

# Peregrinatio in Romania

Artículos en homenaje  
a Eugene Roegiest  
con motivo de su 65 cumpleaños

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING SPECIFIC, OR: SPECIFICITY – TWO OPPOSITES, THREE VARIANTS

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"The highest function of love is that it makes the loved one  
a unique and irreplaceable being."

(Tom Robbins: *Jitterbug Perfume*, Toronto e.a.: Bantam Books 1984: 131)

### French Abstract

La spécificité – un aspect possible de la référence indéfinie – est certainement l'un des concepts les plus controversés de la sémantique des déterminants. La preuve: ses multiples contraires. S'agit-il d'une opposition entre un choix délibéré du référent versus un choix dirigé par son identité? ou entre l'ignorance versus la connaissance de cette identité de la part du locuteur? ou plutôt, une opposition qui tient au concept de mondes possibles, la non-spécificité se confondant avec la non-existence, c'est-à-dire, en d'autres termes, avec une existence hypothétique? Ou bien faut-il envisager une combinaison de plusieurs de ces facteurs? S'agit-il peut-être de deux oppositions distinctes au lieu d'une seule? C'est ce que l'on essaiera d'éclaircir dans la première partie de l'article à partir d'un corpus d'exemples français, espagnols et allemands.

Dans un deuxième temps, et après avoir bien établi une définition double, mais claire de ce que c'est que la spécificité, on s'attachera à montrer les variations sémantiques susceptibles d'être englobées par le concept ainsi défini. Il s'avérera que suivant les contextes, on peut se trouver en présence de trois variantes de la spécificité comme de la non-spécificité, l'une quantitative, l'autre qualitative, et la dernière, la plus courante, liée au concept d'identité. Les deux variantes marquées, la variante quantitative et la variante qualitative, seront expliquées par l'interaction de la spécificité avec des formes de référence aussi fondamentales que la référence massive et la référence aux espèces et aux sous-espèces. Cette nouvelle systématique sémantique pour la spécificité permet de rendre compte p.ex. de la différence qui existe entre les déterminants français *quelque* et *un* (...) *quelconque* et de la connotation péjorative qui accompagne systématiquement certains types de syntagmes nominaux indéfinis non spécifiques.

## 1. Introduction and English abstract<sup>1</sup>

Specificity – one possible aspect of indefinite reference – is certainly one of the most controversial concepts in determiner semantics. The proof: its multiple opposites. Does the opposition consist of a random choice of the referent versus a choice guided by its identity? Is it ignorance versus knowledge of this identity on the part of the speaker? Or something related to the concept of possible worlds, non-specificity coinciding with non-existence, in other words, with an existence that is purely hypothetical? Or should we picture it as a combination of several of the above factors? Might we be dealing with two distinct oppositions instead of a single one? This is what we shall explore in the first part of the paper, based on a series of French, Spanish and German examples.

After having established a double definition of specificity, a two-tier system, the second part of the contribution will be dedicated to the semantic variants that are encompassed by the thus defined concept. We shall see that depending on the context, three variants of specificity and of non-specificity can occur: quantitative, qualitative, and – the most common type – identity-related. The two marked variants, i.e. the quantitative and the qualitative one, will be explained through the interaction of specificity with such fundamental reference types as mass reference and reference to sub-species. This new semantic system for specificity makes it possible e.g. to account for the semantic difference between the French determiners *quelque* and *un* (...) *quelconque*, and for the systematically occurring pejorative connotations in certain types of non-specific indefinite noun phrases.

## 2. Why is specificity so important? Two anecdotes to begin with

In the apartment building where I live, one day a couple of technical specialists turned up. They had been sent by the landlord to check the state of the windows in the building. The specialists found that five were damaged and needed to be replaced. A few days later, the repair men of a window company came to replace five windows; and they did replace them, just not the five damaged ones, but simply the first five windows that they came across.

The window repair men acted on the principle of 'random choice', which applies for example in *drawing lots*. The opposite would be 'specificity', i.e. choice guided by the identity of the chosen items. In our case, the identity of the damaged windows would certainly have been of some importance.

This anecdote is a good example of how the linguistic concept of specificity – one possible aspect of indefinite reference – applies to a real life situation.<sup>2</sup>

So it seems that specificity can be very important; but why exactly? I would like to answer this question by telling another story. I still remember my first experience of loss through death when I was a small child. One day my pet, a budgie, died. Not really understanding what had happened, my first reaction was disconsolate grief. But eventually I found a solution: "This year I am going to ask for a new budgie as a Christmas present, a budgie that looks exactly like poor dead Pipsi."

From an adult perspective, the idea that an individual could be replaced by a look-alike seems absurd and frivolous, even if the individual in question is only a budgie. For a car or a dress, replacing it in this way would be a reasonable and acceptable option – for a house or a work of art, certainly less so; for a human being or a pet – never.

It appears that the problem of specificity is related to a fundamental question of our existence: the question of *human identity*. Unless you are a saint, the idea of being just *anybody* is absolutely unbearable; it is one of the symptoms of deep depression. Every person is profoundly convinced that he or she is not just anybody, but somebody, somebody special, *somebody specific*.

