

Indefinites and Specificity Revisited

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YoungEun Yoon. 2007. Indefinites and Specificity Revisited. *Language and Information* 11.2, 67–86. The semantic literature on definiteness and specificity shows that the former is relatively an established notion, whereas the latter is still a vague notion that needs to be more clarified and confirmed. Given this, Ionin (2006) argues for the reality of specificity based on the informal use of *this*. She proposes *this* in spoken English as a specificity marker which has a semantic feature indicating “speaker intent to refer” and “noteworthiness.” She also provides as evidence the results of some crosslinguistic studies including an L2 acquisition study with both L1-Russian and L1-Korean L2-English learners. However, this paper will argue that the informal use of *this* does not seem to mark specificity according to Ionin’s definition of specificity. It will also be argued that the L2 acquisition study cannot be used as evidence for the reality of specificity. Based on these arguments, this paper will try to redefine specificity, based on the notions of existence and uniqueness. (Ewha Womans University)

Key words: specificity, definiteness, indefinites, definites, referentiality, existence, uniqueness, presuppositionality, noteworthiness, *this*_{ref}

1. Introduction

The semantics of definite and indefinite NPs has been dealt with as one of the main topics in the semantic literature by numerous linguists including Kamp (1981), Fodor and Sag (1982), Heim (1982; Heim (1990), Kadmon (1987; Kadmon (1990), Groenendijk and Stokhof (1990), Enç (1991), Kamp and Reyle (1993), Chierchia (1995), Winter (1999), Roberts (2003), and Ionin (2006), among others.

As for indefinites, there have been numerous arguments on the issue of whether indefinites refer or not. Russell (1905) argued for indefinites as non-referring expressions, which seems to be supported by (1b). And yet, the pronoun in (1c) refers to something. If what it refers to is the same as *a woman* in the first sentence, then a question arises whether the indefinite refers or not.

- (1) a. John saw a woman.

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b. It is not the case that John saw a woman.

c. John saw a woman. She was carrying a dog.

Geach's (1962) analysis of anaphoric pronouns as bound variables seem to solve the above dilemma by analyzing (1c) as in (1c'), in the sense that both *a woman* and *she* are construed as existential quantifiers.

(1c') $\exists x \exists y [\text{woman}(x) \wedge \text{saw}(j, x) \wedge \text{dog}(y) \wedge \text{was-carrying}(x, y)]$

However, this analysis is not free from counterexamples like the following, as pointed out by Evans (1980):

(2) John owns some chickens. Mary sold them.

According to Geach's analysis, (2) means that the set of chickens owned by John and sold by Mary should be composed of at least two members. And yet, what (2) means intuitively is that John owns some chickens and Mary sold all the chickens owned by John, which is a stronger meaning than Geach's.

Different from Geach, Kripke (1977) attempted to solve the above dilemma by proposing two notions, namely, "speaker's reference" and "semantic reference." According to Kripke's proposal, for example, in (1c) *a woman* could be argued to have "speaker's reference" rather than "semantic reference," maintaining the claim that indefinites do not refer.

And yet, this analysis cannot account for the following example, pointed out by Heim (1982).

(3) Someone broke into our house last night. He broke the lamps in the living room and opened all the drawers in the bedroom.

If we assume that (3) is uttered in a situation in which the speaker did not see a specific person actually breaking into his house and doing all the things as described in (3), it seems difficult to argue that the indefinite *someone* has "speaker's reference."

Lewis's (1979) proposal based on the notion "saliency" also faces counterexamples. According to Lewis's proposal, a pronoun may refer to whatever object is maximally salient in the context, and in (3), the pronoun *he* refers to the salient object *someone* in the situation. However, the saliency only does not guarantee this kind of anaphoric relationship, as illustrated by the following Heim's example. In both (4a) and (4b), the missing one marble is salient, but only in (4a), the pronoun can refer to it.

(4) a. I dropped ten marbles and found all of them, except for one. It is probably under the sofa.

?b. I dropped ten marbles and found only nine of them. It is probably under the sofa.

Another well-known approach which maintains the status of indefinite antecedents as non-referring expressions is the “E-type” pronoun theory by Evans (1977; Evans (1980). In addition to bound-variable pronouns and the so-called “pragmatic” pronouns based on the notion of “saliency,” Evans proposed another type of pronouns, namely, “E-type” pronouns. E-type pronouns are not bound by the quantified antecedent NPs, but their meaning is determined in a systematic way by the minimal sentence in which the antecedent occurs. For example, (1c), which is repeated as (5a) in the following, is analyzed to mean (5b), where the meaning of the pronoun is that of a definite description:

- (5) a. John saw a woman. She was carrying a dog.
 b. John saw a woman. The woman John saw was carrying a dog.

Furthermore, according to Evans’s theory, the definite description is interpreted to carry “uniqueness implication” such that John saw exactly one woman. Although this uniqueness implication was further supported by Kadmon (1987; Kadmon (1990), it is a controversial notion criticized by numerous linguists.

Contrary to the theories discussed above, which analyze indefinites as existential quantifiers in line with Russell’s view, there have been views that acknowledge the existence of indefinites which refer, in addition to non-referring indefinites. Strawson (1952) was a predecessor of this view, and Fodor and Sag (1982), among Strawson’s other followers, convincingly showed that the existence of referential indefinites is real, with the following examples.

