

Abstract ‘average’: a unique modifier

Ahmad Al-Bitar

Al-Bitar@lingua.uni-frankfurt.de

RTG Nominal Modification, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

The modifier *average* has interestingly different uses, among which the ‘abstract’ use is the most well-studied. Carlson & Pelletier (2002), Kennedy & Stanley (2009) and Morzycki (2016) provide analyses of the famous example in (1-a). This sentence can be true without there being an individual with the impossible property of having 2.3 children. Hence the naming ‘abstract’.

- (1) a. *The average American has 2.3 children.* (Abstract use)
b. *The average age of the students is 21.* (Abstract use)

This use seems to (always) prefer the definite article; see (3-a) and (3-b).

- (2) *An/The average German eats potato salad.* (Concrete use)
(3) a. *??An/The average American has 2.3 children.* (Abstract use)
b. *#An/The average age of the students is 21.* (Abstract use)

Kennedy & Stanley (2009) provide the most appropriate analysis of abstract *average* in that ‘averaging’ is shown as the core of its meaning. The only missing component is, however, to consider the definite article in the semantics of *average*. This talk, therefore, aims at providing a compositional way of integrating the definiteness requirement into Kennedy & Stanley (2009)’s semantics of abstract *average*. In my conclusion, I will sketch a wider picture: there are certain modifiers that trigger a uniqueness interpretation, which is reflected by realising the containing DP as definite.

References

- Carlson, Greg & Francis Jeffrey Pelletier (2002). “The Average American Has 2.3 Children”. *Journal of Semantics* 19 (1): 73–104.
- Kennedy, Christopher & Jason Stanley (2009). “On ‘average’”. *Mind* 118 (471): 583–646.
- Morzycki, Marcin (2016). “Toward a general theory of nonlocal readings of adjectives”. In: *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung*. Vol. 20, 515–532.