

εμβός ìIndefiniteness: A Pragmatic Analysis

Kiba Ngapoula

Marien Ngouabi University, Brazzaville, Republic of Congo

Tel: 242-05-548-3940 E-mail: kibangapoula@yahoo.fr

Received: April 18, 2023

Accepted: May 20, 2023

Published: June 13, 2023

doi:10.5296/ijl.v15i3.20917

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v15i3.20917>

Abstract

This analysis broaches the contextual interpretation of indefiniteness in εμβός ì and it aims at providing the promotion and documentation of this language. The study reveals that εμβός ì indefiniteness interplays with the pragmatic tenets of non-identifiability and novelty. It also and mainly reveals that εμβός ì indefinite description has different functions. It first introduces a new entity in the discourse and may have an attributive function when the referent of an entity refers to whoever or whatever fits the descriptive content of the noun phrase. It may also be referential when the speaker first communicates something about the referent and then wants the audience to identify it. εμβός ì indefinite description also assumes a specific function when the speaker refers to a specific entity in his mind without intending the hearer to identify it. Indefiniteness in εμβός ì also plays a descriptive role when the speaker, using a proper name, does not refer to a specific individual, but rather to what that individual describes.

Keywords: εμβός ì Indefiniteness, Non-identifiability, Novelty, Specific, Unspecific, Functions

1. Introduction

εμβός ì is a Bantu language spoken in the Republic of Congo, especially in the northern part of the country. It is classified by Guthrie (1948) as a C25 language. The analysis tackles the pragmatic approaches of indefinite descriptions, and it is prompted by the promotion and documentation of the language under discussion. The work addresses the following research questions: (i) How do pragmatic tenets interplay with εμβός ì indefinite descriptions to give rise to various performances? (ii) To what degree is the implicit meaning of εμβός ì indefinite descriptions crucial to the understanding of the message? Based on non-identifiability, novelty principles, and relevance theory, the study deals with the theoretical background and mainly the different functions of εμβός ì indefiniteness. The data are particularly taken from Kiba Ngapoula (2020).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 *embós* Language

embós is a Bantu language of the Republic of Congo. It is spoken in the northern part of the country, specifically in the departments of Cuvette and Plateaux. Classified by Guthrie's (1948) as a C25 language, this language has five dialects: Mboko, Akwa, Ngare, Koyo and *embós* strictly speaking. Kiba Ngapoula (2023:164) claims that "it is worthwhile specifying that *embós* is simultaneously the name of the group C20 and the name of one of its languages classified as C25 and distinguished by *embós* strictly speaking." He keeps on stating that *embós* strictly speaking, is composed of ten different subdialects depending on the geographical location of the speakers: Bokwele, Bonyala, Eboyi, Mbonzi, Ngae, Ngilima, Obaa, *Olee*, Ondinga, and Tsambitso. This work is based on the *Olee* subdialect.

However, to distinguish this language from its dialects, linguists are divided into two main currents. The former, composed of Ollasa (1969), Kouarata (2001), Apondza Ngombe (2003), and others, guided by Guthrie (1953), claim that *embós* language is different from Mboko, Akwa, Ngare and Koyo that they qualify as different languages. The latter, on the contrary, made up of Obenga (1976), Ndongo Ibara (2000), Itoua (2007), and Kiba Ngapoula (2016) assert that Mboko, Akwa, Ngare and Koyo are not different languages from *embós* but rather its dialects. This study deals with indefiniteness in this language.

2.2 Indefiniteness

Indefiniteness is a kind of definiteness indicating that the referent of an expression is not identifiable because of the lack of presuppositional information, which is the common knowledge or situation shared by participants. According to Crystal (2008:241), the term indefinite is used to refer to "an entity or class of entities that is not capable of specific identification." It also includes the first mention of the referent. We distinguish two kinds of them.

2.2.1 Typology of Indefiniteness

2.2.1.1 Specific

Indefiniteness may be specific when the referent of the entity is only known to the speaker, not to the hearer. The following example illustrates it:

(1) Àkò m áng ì ày éé l à b àà p ́s ́s l àp óà

Bananas those they-come with man one in yesterday

"Those bananas were brought by a man yesterday"

In fact, the indefinite description *b àà p ́s ́s* "a man" is said to be particular to the speaker. The referred entity is known to him or her, who probably met that man yesterday, he/she knows some details about him even if he or she may ignore his identity. For the hearer, however, the referred entity is unknown; he/she does not have any information about that man. The reference of the indefinite description *b àà p ́s ́s* "a man" in this utterance is then

known only to the speaker, and not to the hearer. The fact of being known to one of the participants makes this indefiniteness specific.

2.2.1.2 Unspecific

The indefinite description may be unspecific or non-particular, when the reference of the entity is not known to both participants. This is exemplified hereafter:

(2) W ààñ òdz ùém à àné m àng í òp é àótééné l àndzɔ.

If you go by way this, you-may meet with snake

“If you go this way, you may meet a snake.”

Indeed, the indefinite description *ndzɔ* “a snake” is not known to both participants. Neither the speaker nor the hearer is aware of the referred entity, which is therefore non-particular or unspecific. However, the understanding of indefiniteness is better grasped through the principles of non-identifiability and novelty.