The forming of friendships, and perhaps even human relationships in general, mostly serves this very aim: viz. to discover in others what is specific in them, in what ways they are special, and, for oneself, to become somebody special, somebody specific for others. That's what the fox tries to explain to the Little Prince:

(1) Tu n'es encore pour moi qu'un petit garçon semblable à cent mille petits garçons. Et je n'ai pas besoin de toi. Et tu n'as pas besoin de moi non plus. Je ne suis pour toi qu'un renard semblable à cent mille renards. Mais, si tu m'apprivoises, nous aurons besoin l'un de l'autre. Tu seras pour moi unique au monde. Je serai pour toi unique au monde. (Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: *Le petit prince*, Paderborn: Schöningh 1981, p.56)

<sup>2</sup> There is a parallel between definiteness, where the referent can be identified by speaker and hearer, and specificity, where the referent's identity is known to the speaker only, see Kaneko 1971: 95; Tabakowska 1980: 194-195 and Sroka 1983: 115. Sroka 1983: 115 introduces the so-called 'predicates of identification', and he distinguishes 'identified by the encoder and the addressee', 'identified by the encoder', and 'non-identified by the encoder'.

<sup>1</sup> The first part of this paper is based on my doctoral thesis (Lavric 1990), the second one on my 'Habilitation' (Lavric 2001). But there the material is scattered over various chapters (vol. 2, especially 3.7.1., 3.8.2., 3.9.1. and 3.10.2.). This means that the main point of this contribution is that it combines these different elements into a new whole. Moreover, I have tried to present the subject in an easy and accessible way; and I have added a lot of new recent references. In what follows, I shall not mention my own publications.

A friend is someone specific for us because his (their) identity counts. If we understand specificity as the relevance of identity,<sup>3</sup> then the opposite of 'specific' is 'random choice'. But specificity has one more side to it, one more aspect which makes it part of another opposition and links it with another opposite.

### 3. The two opposites of specificity

To explain this, I shall come back to our budgie: this story is interesting from a linguistic point of view because Pipsi's successor has remained a completely random one due to the fact that I have never had a similar bird since. The substitute budgie of my naïve childish wish has remained a *non-existing* budgie. This means that what I referred to was a hypothetical bird, which, in contrast to his specific predecessor Pipsi, never crossed the border into real existence. Not factual, but only 'hypothetical existence': has thus to be considered as another opposite of 'specificity'. This means that there are not one, but two different oppositions involving the term 'specific': first, 'specific' versus 'random choice', and second, 'specific', i.e. 'factually existing' versus 'hypothetically existing'.

#### 3.1. Real versus hypothetical existence

The latter opposition is reflected in one of the well-known referential ambiguities of *indefinite noun phrases*. I use a misunderstanding, which I found in an Austrian newspaper, to illustrate it:

- (4) Le professeur annonce: "La police cherche un jeune homme qui importe les filles dans les alentours du lycée." Réaction de l'élève: "Je suis candidat!" (Neue Kronen-Zeitung, 13.5.1986: 23, translation E.L.)

For the teacher, the bad young man is a specific individual, i.e. one that really exists and can be found; for the pupil, on the other hand, it is only a hypothetical, or potential one, representing a very attractive role which he could perhaps take on himself. This ambiguity can be explained by the *theory of possible worlds* (I refer to the version developed by Martin 1983). Well then: our young man exists either in the real world, or only in a possible one.

<sup>3</sup> When trying to define specificity, one important point is to clarify whether the speaker knows the identity of the referent (ex. 2) or whether what really counts is the relevance of this very identity (ex. 3):  
(2) Il y a une fleur... je crois qu'elle m'a apprivoisé... (Anioine de Saint-Exupéry: Le petit prince, Paderborn: Schöningh 1981: 56)  
(3) - Il faut des rites. Qu'est-ce qu'un rite? C'est une chose bien trop oubliée. [...] C'est ce qui fait qu'un jour est différent des autres jours, une fleur, des autres fleurs. (ibid.: 57)

I consider the second interpretation to be the basic one, because *knowledge of identity* on the part of the speaker can be regarded as one *special case of relevance of identity*.

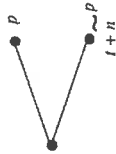
### 3.2. Possible worlds and opaque contexts

The French version of the theory of possible worlds is well known through the book of Fauconnier 1984, *Espaces mentaux*. I prefer the versions developed by Martin (1983 and 1987), see also Martin 2001.

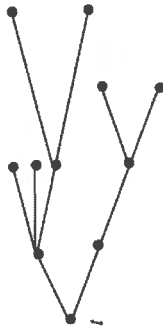
I here adopt the concept of possible worlds as it is developed in Martin 1983. A *'world'* (<monde>) is for Martin an instant of a ramified time. See his schemata (p.30) and explanations:

(- is logic negation)

"...le possible est lié à un temps ramifié. Au moment *t* du temps, le possible suppose alors deux rameaux au moins, tels qu'en *t + n*, *p* soit vrai ou faux:



En *t + n*, de nouvelles ramifications sont concevables de telle sorte que le temps se diversifie à l'infini:



On appelle 'mondes possibles' les instants d'un temps ramifié."

The referents of most noun phrases exist in the real world, but there are also certain contexts in which indefinite NPs do not establish a referent in the real world.<sup>4</sup> Instead of saying that such (hypothetical) NPs have no referent or no existing referent, it can be more interesting to say that they establish a referent just like other indefinite NPs, but that *this referent exists in a possible, or even in a counterfactual world*.

Possible worlds are triggered by so-called 'opaque contexts', i.e. contexts introducing something hypothetical, suggested, for instance, by the verb *to*

<sup>4</sup> According to Bickerton 1975, articles express three universal semantic categories: presupposition of existence (definite articles), assertion of existence (indefinite articles) and hypothesis of existence (indefinite articles). The two latter categories (and thus the meaning of the indefinite article) can be unified if one considers hypothesis of existence as one form of existence assertion, namely, existence in a possible world.

look for, the future, questions, conditional or negative sentences, etc.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.3. Pronominalization

The two versions of our example (4), the real world one and the possible world one, differ in their *possible continuations*: the question is whether the indefinite referent can later be represented by a *definite* expression, e.g. the personal pronoun *il*:

(5) La police cherche un jeune homme qui importune les filles dans les alentours du lycée.

