

Olga Borik
(UNED, Madrid)

On definiteness in Russian: the case of demonstratives and possessives

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Abstract

For English, it has been claimed that demonstratives and possessives (at least Saxon genitives) have the same semantic properties as definite descriptions (cf. Elbourne 2008, Vikner & Jensen 2002) and thus their semantic representation should include the iota operator, standardly associated with the definite article in English and other languages with articles. The existence of the iota operator in Russian and in Slavic languages in general is a debatable issue: given that if this operator is assumed for article-less languages, its existence cannot be taken for granted in the absence of overt definiteness marking. I have previously argued that the semantic properties of bare nominals in Russian do not provide any support for postulating the iota operator for Russian bare nominals. In this talk, I will carefully examine the semantic characteristics of demonstrative and possessive nominal phrases in Russian with the purpose of determining their precise relation to the category of definiteness and show that these constructions do not seem to provide support for postulating semantic definiteness for Russian nominals either.