

Preface

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Implicatures in Discourse: The case of Spanish NP anaphora

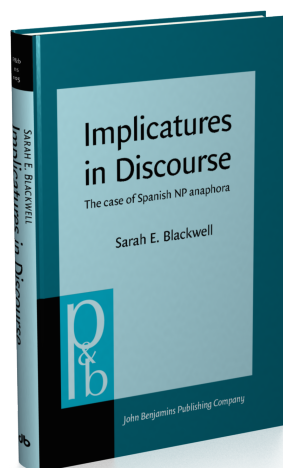
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Preface

The goal of this book is to seek empirical evidence supporting a pragmatic theory of anaphora, while also aiming to heighten our understanding of third-person reference in Spanish discourse. My initial motivation for studying anaphora in Spanish stems from my experiences as a learner of Spanish as a second language, which, in large part, precede my formal training in linguistics. Even after living in Madrid for several years, I would still, at times, ‘get lost’ in a conversation; as they say in Spanish, *perdería el hilo* (‘(I) would lose the thread’). My losing track of the conversation was often due to the fact that I couldn’t figure out who (or what) the speaker had just referred to, typically via a pronoun or null (zero) subject. By failing to infer this important bit of information, I was usually unable to interpret subsequent reference to the same entities, which would cause me to ‘lose the thread’ completely.

The following chapters focus on two main questions, the first being why (or under what conditions) speakers choose, for instance, a pronoun instead of a full noun phrase (NP), or a null subject instead of an overt (lexically expressed) subject pronoun to refer to an entity in discourse. This question leads naturally to the second question, namely, how the chosen expression is successfully interpreted by the addressee. In order to answer these questions, I examine the various NP expressions used by Spanish speakers to refer to entities that are either mentioned or implied in previous discourse, a phenomenon known as ‘discourse anaphora’. Two genres of spoken Spanish, conversations and narratives, are analyzed in this book. The data examined in Chapter 4 come from eight naturally occurring conversations among family members and friends from Aragón, a region in northeastern Spain. The narratives discussed in Chapter 5 were produced by fifteen Spaniards from the same region. These participants were shown a brief film, known as ‘the pear film’ (Chafe 1980), and were then asked to tell about it. Both the conversations and the narratives were video- and audiotaped, and later transcribed.

In my analysis of representative excerpts of the Spanish conversations and narratives, I illustrate how speakers abide by ‘neo-Gricean’ principles in both genres of spoken discourse. However, I also argue, following Huang (1991,

1994, 2000b), that the influence of intervening grammatical, semantic, cognitive, and pragmatic constraints on anaphora must also be considered if we are to fully account for the phenomena in question. For instance, in a conversation, assumptions of ‘mutual knowledge’ (Clark and Marshall 1981) can influence the speaker’s choice of a referring expression by determining how ‘semantically informative’ the expression must be in order for it to be successfully interpreted by the addressee. Furthermore, familiarity with the cultural norms and practices of a community frequently enables interlocutors to comprehend minimal referring expressions (e.g. null subjects) which cultural outsiders, unfamiliar with these norms, may not be able to interpret.

I collected the Spanish conversations and narratives in Spain in 1993 as part of the field work carried out for my doctoral dissertation (Blackwell 1994). I did all of the transcriptions and translations from Spanish to English myself, and am therefore responsible for any errors or discrepancies in them. While the main thesis of this book is the same as the one advanced in my dissertation, I have substantially revised and reorganized each chapter, and have expanded the data analysis and the references section. It is my hope that this book will shed light on the nature of discourse anaphora in Spanish and help to stimulate further empirical research in the areas of Spanish pragmatics, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis.

I could never have carried out the research leading up to the writing of this book without the support and guidance of my dissertation director, Dr. Susan Berk-Seligson. Her graduate seminars at the University of Pittsburgh introduced me to pragmatics and sociolinguistics and laid the foundation for my subsequent research. I am greatly indebted to Professor Berk-Seligson for constantly providing me with constructive feedback and excellent suggestions for improving my research projects. Without her outstanding teaching and mentoring, my dissertation and this book would not have materialized.

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Many thanks go to my mentor and friend, Dr. Jorge Guitart, Professor of Spanish Linguistics at the State University of New York at Buffalo. I am

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