- (6) a. John overheard the rumor that each of my students had been called before the dean.
 b. John overheard the rumor that a student of mine had been called before the dean.

If the indefinite *a student of mine* in (6b) is an existential quantifier, its wide scope reading cannot be accounted for since the *that*-complement to the noun *rumor* is a scope island. For (6a), however, *each of my students* cannot escape the island to get a wide scope reading.

On the same lines, Enç (1991) also proposed a theory of specificity. According to Enç, the discourse referents of both definites and specific (=referential) indefinites are linked to previously established discourse referents. Furthermore, the difference between definites and specific indefinites is that for the former, the linking with the antecedent is the “identity” relation while for the latter, it is the “inclusion” relation. That is, a definite and its antecedent are coreferential, whereas a specific indefinite is a sub-group of its antecedent. Enç argues that the specific reading of *many students* is favored in (7), since its prominent interpretation is such that the speaker interviewed many of the students who took the course last semester.

- (7) I thought that the best way to determine whether or not this course would be boring was to ask the students who took it last semester. I talked to many students and decided that it was worth a shot.

And quite recently, Ionin (2006) argues for the reality of specificity, building upon Fodor and Sag's (1982) semantic ambiguity theory for indefinites. Ionin proposes that *this* in spoken English is a specificity marker with a semantic feature indicating "speaker intent to refer" and "noteworthiness." She also provides as evidence for her argument the results of some crosslinguistic studies including an L2 acquisition study with both L1-Russian and L1-Korean L2-English learners. However, in the following paragraphs, this paper will argue that the informal use of *this* does not seem to mark specificity according to Ionin's definition of specificity. It will also be argued that the L2 acquisition study cannot be used as evidence for the reality of specificity.

Given this, the purpose of this paper will be to try to reexamine the theories of indefinites proposed by Fodor and Sag (1982), Winter (1999), and Ionin (2006), and try to redefine specificity, based on the notions of existence and uniqueness.

This paper is organized as follows: In section 2, Ionin's (2006) theory will be discussed, and some problems of her analysis will also be discussed. In section 3, we will try to present a new analysis of specificity revising the previous theories of specificity including Fodor and Sag (1982), Winter (1999), and Ionin (2006). Section 4 will conclude this paper.

2. Specificity

It has been discussed in section 1 that since Strawson's (1952) proposal for the existence of referential indefinites in addition to non-referential indefinites, this view has been supported by many linguists including Fodor and Sag (1982), Enç (1991), Winter (1997; Winter (1999), and recently by Ionin (2006).

As discussed above, Fodor and Sag (1982) argues that examples like (6a,b) can be more persuasively accounted for by their semantic ambiguity theory rather than by the scope ambiguity theory which argues that any ambiguities in quantified phrases including indefinite phrases are merely scope ambiguities. According to Fodor and Sag, (8a) is two-way ambiguous, whereas (8b) is three-way ambiguous.

- (8) a. A student in the syntax class cheated on the final exam.
 b. Every professor met a student in the syntax class.

That is, in (8a), the indefinite *a student* could be interpreted as both a quantified expression and a referring expression. In (8b), it could be interpreted as a narrow scope quantifier, as a wide scope quantifier, and as a referring expression. In other words, according to Fodor and Sag, *a student* in (8b) interpreted as a narrow scope quantifier denotes any non-particular student, *a student* as a wide scope quantifier denotes a particular student but unknown, and *a student* as a referring expression denotes a specific student known to the speaker.¹

However, Fodor and Sag's analysis cannot account for intermediate scope readings, as observed by Ruys (1992), Reinhart (1997), Winter (1997), and Kratzer

¹ This issue of ambiguity in interpreting indefinite phrases will be taken up again in section 3 and will be discussed in more detail.

(1998), among others. According to Fodor and Sag, long-distance indefinites cannot take intermediate scope, but it has been shown that intermediate scope readings do exist, as in the following example:

(9) Everyone saw every movie that a friend (of his or hers) had recommended.

This reading is such that everyone saw every movie that had been recommended by a particular friend. That is, Jill saw every movie recommended by her friend Troy, John saw every movie recommended by his friend Bill, etc.

These intermediate scope readings have been accounted for by choice function analyses proposed by Reinhart (1997), Winter (1997; Winter (1999), Kratzer (1998), and Matthewson (1999). According to these analyses, the indefinite determiner is translated as the variable f , which ranges over choice functions which map any non-empty set in their domain to an element of this set.

Reinhart's (1997) and Winter's (1997) version of choice function analysis, in which the choice function variables are bound by "existential closure," gives (9) the LF in (10). The intermediate scope reading of the indefinite *a friend* is obtained by existential closure below *everyone*, as shown in the following.

(10) [everyone] λ_1 [$\exists f$ [t_1 saw every movie f (friend) had recommended]]

As discussed earlier, Enç (1991) views the link between a specific indefinite and its antecedent as the inclusion relation. According to Enç, specific indefinites denote members of a previously mentioned set, so that specific indefinites are both "partitive" and "presuppositional." And quite recently, different from Enç's analysis, Ionin (2006) has proposed a theory of indefinites based on the informal use of *this* which views specific indefinites as non-presuppositional. A detailed discussion on this theory is presented below.