Only in the teacher's version, interpreting the sentence as the search for a rogue existing in the real world, is it possible to continue by saying:

(5a) Il a les cheveux verts.

*Il* is a definite expression representing the young man. This option is possible because we simply remain in the real world.

In the pupil's version, presupposing the search for a suitable candidate who only exists in a possible world, such a continuation would be impossible. If we want to represent the young man in the real world, we have to do this through an indefinite noun phrase,<sup>6</sup> e.g.:

(5b) Je connais un tel jeune homme!

It is only if we remain in the possible world, in the realm of the hypothetical, of the wishes concerning a potential candidate, that an anaphor realized in a definite expression, e.g. *il*, is possible:

<sup>5</sup> The contexts I call 'opaque' (the term was coined by Quine 1960 and is discussed e.g. in Bähr 1986) are described e.g. by Loup 1977: 241 (contexts for the Russian *-itubul'*-suffix), Givón 1978: 294 (POSSIBLE or NEG modality), Martin 1983 (possible contexts for Fr. *lour*), Jacob 1992: 9-10 (contexts in which non-refering NPs can appear) etc. See below, Haspelmath's (1997) non-specific contexts for indefinites.

<sup>6</sup> Much research on verbs of propositional attitude has centred on the 'world creating predicates' (Lawler 1977: 110, Kleiber 1979: 242) with another type of contexts, viz. contexts where a reported speaker is involved. But it should be clear that the ambiguities that arise in both types of contexts are not the same, see Galimiche 1983: 63-66 and Martin 1983: 37-38.

The more recent study by Mutombo Matsumakia 1988 entitled *Opacité référentielle et quantification* regards opacity as a more general linguistic phenomenon, not necessarily bounded to the scopus of certain types of verbs – a position I fundamentally agree with.

<sup>7</sup> Pronominalization in effect depends on world status, which can also be described through the concept of 'levels of reference'. Heinz 1982 (like Werth 1980) distinguishes three levels of reference. (Réferenz-ebenen): 'specific, non-specific' (she means factual and hypothetical existence) and 'generic'. She writes (p.33):

'Ein einmal im Text präsentiertes Nominalsyntaxema ist im Prinzip in allen folgenden Re-präsentationen 'definit', solange es denselben Referenzbezug besitzt. Jeder Wechsel im Referenzbezug, sei es von einer Einheit derselben Klasse zu einer anderen innerhalb derselben Referenzebene, sei es aber auch der Wechsel zwischen den genannten Referenzebenen, bedeutet grundsätzlich den Bruch der Re-präsentationsabfolge.'

The possibilities of pronominalization depending on the world status of a referent have been studied by Karttunen 1968: 5-6, 1969 and 1972: 180, Loup 1977: 237, Van Langendonck 1979: 38-39 and 1980: 218, Zhou 1985: 125 as well as by Heim 1988 and Stark 2001.

(5c) Il est censé se faire tatouer pour faire ce travail.

In general, we can say that no referent can be transferred from a possible world to the real world by means of a definite expression.

### 3.4. Definite and indefinite referents in opaque contexts

Not all referents in opaque contexts are hypothetical. E.g., a *definite* NP in an opaque context establishes a normal existing referent (whose existence is presupposed), just like in all other types of contexts:

(5d) La police cherche le jeune homme qui importune les filles dans les alentours du lycée.

The same is true of indefinite noun phrases with explicitly specific determiners:

(5e) La police cherche un certain jeune homme qui importune les filles dans les alentours du lycée. Il est armé d'une massue.

How can the occurrence of factually existing referents in opaque contexts be explained? Well, these are simply transferred from the real world into the possible world. Transfers are always possible in this direction (but not the other way round).

What happens, generally speaking, to NPs with *indefinite* articles in opaque contexts? They establish the ambiguity, already described, between factual and hypothetical existence of the referent:

(5f) La police cherche un jeune homme qui importune les filles dans les alentours du lycée.

teacher's reading: ...Il est tatoué et piercé. (real world)

pupil's reading: ...Il devrait si possible être tatoué et piercé. (poss. world)

And *indefinite* NPs with *random determiners*, like Ger. *irgendein* and Fr. *quelque*? They also create the same ambiguity:

(5g) La police cherche quelque jeune homme qui importune les filles dans les alentours du lycée.

teacher's reading: ...Il paraît qu'il a les cheveux teints en vert. (real world)

pupil's reading: ...Il devrait si possible avoir les cheveux verts. (poss. world)

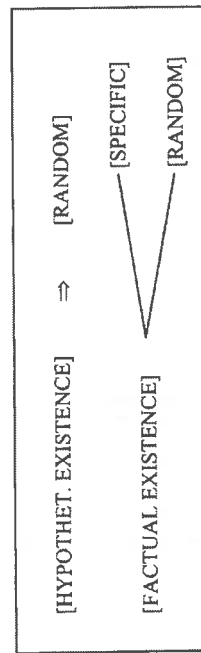
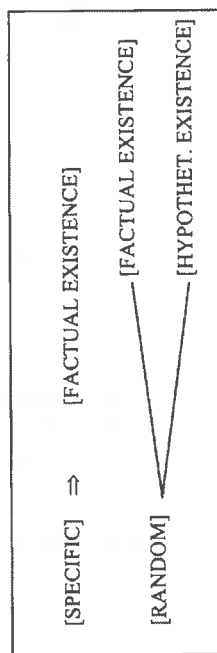
These examples make it clear that specificity as commonly understood covers two different semantic oppositions: first, one which is concerned with possible worlds as opposed to the real world, which I call [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] versus [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE]; and second, one which deals with the relevance or non-relevance of identity, which I call [SPECIFIC] versus [RANDOM].

