

Thalmann, Maik

Definite Singulars Presuppose Uniqueness, Not Existence

In this talk, I will provide experimental evidence that violations of the uniqueness presupposition associated with the definite singulars pattern with other kinds of undefinedness (such as violations of the homogeneity inference associated with definite plurals). The situation where no object satisfies the description of the singular DP (no existence), on the other hand, patterns with entailment violations, i.e., lead to mere falsity. I will discuss two proposals that may serve to explain this contrast, one based on the lexical entry of the definite article itself, the other on a pragmatic mechanism that allows one to ignore certain presupposition failures. Ultimately, I will argue that the experimental results are best captured under the former view such that definite singulars only presuppose uniqueness, and that existence is an entailment.