2.1 Ionin's Theory of Specificity

Ionin (2006) assumes a standard presuppositional analysis of English definites and a standard quantificational analysis of English *a*-indefinites, given in (11) and (12), respectively.

(11) *Fregean analysis:*

[the ζ] ξ expresses that proposition which is

- true at an index i , if there is exactly one ζ at i ,
and it is ξ at it,
- false at an index i , if there is exactly one ζ at i ,
and it is not ξ at it,
- truth-valueless at an index i , if there isn't exactly one ζ at i .

(Heim, 1991, 9)

(12) A sentence of the form [a ζ] ξ expresses that proposition which is true if there is at least one individual which is both ζ and ξ and false otherwise.

(Heim, 1991, 26)

According to (11) and (12), any context compatible with the semantics of definites is also compatible with that of indefinites. And yet, the distribution of *the* and *a* does not overlap. To account for this, Heim proposes the “Maximize Presupposition Principle,” which says, “Make your contribution presuppose as much as possible.” Hence, whenever the presuppositions for *the* have been satisfied, *the* should be used instead of *a*.

Assuming these, Ionin distinguishes the informal use of indefinite *this* in spoken English from the standard deictic use of demonstrative *this*, and proposes that referential indefinite *this* (*this_{ref}*) supports the reality of specificity.

- (13) a. There is this man in my neighborhood who likes to show off his muscled body. He jogs every morning with his top off.
- b. There is #the/a man in my neighborhood who likes to show off his muscled body. He jogs every morning with his top off.

As can be seen in (13a,b), the informal use of *this* in spoken English is an indefinite rather than a definite. Ionin also observes differences between *this*-indefinites and *a*-indefinites, as illustrated in the following:

- (14) a. Sarah wants to/must read a/this book about butterflies, but she can't find it.
- b. Sarah wants to/must read a/#this book about butterflies, but she can't find one.
- (15) a. Lorraine didn't read a/this book about butterflies because she couldn't find it.
- b. Lorraine didn't read a/#this book about butterflies because she couldn't find one.

One difference is that different from *a*-indefinites, *this*-indefinites are never interpreted as being inside the scope of an intensional/modal operator as in (14b) or negation as in (15b).

As another difference, Ionin proposes the notion of “noteworthiness,” following Maclaran (1982, 90), who argued that the use of *this_{ref}* “draws attention to the fact that the speaker has a particular referent in mind, about which further information may be given.” According to Ionin, for example, in (16a), where the identity of the stamp is not important or noteworthy, use of *this_{ref}* is infelicitous, whereas in (16b) its use is felicitous, since its identity is noteworthy in the sense that it is talked about further as a worth-a-fortune stamp. A similar reasoning also applies to (17).

- (16) a. He put on a/#this 31 cent stamp on the envelope, so he must want it to go airmail.
- b. He put on a/this 31 cent stamp on the envelope, and only realized later that it was worth a fortune because it was unperforated. (Maclaran, 1982)

- (17) a. Becky wrote some thank-you notes using a/#this purple pen; then she mailed the notes to her friends.
- b. Becky wrote some thank-you notes using a/this purple pen, which suddenly exploded, spilling purple ink all over Becky's clothes and furniture! (Ionin, 2006)

Ionin (2006, 187) proposes the semantics for specificity as in (18), in which *sp* stands for specificity marker, which in English corresponds to *this_{ref}*.

- (18) A sentence of the form [*sp* α] ζ expresses a proposition only in those utterance contexts *c* where the following felicity condition is fulfilled: the speaker of *c* intends to refer to exactly one individual x_c in *c*, and there exists a property β which the speaker considers noteworthy in *c*, and x_c is both α and β in *c*. When this condition is fulfilled, [*sp* α] ζ expresses that proposition which is true at an index *i* if x_c is ζ at *i* and false otherwise.

Ionin proposes that felicity conditions, but not presuppositional conditions, are applied to specificity. According to the standard presuppositional analysis of English definites in (11), a definite presupposes existence and uniqueness, which means that the speaker and the hearer must share the knowledge of the existence and uniqueness of a set in question. However, for specificity, Ionin (2006, 191) argues that “[i]n deciding to use a *this*-indefinite in English, the speaker considers only her own view of what’s noteworthy, and not the state of her listener’s knowledge.” Furthermore, she argues that uniqueness is not required, as illustrated by (19a,b). In (19b), *the* presupposes uniqueness, so that the following sentence is not appropriate, whereas in (19a), the noteworthiness of a specific book among the three books guarantees the felicitous use of *this_{ref}*.

- (19) a. I read *this book about the habits of the underwing moths* the other day. There are only three books about the habits of the underwing moths in existence.
- b. I read *the book about the habits of the underwing moths* the other day. #There are only three books about the habits of the underwing moths in existence.

Ionin also observes that *this*-indefinites do not appear to have intermediate scope readings (or under-a-higher-quantifier scope readings), different from *a*-indefinites, as illustrated in (20a,b):

- (20) a. Every student read every book that *this teacher* had recommended.
- b. Every girl saw a/*this great movie (Alice saw “Harry Potter,” Laura saw “Lord of the Rings,” etc. . .).