3.5. *The relationship between [SPECIFIC] / [RANDOM] and [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] versus [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE]*

The two oppositions [SPECIFIC] / [RANDOM] and [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] versus [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] are not independent of each other. Certain combinations are not possible, i.e. [SPECIFIC] cannot combine with [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE]:

[FACTUAL EXISTENCE]	[HYPOTH. EX.]
[SPECIFIC]	[RANDOM]

A referent that is specific always has to exist: [SPECIFIC] implies [FACTUAL EXISTENCE]. And a referent that does not exist can only be random: [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] implies [RANDOM].



In 'normal', *non-opaque contexts*, indefinite referents always have [FACTUAL EXISTENCE]; and they can be either [SPECIFIC] or [RANDOM].

In *opaque contexts*, indefinite referents have either [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] or [FACTUAL EXISTENCE]. Hypothetically existing referents are always [RANDOM]. Factually existing referents can be either [SPECIFIC] or [RANDOM].<sup>7</sup>

3.6. *Relative clauses*

The factual/hypothetical existence dichotomy has one more correlate on the syntactic level: in Romance languages like French or Spanish, the *mood* of a possible *relative clause* correlates with the existence status of the antecedent:

(6a) Je veux épouser un homme qui écrit des poèmes.  
Quiero casarme con un hombre que escribe poesias.

If I use the indicative mood, I want to marry a specific man, who accidentally writes poetry ([FACTUAL EXISTENCE] [SPECIFIC]).

(6b) Je veux épouser un homme qui écrit des poèmes.  
Quiero casarme con un hombre que escriba poesias. (after Galmiche 1983: 68-69)

<sup>7</sup> As for the oppositions [SPECIFIC] / [RANDOM] and [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] / [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] in linguistic literature, some linguists call my opposition [SPECIFIC] versus [RANDOM], [+/- SPECIFIC], e.g. Vaele 1963/1979: 102, Martin 1983: 155-156 and Zhou 1985: 198. Others call the opposition that I call [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] versus [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE], [+/- SPECIFIC], e.g. Loup 1977: 237-239, Werth 1980: 252-259, Heinz 1982: 32-45 and Galmiche 1983. There are also some linguists that do not make it clear which of the two oppositions they mean: Parée 1972: 415, Lawler 1977: 115 and Heger 1983: 101-103. This holds true especially for those who – like Kaneko 1971: 96-97 and Oomen 1977: 97 – try to define the dichotomy without mentioning the speaker. It is Galmiche 1983: 70 who most clearly distinguishes the two oppositions and describes the relationship between them. A very clear analysis can also be found in Martin 1983: 155-156. The interaction between [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] and [RANDOM] is described by Loup 1977: 239 and Van Langendonck 1980: 218-219. Haspelmath 1997: 52 and 119-122 presents the following scheme (from a typological perspective) – which I agree with, apart from the position of 'free choice':

specific	known to speaker unknown to speaker	conditionals questions
non-specific	irrealis context	standard of comparison indirect negation direct negation
	negative polarity	
	free choice	

For a more recent and very clear synopsis of the question, see Stark 2001. The factual versus hypothetical existence ambiguity has also been described in terms of a scopus problem, e.g. by Parée 1972: 415-416, Bach 1975: 88, Loup 1977: 239-240 and Van Langendonck 1979: 39 and 1980: 215: in fact, it all depends on whether or not the indefinite NP stands in the scopus of some kind of 'opacifying' factor. This view is represented especially by 'Discourse Representation Theory' (see Kamp / Reyle 1993) and by 'File Change Semantics' (Heim 1988); see also Corblin 1997 and Herburger 2000.

The subjunctive mood indicates that I want to marry any man, provided he is a poet ([HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] [RANDOM]).

Moreover, the relative clause in (6a) is non-restrictive (e.g., the writing of poems is accidental), in (6b) it is restrictive (the writing of poetry is a necessary condition).<sup>8</sup>

## 4. The three variants of specificity

### 4.1. Specific and random determiners

The popular linguistic term *specificity* therefore covers not one concept, but two different semantic oppositions: first, one which is concerned with possible worlds as opposed to the real world and which I call [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] versus [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE]; and second, one which deals with the relevance or non-relevance of identity and which I call [SPECIFIC] versus [RANDOM]. The latter dichotomy can be shown to have correlates on the lexical level, viz. in the semantics of indefinite determiners. This is why in the third part of this paper we shall be concerned with the indefinite specific versus random determiners of French, Spanish and German shown in the following table:

Table I<sup>9</sup>

Fr.	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	
(un) certain/s	cierto/s	(ein) bestimmte/r (ein) gewisse/r	quelque n'importe quel/s un/de quelconque/s divers	algun cual(es)quier/a (un...cualquiera)	irgendein irgendwelche diverse	

### 4.2. How random determiners react under negation

Before we get to our main point, we have to clarify one important distinction that occurs within the group of random determiners, i.e. how they react under negation. See the following examples:

<sup>8</sup> When I posit an affinity between factual existence, indicative mood, and non-restrictive relative clauses on the one hand, and hypothetical existence, subjunctive mood, and restrictive relative clauses on the other hand (see also Calmiche 1983: 68-69, Héger 1983: 101-103 and Lehmann 1984: 290), this does *not* mean that these correlations hold *for* 100%. e.g. Calmiche 1983 thinks that writing poetry could also be a desirable quality of a really existing candidate. Rivero 1974 (and 1975, then Rojas 1977, then Rivero 1977) and 1979a tries to establish an analogy between [FACTUAL EXISTENCE] versus [HYPOTHETICAL EXISTENCE] and Donnellan's distinction referential / attributive (Donnellan 1966), but the only thing she really shows is that in Spanish the mood of the relative clause is independent of the world status.

