

'DÉFINIR LES INDEFINIS' BY CARMEN DOBROVIE-SORIN AND CLAIRE

BEYSSADE

Book notice

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**Définir les indéfinis.** By CARMEN DOBROVIE-SORIN, and CLAIRE BEYSSADE (Collection Sciences du Langage). Paris : CNRS Éditions, 2004. Pp. 227. ISBN 2271062764. \$33.75.

This book by CARMEN DOBROVIE-SORIN and CLAIRE BEYSSADE is a gem. It has been superbly edited and deserves the attention of anyone interested in the semantics of indefinites. Written in French, it allows francophone researchers and students to have access to a semantic literature that is otherwise mostly published in English. The volume can be used as a textbook, and is ideal for a monographic postgraduate seminar.

The authors not only summarise recent proposals about indefinites, but also introduce an analysis of their own according to which indefinites are analysed as three distinct entities: as properties  $\langle e, t \rangle$ , treated as the basic type; as individual variables  $\langle e \rangle$ ; or as quantificational expressions  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle e \rangle$ . The latter two are derived from the first by a rule of type-shifting. The choice of denotation varies according to context, be it syntactic, lexical or pragmatic.

The controversial idea put forward by the authors is that property-denoting elements can appear in argumental positions. This proposal is at odds with the traditional view taken by most semanticists, namely that there is a strict one-to-one correspondence between syntax and semantics: only elements of type  $\langle e \rangle$  or  $\langle \langle e, t \rangle, t \rangle$  can appear in argumental positions. The mismatch analysis has nevertheless generated a growing interest over the years and is receiving an increasing support.

The book contains eight chapters followed by a brief conclusion. Unusual for a French publication, it has an index: a welcome addition. The first chapter introduces the basic tools needed for semantic theorizing and for understanding the argumentation put forward in the book.

Chapter two concentrates on bare nominals and mass nouns in Romance languages and argues that they denote properties. Such nominals do not introduce an existential quantifier: their sole function is to restrict the interpretation of one of the verb's arguments. The analysis works well for Spanish and Italian, but unfortunately not for French, since in that language a determiner surfaces with the putative bare nominals (*J'ai mangé des escargots* versus *Yo comí caracoles*, i.e. 'I ate snails'). Moreover, nominals accompanied by *des* can escape the scope of negation whereas this is generally impossible for bare nouns (*Des étudiants ne sont pas arrivés* 'Some students didn't arrive' with the interpretation 'There are some students and it is not the case that they have arrived' versus 'I didn't see students', which cannot mean: 'There are some students, and it is not the case that I have seen them'). The authors treat the French problematic cases as exceptions while arguing that the wide scope interpretations obtained in French are marked. However, it appears that the interpretations in question are in fact very natural, suggesting that the property analysis cannot be extended to *des* nominals in French after all.

Chapter three focuses on existential constructions. The proposal is that the existential predicate takes only property-denoting indefinites. This is one of the most convincing proposals of the book.

Chapter four argues that indefinites give rise to three (rather than the traditional two, i.e. strong and weak) different readings: (i) weak indefinite: property-denoting; (ii) strong non-quantificational indefinite: individual variable; (iii) quantificational indefinite: analysed as a quantificational NP.

Chapter five introduces several contexts where the interpretation of indefinites can vary: some determiners force a particular reading (the case of *certain* + N), a strict bare noun can never receive a wide scope interpretation, some syntactic positions ban the presence of bare nouns, an indefinite that ends up topicalized is interpreted quantificationally.

Chapter six argues that individual-denoting indefinites can either be dependent on or independent from a c-commanding quantificational expression. When the indefinite is independent, the denotation is constant: a specific interpretation is obtained. On the other hand, when the indefinite is dependent, the denotation of the indefinite varies with the quantificational element(s) on which they depend.

Chapter seven deals with generics. It is argued that the type of distributivity allowed by generic readings with *des* nominals depends on whether the indefinite is bound by the quantifier directly or indirectly.

Finally, chapter eight gives an analysis of so-called donkey sentences in French via a Skolem function analysis.

To conclude, I greatly encourage syntacticians and semanticists alike to read ‘Définir les indéfinis’. The authors must be commended for having succeeded in providing a rich, entertaining and very clear account of indefinites in Romance [ERIC MATHIEU, *University of Ottawa*.]