Ionin (2006, 202) proposes that “[t]he long-distance readings of *a/some*-indefinites arise through a choice-function mechanism and are not tied to any felicity conditions,” whereas “*this*-indefinites have truly referential readings, with the felicity condition of noteworthiness.”

To sum up, Ionin argues that none of the referential (e.g., Fodor and Sag (1982)), choice-function (e.g., Winter (1997; Kratzer (1998))), and presuppositional (e.g., Enç (1991)) analyses of English indefinites can account for the semantics of *this_{ref}*. That is, *a*-indefinites may have a quantificational or choice-function reading, while *this_{ref}* has a truly referential reading and encodes specificity as noteworthiness.

Lastly, to support her analysis, Ionin discusses some crosslinguistic studies on definiteness and specificity, including an L2 acquisition study with both L1-Russian and L1-Korean L2-English learners by Ionin (2003) and Ionin, Ko, and Wexler (2004).

First, Ionin observes that a two-article language cannot encode both definiteness and specificity, since if one article is specified as definite or specific, the other article must be underspecified.² She provides the following two options of article system in two-article languages:

(21) Possible options of article choice in two-article languages

a) The definiteness option (English)

	definite	indefinite
specific	<i>the</i>	<i>a</i>
non-specific		

b) The specificity option (Samoan)

	definite	indefinite
specific		<i>le</i>
non-specific		<i>se</i>

Second, Ionin assumes that L2 learners of English whose native language does not have articles will not have L1-transfer when acquiring English articles, so that their English article acquisition pattern could shed light on specificity. Based on this assumption, Ionin analyzes the results of an L2 acquisition study with both 26 L1-Russian and 39 L1-Korean L2-English learners. The subjects completed a forced choice elicitation task with 76 short English-language dialogues. The target sentence in each dialogue was missing an article, and the subjects had to choose between *a*, *the*, and the null article. The four representative context types of the 76 test items were specific definite (*the*), non-specific definite (*the*), specific indefinite (*a*), and non-specific indefinite (*a*).³

As the study results tables in (22) shows, the L2 learners used *the* a lot more in definite than in indefinite contexts, and used *a* much more in indefinite than in definite contexts, but they overused *the* in specific indefinite contexts and overused *a* in non-specific definite contexts.

² Ionin also classifies spoken English as a three-article language with definiteness, indefiniteness, and specificity markers.

³ These four representative context type dialogues will be given in section 2.2 and discussed in more detail.

(22) a) Performance of L1-Russian speakers (N=26)

	definite: target <i>the</i>			indefinite: target <i>a</i>		
specific	79% <i>the</i>	8% <i>a</i>	13% null	36% <i>the</i>	54% <i>a</i>	10% null
non-specific	57% <i>the</i>	33% <i>a</i>	10% null	7% <i>the</i>	84% <i>a</i>	9% null

b) Performance of L1-Korean speakers (N=39)

	definite: target <i>the</i>			indefinite: target <i>a</i>		
specific	88% <i>the</i>	4% <i>a</i>	8% null	22% <i>the</i>	77% <i>a</i>	1% null
non-specific	80% <i>the</i>	14% <i>a</i>	6% null	4% <i>the</i>	93% <i>a</i>	3% null

Given these results, in order to answer the question of whether the concept of specificity that plays a role in L2 English is equivalent to the concept of specificity conceived by native speakers of English (i.e., to what extent does L2 English *the* correspond to English *this_{ref}*?), a pilot study with seven native English speakers was carried out, in which all the indefinite items from the previous elicitation were included and *this_{ref}* was inserted into the target sentence instead of a missing article. The subjects rated the felicity of the target sentence containing *this_{ref}* in the given context, using a scale ranging from 1 (infelicitous) to 5 (felicitous). The average scores for the sentences with *this_{ref}* were 3.6 for specific indefinite contexts and 2.4 for non-specific indefinite contexts.

In conclusion, Ionin argues that these results support the reality of specificity as a universal semantic feature, and that specificity indicates “speaker intent to refer” and “noteworthiness.”

2.2 Problems of Ionin’s Analysis

As discussed above, Ionin proposes “specificity,” as expressed by *this_{ref}* in English, as involving “speaker intent to refer” and “noteworthiness.” However, neither of these two notions seems to be in accordance with the data she provides as evidence for her analysis. First, consider the following examples from Ionin (2006).

- (23) a. #Mary wants to see this new movie; I don’t know which movie it is.
 b. Mary wants to see this new movie; I don’t know which movie it is, but she’s been all excited about seeing it for weeks now.
 c. I want to see this new movie -- I can’t remember its name and I have no idea what it’s about, but someone mentioned to me that it’s really interesting.

Ionin asked five native English speakers, who are linguists, to judge the felicity of (23a,b,c), and the results were such that three of the five informants made a strong distinction between (23a) and (23b,c), as indicated by # for (23a) and no # for (23b,c) above, whereas the other two informants rated all the three examples as good.

Given this, one thing Ionin (2006, 183) argues is that the important point for her purposes with the above data is that a distinction between (23a) and (23b,c) exists at least for some speakers. Another thing Ionin argues is that in (23b,c),

contrary to (23a), the speaker is able to say “something” about the movie. In (23b), the speaker is able to describe the movie as a movie Mary has been all excited about seeing for weeks, although the speaker does not know which movie it is. In (23c), the speaker is able to describe the movie as a movie referred to as being interesting by someone. That is, in (23b,c), the speaker is stating a “noteworthy” property, whereas in (23a), the speaker does not reveal any knowledge about the movie, which leads to its infelicity.