(7a) Je suis prête à épouser n'importe quel poète.  
Estoy dispuesta a casarme con cualquier poeta.

(7b) Je ne suis pas prête à épouser n'importe quel poète.  
No estoy dispuesta a casarme con cualquier poeta.

(8a) Je suis prête à épouser quelque poète / un quelconque poète.  
Estoy dispuesta a casarme con algún poeta / un poeta cualquiera.  
Ich bin bereit, irgendeinen Dichter zu heiraten.

(8b) Je ne suis pas prête à épouser quelque poète / un quelconque poète.  
No estoy dispuesta a casarme con algún poeta / un poeta cualquiera.  
Ich bin nicht bereit, irgendeinen Dichter zu heiraten.

In the first case (7b), I am ready to marry a poet, but not just any poet. In the second case (8b), I refuse categorically to marry any member of this profession. This means that with Fr. *n'importe quel* and Sp. *cualquier*, negation impacts only on random choice, but not on the existence of the person. With Fr. *quelque, un (...)* *quelconque*, Sp. *algun, un...cualquiera* and with Ger. *irgendein, I deny the very existence of a poet I would be ready to marry.*

Negation being a test to find out, in a given sentence, what is presupposed and what is asserted, we can say that *n'importe quel* and *cualquier* presuppose the existence of the referent, asserting its random choice. I call them 'random-centered forms' (they are, by the way, typical totalizers, like e.g. *all*). All other random determiners assert both the existence and the random choice of the referent. I call them 'existence-centered forms' (they are typical indefinites).

<sup>9</sup> Table Ia is a more complete version of our Table I. It shows not only those determiners which are marked mostly for [SPECIFIC] or [RANDOM], but also those which combine this dimension with some other type of semantic feature:  
Ger. *ein paar*: [RANDOM] and small quantity;  
Fr. *nombre de* and Ger. *etliche*: [SPECIFIC], a big quantity, and a quantity subjectively considerable;  
Ger. *mancher, manliche*: [SPECIFIC], and in some uses: a quantity not necessarily big, but subjectively considerable.

Table Ia

Fr.	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	
(un) certain/s	cierto/s	(ein) bestimmte/r (ein) gewisse/r etliche (so) mancher	quelque n'importe quel/s un/de quelconque/s divers	algun cual(es)quier/a (un...cualquiera)	irgendein irgendwelche ein paar diverse	
nombre de				diversos		

Two more examples:

**Random-centered forms: n'importe quel, quelque**

- (9) BP *Erngrease A1* [...] peut être appliquée facilement avec n'importe quelle pompe à graisse courante.  
 BP *Erngrease A1* [...] puede aplicarse muy fácilmente con quelquier pistola de engrase.  
 BP *Erngrease A1* [...] läßt sich mit jeder gewöhnlichen Fettpresse leicht fördern. (BP *Erngrease A1*, multilingual product catalogue, Vienna 1985)

**Existence-centered forms: quelque, un (...) quelconque, algún, un ... cualquier, irgendein**

- (10) El exterior de la casa [...] no tenía nada que la distinguiera de las menos felices, salvo [...] un portón desmontado de alguna iglesia antigua.  
 L'extérieur de la maison [...] n'avait rien qui pût la différencier d'autres moins heureuses, sauf [...] un portail soustrait à une quelconque église ancienne.  
 Das Äußere des Hauses [...] unterschied sich in nichts von den weniger glücklichem, einmal abgesehen von [...] dem Portal, das aus irgendeiner alten Kirche herangeschafft worden war. (G. García Márquez: *El amor en los tiempos del cólera*, Barcelona 1985, p.28; Fr. Paris 1987, p.22; Ger. München 1991, p.21)

For this distinction see Rohrer 1971, Kleiber / Martin 1977 and Martin 1983: 176-183. Martin 1983: 157 gives a formal description:

*En fait* Je peux prendre le train et j'accepte du travail *sont présupposés respectivement par* [je peux prendre n'importe quel train] et [j'accepte n'importe quel travail]. *Cela signifie qu'avec n'importe quel est présupposée l'existence d'un ensemble X, tel que*  $\forall x \in X. F(P x)$ .

Soit: pp :  $\exists X, \forall x \in X. F(P x)$  [pp: présupposé  
 posé : [F]  $x_w$  w: extraction aléatoire]

P is the predication of the noun (*travail*), F is the predication of the sentence (*j'accepte*).

