999; Borthen, 2003) suggests that the appearance of the definite article in such structures may be pleonastic. These constructions also bear significant similarities in meaning to incorporation structures in a variety of other languages. This paper develops the idea that these are in fact "incorporation-like" in their semantics, and finds a natural place for the meaning of the definite article despite initial appearances. The possibility of pronominal reference back to entities apparently established by the weak definites is discussed in light of the experimental results and in light of the account of discourse reference developed in Farkas and de Swart (2004) for Hungarian incorporated forms. Directions for further experimental investigation are explored.