However, I also asked five native English speakers to judge the felicity of (23a,b,c), and obtained a result that all of them except one British informant rated all the three examples as good. The British informant was found to be an exception since in British English, *this_{ref}* does not exist. One problem we can observe here is that although Ionin wants to regard the three informants’ judgments as evidence for her theory, we could also throw doubt on the reality of the role of “noteworthiness” in the felicitous use of *this_{ref}*, since it could be revealed by further study that most or almost all native English speakers do not associate “noteworthiness” with *this_{ref}* at all, as indicated by my own survey with five informants.

Furthermore, the notion of “noteworthiness” is a quite vague notion, similar to the notion of “saliency” utilized in many theories, since it depends on numerous factors and also could be subjective. According to Ionin, for example, in (23a), the movie does not have any noteworthy property. And yet, some could argue that the movie is noteworthy in the sense that Mary wants to see it.⁴ Consider another example:

(24) Bill: I’m looking for Erik. Is he home?

Rick: Yes, but he’s on the phone. It’s an important business matter. He is talking to the owner of his company! I don’t know who that person is -- but I know that this conversation is important to Erik. (Ionin, 2006)

Ionin interprets the underlined definite NP as non-specific. Rick does not know the owner of Erik’s company, so obviously he has no intent to refer to a specific person with the definite. And yet, when it comes to noteworthiness, we might argue that the owner of Erik’s company is very noteworthy in the context in that Erik is now talking to the owner and the phone conversation with the owner is important to Erik.

My informants also mentioned that if there is a possibility that Erik’s company has more than one owner, then *this_{ref}* instead of *the* can be used, which means that they interpret the owner as an indefinite specific NP in this case, in discord with Ionin’s analysis.

Concerning the issue of “speaker intent to refer,” as mentioned above, Ionin’s analysis of specificity is built upon Fodor and Sag’s (1982) view of referentiality, so that both Fodor and Sag, and Ionin analyze specificity as involving speaker intent to refer. However, Ionin (2006, 183) argues that “the term *speaker intent to refer*

⁴ This might be argued to be the noteworthy property perceived by the informants who judged (23a) as felicitous. However, we propose that noteworthiness is neither a precise or consistent property to be associated with specificity.

is not very precise and does not capture the intuition that the referent of a *this*-indefinite is somehow noteworthy.” As observed in examples like (23a,b,c) and (24) above, Ionin argues that the notions “speaker intent to refer” and “noteworthiness” do not have to be directly related to the identity of the individual.

However, it seems that (23a,b) and (24) involve someone else’s reference rather than speaker’s reference. In (23a,b), *this new movie* obtains its specificity from Mary’s having a specific movie in mind, not from the speaker’s capability to say something about the movie, which seems to come after Mary’s intent to refer. In other words, through Mary’s reference, the speaker is able to say something about the referent. Consequently, it is not that specificity involves noteworthiness, but that specificity could be followed by noteworthiness. Similarly, in (24), *the owner of his company* obtains its specificity from Erik’s intent to refer to a specific person. As for (23c), it happens that the speaker neither remembers the title of the movie nor knows its contents, but the speaker has a specific movie in mind. Hence it is a typical example of speaker’s reference.

Lastly, concerning the L2 acquisition study results presented by Ionin as evidence for her analysis, judging from the following four sample examples used for the study, the results do not seem to support Ionin’s analysis. The followings are the four representative context types of the 76 test items mentioned in section 2.1:

(25) *Specific definite*

Kathy: My daughter Jeannie loves that new comic strip about Super Mouse.

Elise: Well, she is in luck! *Tomorrow, I’m having lunch with (a, the, --) creator of this comic strip -- he is an old friend of mine.* So I can get this autograph for Jeannie!

(26) *Non-specific definite*

Bill: I’m looking for Erik. Is he home?

Rick: Yes, but he’s on the phone. It’s an important business matter. *He is talking to (a, the, --) owner of his company!* I don’t know who that person is – but I know that this conversation is important to Erik.

(27) *Specific indefinite*

(Meeting on a street.)

Roberta: Hi, William! It’s nice to see you again. I didn’t know that you were in Boston.

William: I am here for a week. *I am visiting (a, the, --) friend from college -- his name is Sam Brown, and he lives in Cambridge now.*

(28) *Non-specific indefinite*

Chris: I need to find your roommate Jonathan right away.

Clara: He is not here -- he went to New York.

Chris: Really? In what part of New York is he staying?

Clara: I don't really know. *He is staying with (a, the, --) friend -- but he didn't tell me who that is.* He didn't leave me any phone number or address.

As already discussed in section 2.1, Ionin also carried out a pilot study with seven native English speakers. The subjects rated the felicity of the two types of target sentences containing *this_{ref}* in either specific or non-specific indefinite contexts. The results were such that the felicity for the sentences with *this_{ref}* in specific indefinite contexts was higher than that for those in non-specific indefinite contexts.