**4.3. Specificity / random: Three variants**

Having clarified this detail, we can now proceed to our main point: it can be shown that, strictly speaking, *specificity and random choice come in three different variants*, which will be the subject of this chapter:

[SPECIFIC 1]	[RANDOM 1]
[SPECIFIC 2]	[RANDOM 2]
[SPECIFIC 3]	[RANDOM 3]

**4.3.1. Variants 1 and 2**

One important difference between the random determiners of the various languages is that only Fr. *quelque* and Sp. *algún* can combine with *mass terms*. But in that combination, we witness a very special phenomenon arising:

- (11) Transcurrido algún tiempo, volví a levantarme. (P. Handke: *Los avispones*, Barcelona 1984, p.12)  
 (12) Le concierge était resté quelque temps sur le pas de la porte... (A. Camus: *La peste*, Paris 1947, p.15)  
 (13) Il agit là avec quelque perfidie: d'abord il nous met en garde contre l'idée d'une force infinie – 'Méfions-nous de ces orgies de la pensée' – puis généreusement il accorde que le temps est infini. (J.L. Borges: *Histoire de l'infamie*. Histoire de l'éternité, Paris 1964, p.216)  
 (14) Tendrás que darle algún dinero.  
 Il faudra lui donner quelque argent.  
 (15) ...no sin derramar alguna sangre...  
 ...non sans verser quelque sang...  
 (16) ...si queda algún calor...  
 ...s'il reste quelque chaleur...

What we have in all these examples is an indefinite quantity of time, money, blood, warmth, and not specimens of unidentified time, warmth, etc. If combined with mass expressions, the random determiners take on a different meaning, viz. a *random quantity* of something. Therefore, I would like to introduce a semantic feature [QUANT-RANDOM], constituted by a combination of [RANDOM] with a mass noun. In German, the corresponding determiner is *irgendwelcher*:

- (14') Du wirst ihm irgendwelches Geld geben müssen.



Table II

	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.
[IDENT-]	(un) certaint/s	cierto/s	(ein) bestimmte/r	quelque	algun	irgendein/irgendwelche
[QUANT-]	(un) certaint+M (certains + Pl)	un cierto+M (ciertos + Pl)	(ein) gewisse/r	un/de quelconque/s n'importe quel/s quelque + M	algun + M	irgendwelcher (irgendwelche)

It might be interesting to see whether there is something comparable on the specific side. And there actually is!

- (17) ...el debate de si lo que dice el señor R. es falso o carece de valor veritativo [...] le da un cierto humor a la situación. (M.-L. Rivero: Estudios de gramática generativa del español, Madrid 1979, p.152)
- (18) ...el [...] español sigue guardando una cierta libertad de elección entre *mis-mo* y propio. (U. Jokinen: *Même - mismo - medesimo*. In: Romanística Turkuensis, Turku 1993, p.131)
- (19) Il avait aidé Alba à venir au monde, [...] il se sentait comme son père et ne pouvait se départir d'une certaine appréhension à la voir devenir femme. (I. Al-lende: La maison aux esprits, Paris 1984, p.363)
- (20) Depuis 1953, de nombreuses lois ont amélioré la condition féminine, développant une certaine égalité avec les hommes. (K. Henschelmann: Technik des Übersetzens Französisch - Deutsch, Heidelberg 1980, p.14)
- (21) Il est resté un certain temps avec elle.
- (22) Hace falta un cierto valor para hacer eso.

All these examples do not refer to a certain thing, but to a certain quantity of something. This means that specific, combined with mass, converts to [QUANT-SPECIFIC]. By the way, this variant is not restricted to mass expressions, but it occurs also with pseudo-pluraliatum such as *doubts* or *difficulties* (see Sp. *tuvo ciertas dudas / ciertas dificultades*.) And it can even combine with count singular nouns, but only if they refer to something measurable, see Fr. *une certaine somme, une certaine distance*, or, even more surprisingly, Ger. *eine gewisse Marktlücke*.

In German there are two [SPECIFIC] determiners, *ein bestimmter / bestimmte* and *ein gewisser / gewisse*, and it is only the latter that appears in [QUANT-SPECIFIC] examples (*eine gewisse Zeit, gewisse Zweifel...*). *Ein bestimmter / bestimmte*, on the other hand, is particular to normal specific contexts, for which

it is time to introduce a new name, which will be [IDENT-SPECIFIC]. Normal, identity-centred random choice will consequently be called [IDENT-RANDOM].

Table III

	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.
[IDENT-]	(un) certaint/s	cierto/s	(ein) bestimmte/r	quelque	algun	irgendein/irgendwelche
[QUANT-]	Un certaint+M (certains + Pl)	un cierto+M (ciertos + Pl)	ein gewisser (gewisse + Pl)	un/de quelconque/s n'importe quel/s quelque + M	algun + M	irgendwelcher (irgendwelche)

#### 4.3.2. Variant 3

But that's not yet the whole story. Because there is still another variant (a third one) of specificity and random choice, as can be seen in the following examples:

- (23) Comme vous le savez peut-être, notre gouvernement a récemment décrété un embargo sur l'exportation de certaines marchandises.  
Como sabrán, nuestro Gobierno prohibió recientemente la exportación de ciertos productos.  
Wie Ihnen vielleicht bekannt ist, verhängte unsere Regierung vor kurzem einen Ausfuhrstopp für gewisse Waren. (E. Dröber / B. Dröber-Ortoli: Mustergeschäftsbriefe, Kissing 1981, p.93)

- (24) Certains solvants organiques ainsi que les huiles essentielles [...] attaquent les pièces en matière plastique.  
Ciertos disolventes orgánicos al igual que los aceites etéreos [...] atacan las piezas de material plástico.  
Gewisse organische Lösungsmittel greifen ebenso wie ätherische Öle [...] die Kunststoffteile an. (AEG, multilingual use instructions for refrigeration equipment, Regensburg s.a.)

These statements are about certain types of goods, certain types of solvents, and not about certain quantities or individual specimens of them. The third variant of specificity therefore has to be called [TYPE-SPECIFIC]. It is the result of the combination of a specific determiner with the type reading of a noun: actually, nearly all nouns can be used to designate not only individuals, but also

types, or rather: sub-types of something,<sup>10</sup> as can be seen in the following examples: *Welches Auto ist besser: die Ente oder der Käfer?*, or: *Hier bekommen Sie alle Weine Frankreichs!* The latter example shows that mass terms, when used in a type reading, suddenly become countable.

