

NON-OBJVIOUS CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE: EVIDENCE FROM WEAK DEFINITES

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Abstract: It would appear that the concepts NEWSPAPER, DOCTOR, BUS, and BANK have nothing in common that distinguish them from concepts like MAGAZINE, SURGEON, CAR, and HOTEL. Nevertheless, definite noun phrases containing words corresponding to the two sets of concepts are interpreted differently. For example, "John went to the surgeon and Bill did too" is interpreted as involving a specific surgeon who is seen by both John and Bill. In contrast, "John went to the doctor and Bill did too" allows for the possibility that John and Bill saw different doctors (weak definite interpretation). We propose that weak definite interpretations are possible for nouns that name kinds that are simultaneously conceived of in concrete and abstract terms and provide principles of individuation and non-individuation. Three experiments provide support for this non-obvious characteristic of conceptual structure distinguishing the two sets of concepts and licensing the possibility of weak definite interpretations.