However, again, my own small test results are different. Although my informants were asked to judge the felicity of only one set of examples available, the felicity for the sentence with *this_{ref}* in specific indefinite context and that of the sentence in non-specific indefinite context were the same. All of them except one British informant answered that both in (27) and (28), the use of *this_{ref}* is felicitous.⁵

Given this, you might argue that the informal use of *this* in English indicates indefiniteness. And yet, it seems necessary to question the validity of the argument that the informal use of *this* represents the specific or referential use of indefinites in English.

Furthermore, Ionin's claim that the L2 acquisition study results summarized in (22) support the reality of specificity as a universal semantic feature should also be reexamined. Since Ionin's theory of specificity is based on two questionable notions, namely, "speaker intent to refer" and "noteworthiness," as discussed above, first, it should be reconsidered whether her test items had been designed properly. We have questioned above with (26) that *the owner* could be specific, not non-specific as argued by Ionin. Also, following Ionin's analysis, in (28), *a friend* could be noteworthy and specific in the sense that he is staying with Jonathan and could be a contact point to find Jonathan. Consequently, if the test items had not been properly designed and classified, then the results could be unreliable.

Ionin argues that the overuse of *the* in specific indefinite contexts and that of *a* in non-specific definite contexts indicate the Russian and Korean L2 learners' perceiving *the* as a specific article and *a* as a non-specific article. However, there could be other influencing factors for these results, not to mention the problem of validity of the test items. For example, although Korean is known as an article-less language, it has a definite article *ku*, whose distribution is very limited. *Ku* is marked only when it is indispensable to avoid the risk of ambiguity or misinterpretation. That is, Korean seems to be a language which does not use a whole lot of markers in places where they fit, but use them only in places in a very limited way where they are absolutely needed. Although further research is needed to come up with a clear picture of the semantics of definiteness and specificity in Korean, Korean also has its own system of marking definiteness and specificity like any other language.

⁵ The four informants further commented that even in (25) and (26), the use of *this_{ref}* could be felicitous if there's a pause before the *of*-phrase. It might be that the pause plays the role of temporarily keeping *this creator* and *this owner* from being interpreted as a definite NP.

Furthermore, the semantics of definiteness and specificity in Korean could be different from that of other languages including English. Especially, the fact that most L-1 Korean L-2 English learners including those who have learned English for a long period of time have enormous difficulties in learning English articles *the* along with *a* also seems to confirm the difference between the definiteness and specificity in Korean and English. Consequently, all in all, the L2 acquisition study results do not seem to be able to be used as evidence for Ionin's analysis.

3. A New Perspective on Specificity

As discussed in sections 1 and 2, Fodor and Sag (1982) have proposed for the existence of referential indefinites by comparing *a* with *each*. Furthermore, they have also proposed for the superiority of their semantic ambiguity theory over the scope ambiguity theory by arguing for the existence of wide-scope quantificational reading in addition to wide-scope referential reading. For example, as discussed above, they argue that in the following sentence, which is recited from section 2, *a student* interpreted as a narrow scope quantifier denotes any non-particular student, *a student* as a wide scope quantifier denotes a particular student but unknown, and *a student* as a referring expression denotes a specific student known to the speaker.

(29=8b) Every professor met a student in the syntax class.

Hence Fodor and Sag's analysis of referentiality or specificity is based on the notion of "speaker's knowledge." That is, according to them, there are two wide-scope readings for *a student* in (29), but depending on whether the speaker knows *a student*, it could be a specific or non-specific indefinite. Also consider (30), which is again repeated from section 2:

(30=8a) A student in the syntax class cheated on the final exam.

According to Fodor and Sag, *a student* in (30) could be interpreted as both a quantified expression and a referring expression. Then, *a student* with the former reading denotes a particular student but unknown, while *a student* with the latter reading denotes a specific student known to the speaker.

Given the interpretations available for (29) and (30) argued by Fodor and Sag, a question could arise concerning the so-called wide-scope quantificational reading. Is this reading real or at least necessary? The answer seems to be negative. First, in (29), the two wide-scope readings differ only in whether the speaker knows the particular student in the syntax class or not. There exists exactly one particular student met by every professor, but the speaker could utter (29) either knowing or unknowing the identity of the student. If we numerate some possible capacities of the speaker's knowing the student, there could be numerous possibilities. One possibility is that the speaker has known the student in his capacity as supervisor for a long time. Another possibility is such that the speaker has seen her before, but did not know anything about her until he was able to identify her with the specific student in the incident. Or the speaker has never seen or known her before, but has only heard about the incident, so he knows that a specific student in the syntax

class was involved in the incident. In which of these cases, does *a student* receive wide-scope referential reading? In the first case only, in the first and the second cases, or in all of the three cases? Compare these with the following example:

(31) A woman came into the studio this afternoon.

Assuming that in (31), the speaker is reporting an event in which the speaker was an observer who saw a strange woman come into the studio this afternoon, does *a woman* receive a quantificational or referential reading? The answers to these questions do not seem to be easily obtainable, as also observed with examples like the following, which is recited from section 2.2:

(32=23b) Mary wants to see this new movie; I don't know which movie it is, but she's been all excited about seeing it for weeks now. (Ionin, 2006)

As discussed above, in (32), the speaker does not know anything about the movie except for the fact that Mary has been all excited about seeing the movie for weeks. And yet, Ionin argues that *this new movie* receives a specific reading based on its noteworthiness. Then, what does this "knowing" or "unknowing" amount to?