Our third variant, [TYPE-SPECIFIC], is connected with this type reading:

(25) Certains vins sont mauvais pour la santé.

(26) Ciertas experiencias pueden ser muy útiles.

In German the determiner connected with type specificity is always *gewisse* and not *bestimmte*:

(27) Gewisse Wale sind beinahe ausgestorben.

Table IV

	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.
[IDENT-]	(un) certain/s	ciento/s	(ein) bestimmte/r (ein) gewisse/r	quelque un/de quelcon- que/s	algun cual(es)quiera/a (un...cualquiera)	irgendem irgend- welche
[QUANT-]	Un certain+M (certain + Pl)	un ciento+M (cientos + Pl)	ein gewisser+M (gewisse + Pl)	n'importe quel/s quelque + M	algun + M	irgend- welcher (irgend- welche)
[TYPE-]	(un) certain/s	ciento/s	(ein) gewisse/r			

Needless to say, [TYPE-SPECIFIC] has got its random counterpart, [TYPE-RANDOM], i.e. the meaning nuance *whatever type of*:<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The 'type' reading of nouns has often been described as a special semantic variant of the plural, especially with mass nouns, see e.g. Schiffo 1980: 139 and Mulwene 1984: 210. Schulz 1988: 42 recognizes it only in the count domain ('...a number of countable nouns can designate more than one configuration of discrete entities...'). Biermann 1982: 236 distinguishes (after Jensen 1951/1952: 11) a 'Plurals Distributivus (individuals)' and a 'Plurals Generalis' (types). It is only Galmiche 1988: 72-73 that acknowledges the existence of the phenomenon over the whole range of singular and plural, mass and count. He calls it *les sous-espèces* and describes its repercussions for the French language (1985: 8-10). There is a parallel between the type reading of nouns and the phenomenon of type generativity (*the kerner builds dawns*), which is recognised e.g. by Martin 1988: 41-42 and Chur 1993 (See Lavric 2001: 527: "Substantivus in Sorten-Lesart verbinden hyperonymisch Blindel von Typen"). But it should be noted that type generativity only occurs with the definite article singular, while the type reading is possible in both numbers and with all kinds of determiners.

<sup>11</sup> As far as I know, the quantitative and the qualitative (= type) variant of specificity (versus random) have hardly ever been described in linguistic literature. Here's what I found: Flückiger-Schuder 1983: 176-180 notes the type variant in Ger. *ein gewisser* (only sg.), generalizing it abusively to Fr. *un certain*, *certain*. Warren 1987 finds for Engl. *a certain*, *certain* a type variant connected with the type reading and a quantity reading connected with mass terms. Van de Velde 2000: 248-263 gives a [QUANT-SPECIFIC] example for Fr. *un certain* (*il a une certaine admiration pour son père*) without recognizing the variant. For Québécois (pp.255-263) she sees the [QUANT-RANDOM] variant, interpreting it, however, as "small quantity" and not as "random quantity".

(28) Tu peux combiner ce plat avec n'importe quelle bière.  
Este plato lo puedes combinar con cualquier cerveza.

(29) Ils cherchent s'il n'y a pas une entourage, une quelconque facilité de narration (ellipse abusive, flou trompeur, escamotage) indigne de mon talent et de leur perspicacité. (D. Pennac, *Au bonheur des ogres*, Paris 1988, pp.193-194)

As far as determiners are concerned, for [TYPE-RANDOM] French typically uses *n'importe quel* or *un (...)* *quelconque*, and Spanish *cualquier*. In German, the plural determiner *irgendwelche* has a strong affinity with [TYPE-RANDOM], however, without being restricted to it:

(30) Lass irgendwelche Arbeiten liegen, mach stattdessen irgendwelche Übungen, vielleicht spürst du irgendwelche Wirkungen.

Table V

	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.
[IDENT-]	(un) certain/s	ciento/s	(ein) bestimmte/t (ein) gewisse/r	quelque n'importe quel/s	algun cual(es)quiera/a (un...cualquiera)	irgendem irgend- welche
[QUANT-]	Un certain+M (certain + Pl)	un ciento+M (cientos + Pl)	ein gewisser+M (gewisse + Pl)	quelque + M	algun + M	irgend- welcher (irgend- welche)
[TYPE-]	(un) certain/s	ciento/s	(ein) gewisse/r	un/de quelconque/s	cual(es)quiera/a (un...cualquiera)	irgendem irgend- welche

We shall see in the last chapters of this paper that this three-tier semantic system for specificity makes it possible e.g. to account for the semantic difference between the French determiners *quelque* et *un (...)* *quelconque*, and for the systematically occurring pejorative connotations in certain types of non-specific indefinite noun phrases.

#### 4.3.3. The difference between French *quelque* and *un (...)* *quelconque*

As for French *quelque* and *un (...)* *quelconque*, first we have to mention the fact that in Fr. *un (...)* *quelconque*, the component *quelconque* can precede or follow the noun: *un poète quelconque* or *un quelconque poète*. The first variant can give rise to an irritating ambiguity with the adjective *quelconque*, meaning 'common, vulgar, insignificant', see the following word play:

(31) - Avez-vous jamais milité dans une organisation quelconque?

- Ni dans une quelconque ni dans une distinguée. (D. Pennac: *Au bonheur des ogres*, Paris 1988, p.150)

As for the semantics of *un* (...) *quelconque*, Arrivé 1965: 107 describes it as 'identité indifférente'.

The linguists that have studied the French forms *quelque* and *un* (...) *quelconque* (Gondret 1976: 152, Dausendschön-Gay 1977: 113-119, Riegel / Pellat / Rioul 1994: 160, Van der Velde 2000), all share the assumption that they are *synonyms*; some say that *quelque* is a little bit old-fashioned.

I myself am convinced that *quelque* and *un* (...) *quelconque* are *semantically different*, and that their difference is related to the feature [TYPE-RANDOM]. Of course they have large areas in which they coincide, and if linguists consider them to be synonyms, it is because they easily commute in nearly all types of contexts:

(32) Ils cherchent s'il n'y a pas une entourloupe, une quelconque facilité de narration (ellipse abusive, flou trompeur, escamotage) indigne de mon talent et de leur perspicacité.

Pennac: Au bonheur des ogres, Paris 1988, pp.193-194)

There is, however, a small number of context types where they do not coincide. In these contexts *quelque* fits perfectly, while *un* (...) *quelconque* cannot be used. Such examples can mainly be found in comparison contexts:

(33) ...ce parler d'eau [...] s'empl[ît] vers le soir, comme quelque port lointain, du rose et de la rêverie du couchant.

\*un quelconque port lointain (M. Proust: Du côté de chez Swann, Paris 1992, p.164)

(34) ...l'orage éclata enfin [...]. Il y eut un crépitement, à croire que le monde faisait sauter quelque fermeture-éclair trop serrée.

\*une quelconque fermeture-éclair trop serrée (M. Walser: La licorne, Paris 1969, p.326)

This can be explained if we admit that *quelque* is [IDENT-RANDOM] and *un* (...) *quelconque* is [TYPE-RANDOM]. Actually, if something is similar to a port, or to a zip, then it resembles the prototype of a port, or the prototype of a zip; and in that context, we are *not* interested in the various types of ports or the various types of zips that might exist. That is why it is possible to refer to an [IDENT-RANDOM] port (/zip) with the determiner *quelque*, but not to a [TYPE-RANDOM] port (/zip) with the determiner *un* (...) *quelconque*.

#### 4.3.4. A puzzle about pejorativity

Just as the *quantity* variant is not restricted to mass terms, the *type* variant is not restricted to nouns in type reading either. Designations for persons, for instance, in general cannot be read as types. Five vegetarians, eighteen Japanese

and thirty-seven carrier-pigeon breeders are always individuals, and not types of vegetarians, of Japanese, or carrier-pigeon breeders. Nevertheless, nouns designating persons can be combined with [TYPE-RANDOM] determiners: *de quelconques végétariens*, *unos japoneses cualesquiera* and *irgendwelche Brief-taubenzüchter* are not different types, but qualitatively diverse individuals of their respective species. Moreover, the [TYPE-RANDOM] determiner indicates that the differences between them are irrelevant. And it is interesting to note that this gives rise to an unexpected pejorative nuance. This pejorative shade of meaning can also be found in connection with the [TYPE-RANDOM] determiner series Fr. *divers* / Sp. *diversos* / Ger. *diverse*:

(35a) *Divers* hommes politiques ont réfléchi à la question.

*Diversos* políticos reflexionaron sobre aquello.

*Diverse* Politiker haben dazu Überlegungen angestellt.

Rather surprisingly, the same sentences with Fr. *différents* / Sp. *diferentes* / Ger. *verschiedene* do not appear to be pejorative:

(35b) *Différents* hommes politiques ont réfléchi à la question.

*Diferentes* políticos reflexionaron sobre aquello.

*Verschiedene* Politiker haben dazu Überlegungen angestellt.

The explanation is that the determiners in (35b) signal only heterogeneity, whereas in (35a) they signal additionally that the differences are to be considered as completely irrelevant.

Table VI

	[SPECIFIC]			[RANDOM]		
	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.	Fr.	Sp.	Ger.
[IDENT-]	(un) certain/s	ciertos/s	(ein) bestimmter/r	quelque	algún	irgendein irgend- welche
[QUANT-]	Un certain/M (certains + Pl)	un cierto/M (ciertos + Pl)	(ein) gewisse/r ein gewisser/M (gewisse + Pl)	n'importe quel/s	cual(es)quiera/a (un...cualquiera)	irgendwelcher (irgendwelche)
[TYPE-]	(un) certain/s	ciertos/s	(ein) gewisse/r	un/de quelconque/s n'importe quel/s	cual(es)quiera/a (un...cualquiera) diversos	irgendein irgend- welche diverse

It seems therefore that, if combined with designations for human beings, [TYPE-RANDOM] determiners inevitably produce a pejorative effect. Or, to express it in terms of semantic features:

[HUMAN] + [TYPE-RANDOM] ⇒ [PEJORATIVE]

## 5. Conclusion

The pejorative effect described seems less surprising if we reconsider the psychological implications of specificity versus random choice analysed in the first part of the paper. We human beings are so convinced not to be just anybody, but somebody very special, and this conviction is of such great importance to our mental equilibrium, that we are ready to concede it to any other human being as an integral feature of their existence. Our specificity thus constitutes an inseparable part of the cognitive model our society has built up about being human. Therefore, whoever combines a person noun with a [TYPE-RANDOM] determiner is implicitly insinuating that differences between persons do not matter, or in other words, that a person's individuality is completely irrelevant. And this is certainly a grave insult to the people concerned. Specificity means identity, means individuality, and it is thus a linguistic correlate for nothing less than the dignity of a human being.

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