Consider the following sentence:

(33) A student in the syntax class will give a talk at the colloquium.

According to Fodor and Sag's analysis, *a student* in (33) will get three readings, namely, narrow-scope quantificational reading (any non-particular student), wide-scope quantificational reading (a particular student but unknown), and wide-scope referential reading (a specific student known to the speaker), since an intensional operator is also involved. Again, however, the difference between the wide-scope quantificational and referential readings is not clear. Furthermore, from the point of view of the addressee, whether the speaker knows a particular student or not does not seem to be as much important as whether *a student* denotes a particular student in the context or any non-particular student, let alone the difficulties involved in defining the notion of "knowing."

Furthermore, different from Fodor and Sag's analysis, in sentences like (30), another available reading other than the referential reading seems to be the so-called "at least" reading. That is, in this rather remote reading, *a student* does not denote any particular student regardless of whether known or unknown to the speaker, but denotes at least one non-particular student in the context, which is tantamount to the narrow-scope quantificational reading for *a student* in (29).

Consider more examples:

(34) John wants to marry a Swedish.

(35) My grandpa has a dog.

First, for (34), assume that the speaker added one of the following:

(36) a. Because John is fascinated with gorgeous Swedish women, he wants to find one to get married in the near future.

- b. I don't know who that woman is, but so I heard.
- c. The woman is a friend of mine.

A *Swedish* in (34) followed by (36a) denotes any non-particular Swedish woman, which is a narrow-scope quantificational reading, whereas followed by (36c), *a Swedish* gets a wide-scope referential reading. Then, what about (36b)? According to Fodor and Sag, *a Swedish* followed by (36b) would denote a particular Swedish unknown to the speaker, which is a wide-scope quantificational reading. As pointed out above, however, we argue that this is also the wide-scope referential reading with someone else's reference.

As for (35), Fodor and Sag would argue that *a dog* denotes either a particular dog unknown to the speaker, or a specific dog known to the speaker. And yet, what matters here seems to be whether *a dog* denotes exactly one specific dog either known or unknown to the speaker, or at least one non-particular dog as in the following conversation, which is a reading unidentified by Fodor and Sag.

- (37) A: My grandpa will go to the fair tomorrow.
 B: Every participant in the fair must carry a dog.
 A: My grandpa has a dog. (In fact, he has three dogs.)

In (37), A could mean that A's grandpa has at least one dog to carry to the fair.

Another problem with Fodor and Sag's analysis was that their analysis cannot account for intermediate scope readings. In the following sentence, which is repeated from section 2, according to Fodor and Sag, *a friend* would receive wide-scope referential reading, wide-scope quantificational reading, and narrow-scope quantificational reading:

- (38=9) Everyone saw every movie that a friend (of his or hers) had recommended.

However, *a friend* could also receive an intermediate scope reading such that everyone saw every movie that had been recommended by his or her particular friend.

As we have proposed above, for (38), Fodor and Sag's wide-scope referential reading could be analyzed as the speaker's referential reading, and their wide-scope quantificational reading, as someone else's referential reading, both of which are proposed to be combined as one wide-scope referential reading.

When it comes to the intermediate scope reading, two versions of the choice function analysis account for the reading differently. For example, in Kratzer's (1998) version of the choice function analysis, the choice function variable is contextually determined by the particular function the speaker has in mind. In another version of the choice function analysis by Reinhart (1997) and Winter (1997), the choice function variable is bound by existential closure. Among these two variants of the choice function analysis, we argue that the one based on existential closure better accounts for the intermediate scope readings than the one based on free variables. That is, we have argued that speaker's reference is a vague notion, and

that referential reading could be better analyzed as either speaker's or someone else's referential reading.

Furthermore, intermediate scope readings are like distributive specific readings in that its referentiality or specificity is relative to each individual. Ionin observes that different from *a teacher* in (39a), the intermediate scope reading is not available for *this teacher* in (39b):

- (39) a. Every student read every book that a teacher had recommended.
 b. Every student read every book that this teacher had recommended.

Ionin (2006, 202) argues that "*this*-indefinites have truly referential readings, with the felicity condition of noteworthiness." Ionin (2006, 202–203) further argues that "[o]n my view, the readings of *a*-indefinites may correspond either to regular quantificational readings or to existentially closed choice functions, per Reinhart (1997)/Winter (1997). In my terminology, both types of readings are non-specific." That is, Ionin regards only *this*-indefinites as having true referential readings.

And yet, the ambiguity between specific and non-specific readings in *a*-indefinites is real, as generally accepted. We will call wide-scope referential readings as "absolute specific" readings and intermediate scope readings as "relative specific" readings.

Have a look at the following Heim's (1982) example recited from section 1:

- (40=3) Someone broke into our house last night. He broke the lamps in the living room and opened all the drawers in the bedroom.

According to Heim, assuming that (40) is uttered in a situation in which the speaker did not see a specific person actually breaking into his house and doing all the things as described in (40), the indefinite *someone* cannot even have the so-called "speaker's reference" in line with Kripke's (1977) theory, let alone the "semantic reference."

Then, what does *someone* in (40) denote? A specific person or non-specific person? Consider a couple of more similar examples:

- (41) a. A man is in the women's bathroom (but I haven't dared to go in there to see who it is).
 b. There was someone smoking behind the woodshed.
 (Fodor and Sag, 1982)

Following Fodor and Sag, Ionin also analyzes *a man* in (41a) and *someone* in (41b) as a quantificational indefinite. However, we argue that if *a man* and *someone* could be decided to refer to exactly one specific entity in the context with a help from someone other than the speaker or based on whatever reasoning, then they are specific indefinites. On the other hand, if the speaker utters either (41a) or (41b) based on his speculation, but not based on facts, then neither *a man* nor *someone* could be a specific or quantificational indefinite. Consider another sentence:

- (42) Someone cheated on the exam. (Fodor and Sag, 1982)

Suppose that the speaker utters (42), without eyewitnessing a cheater or being informed about the cheating incident from someone else, but speculating based on the circumstantial states. Then, *someone* cannot be analyzed as either a specific or a quantificational indefinite.

In sum, in examples like (40, 41a, 41b, 42), when the speaker utters the sentence based on his speculation, we propose that the indefinite receives narrow-scope quantificational reading under the scope of a modality operator.

To summarize what we have discussed above in this section, first, we have argued against the wide-scope quantificational reading. We have argued that specificity based on the notion of speaker's reference is problematic, and that wide-scope referential and wide-scope quantificational readings are combined as one wide-scope specific reading by either speaker's or someone else's reference. Second, it has been proposed that for sentences with an indefinite neither under nor over any quantifier, or modal/intensional operator, the indefinite could receive the so-called "at least" quantificational reading. Third, it has been argued that intermediate scope readings are better accounted for by an existentially closed choice function analysis than a free variable choice function analysis, and that there exist two kinds of specificity, namely, absolute specificity and relative specificity. Lastly, for sentences like (40, 41a, 41b, 42) which are uttered based on speculations about the indefinite NP, we have proposed that the indefinite does not receive a wide-scope specific or quantificational reading, but a narrow-scope quantificational reading under the scope of a modality operator.

The followings informally summarize the absolute and the relative specific interpretations of indefinite NPs proposed in this section. For example, *a teacher* in (39a) could be interpreted as either an absolute specific indefinite or a relative specific indefinite. If it denotes exactly one unique teacher in the context, then it has absolute specificity, whereas if it denotes exactly one unique teacher in the context, relative to each member of the set of students denoted by the quantifier *every student*, whose scope is over the indefinite NP *a teacher*, then it has relative specificity. As described, what is important in the interpretation process of an indefinite NP is to grasp whether the NP denotes exactly one unique individual in the context or not, but not to find out whether the speaker knows the individual or not. If the NP is decided to denote exactly one unique individual in the context, then it is automatically assumed that it is referred to either by the speaker or by someone else in the context.

(43) Absolute Specificity:

Given a context C, an indefinite NP is interpreted as an absolute specific indefinite in C only if

- a) it denotes exactly one unique individual that exists in C,
- b) then it is automatically guaranteed that it is referred to either by the speaker or by someone else.

(44) Relative Specificity:

Given a context C, an indefinite NP is interpreted as a relative specific indefinite in C only if

- a) it denotes exactly one unique individual that exists in C, relative to each member of a set denoted by a quantifier whose scope is over the indefinite NP,
- b) then it is automatically guaranteed that it is referred to either by the speaker or by someone else.

4. Conclusions

Roberts (2003) defines the existence presupposition of “definiteness” as “weak familiarity” and the uniqueness as “informational uniqueness.” Weak familiarity is a quite weak notion. That is, the antecedent of a definite does not need to exist explicitly, but could be implicitly obtained by entailment from the context or by the world knowledge. Furthermore, the implicit or explicit antecedent does not need to be a referent in the actual world. Also, the definite only needs to be an informationally unique referent among the discourse referents in the context.

Compared to definiteness, “specificity” is a quite strong notion. First, indefinites differ from definites in that they introduce new discourse referents. Among these indefinites, specific indefinites have been proposed to denote exactly one unique individual that exists in the context. That is, the existence and the uniqueness of specific indefinites are not “weak” or “informational” similar to those of definites.

On the other hand, Ionin proposed *this*-indefinites as truly referential indefinites with the felicity condition of noteworthiness. However, we have discussed that her specificity based on the notion of noteworthiness does not well define specificity, since noteworthiness is not a consistent notion. Furthermore, Ionin’s examples of non-specific and specific NPs are not classified in a clear-cut way when they are classified based on her own criterion, i.e., the notion of noteworthiness. When they are classified based on the conditions in (43) and (44), we have proposed that examples like (26) and (28) are also included in the examples of specific NPs which satisfy the conditions in (43). As Ionin proposes *this*-indefinites as truly referential indefinites, i.e., as wide-scope referential indefinites, *this*-indefinites could be tantamount to absolute specific indefinites in our analysis.

Although we have tried to review recent literature on specificity and to propose a way to better define specificity, we have to admit that more in-depth research along with a comparative study with other languages including Korean is obviously needed, in order to come up with a comprehensive theory of specificity along with definiteness.

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