2.2.2 Non Identifiability

Indefinite description is the expression of the non-identifiability of a referent by the participants. This referent is not identifiable because the speaker and the hearer do not share knowledge about it, which includes no previous mention of the referred entity. Indefiniteness is always studied in relation to definiteness because both are existentially quantified descriptions, the main difference is that definiteness indicates a unique referred entity. Let us consider the following example:

(3) *ḥ* àà p̄s̄s̄ ȳ ééótééné l àd à *ḥ* àà damé b̄ é íw à ð áng é *ḥ* àà damé ìl íínéné óny áng àk ò.

Man one he-come meet with dad, man that he-bring him mangoes man that mammy greet not.

“A man came to meet dad. That man brought him mangoes. That man did not greet mummy.”

In (3), the indefinite description *ḥ* àà *ip̄s̄s̄* “a man” involves an entity that is not identifiable in the discourse, it may be identifiable to one of the participants, not to both of them. Since this indefinite description has already been used, the participants are now aware of it; it becomes identifiable and part of their knowledge. The result is that the second and third mentions of this description in the discourse are now definite *ḥ* àà *damé* “that man” with the use of the demonstrative, which indicates that the entity has previously been introduced. Let us remember, with Ndongo Ibara (2012) and Kiba Ngapoula (2015, 2019), that demonstratives take a crucial place in the expression of definiteness in embós ì Otherwise, indefinite description also introduces a new entity into the discourse.

2.2.3 Novelty

The distinction between indefiniteness and definiteness in (3) is displayed through the complementary notions of novelty and second mention developed by Heim (1982,1983). The

indefiniteness expresses the novelty with the first introduction of the entity, and the definiteness expresses the second mention of the entity. Let us consider the following sentence:

(4) *ḥàà ipṣṣ ḃ ééṣténé l àd à ḥàà ipṣṣ ḃ é íw à ḃ áng é ḥàà ipṣṣ ì ínéné ṣny áng àk ò*

Man one he-come meet with dad, man one he-bring him mangoes, man one mammy greet not.

“A man came to meet dad. A man brought him mangoes. A man did not greet mummy”.

Indeed, all three mentions of the indefinite description *ḥàà ipṣṣ* “a man” involve three different first mentions. This means that whenever the speaker says *ḥàà ipṣṣ* “a man”, he/she refers to a new individual, a new man. There are therefore three different individuals evoked by the speaker, whereas in (3), the speaker is referring to the same man who came to meet his/her dad, bringing him mangoes and without greeting his/her mummy. Thus, where definiteness introduces a known description, indefiniteness is used to introduce a new description.

However, taking into consideration the crucial place of the relationship between novelty and second mention in the understanding of definiteness and indefiniteness, Heim (1983) calls to mind the question of truth conditions, or rather felicity conditions, when second mention precedes novelty. Let us illustrate:

(5) *òy í ìw ó ày ééṣt ànó. òy í ìṣpṣṣ ḃ é ínó é ó*

Woman this she-come see you. Woman one she-bring you pineapple

“This woman came to see you. A woman brought you a pineapple”.

Indeed, the first noun phrase *òy í ìw ó* “this woman” is a definite description, reinforced by the presence of the demonstrative *wó* “this”. This means that the referent is part of the participants’ background knowledge. In the second part of the utterance, the noun phrase *òy í ìṣpṣṣ* “a woman” is indefinite. This means the referent is unknown to the speaker and the hearer, or known only to the speaker.

Yet, where the truth conditions, or felicity conditions in Heim’s terms, intervene, is the fact that for this utterance to be successful, the referred entity in both parts of the utterance should not be the same *òy í ì* “woman”. The first noun phrase *òy í ìw ó* “this woman” is known to the participants and is different from the second noun phrase *òy í ìṣpṣṣ* “a woman”, which is unknown, indefinite, and the object of a new introduction. If that condition is not reached, the utterance will not be felicitous. However, the contextual understanding of the indefinite description requires an inferential theory of communication, such as relevance theory, to be understood.

2.3 Relevance Theory

Wilson and Sperber developed relevance theory in 1986, which is a cognitive theory of communication. Its main purpose is to explain how the audience grasps the speaker’s

intended meaning. Inference, which is its key tool and certainly the most crucial mechanism in language use, contributes to the human mind's ability to obtain information that is not literally present in a discourse. Kiba Ngapoula (2020:24-25) claims that recognition of the role played by inference in the comprehension of a discourse is prompted by the requirement of understanding the difference between “what is said” and “what is meant”.

Thus, the understanding of human communication does not depend on decoding alone; pragmatics demonstrates that people require inference to reach the meaning of what is said. Accordingly, Wilson and Sperber (2000:229) highlight that “comprehension is achieved by decoding signals to obtain the associated messages. On an inferential view, utterances are not signals, but pieces of evidence about the speaker's meaning, and comprehension is achieved by inferring this meaning from the evidence provided.” This shows how necessary inference is to the understanding of what is said. It is mostly needed to grasp the speaker's meaning, which often goes beyond the sentence meaning.

Furthermore, the relevance theory indicates that the intended meaning of an utterance is not just decoded, but rather inferred by means of an inferential process. Then, the interaction between the semantically encoded information and the pragmatically inferred information constitutes the heart of relevance theory. The sentences do not carry the full encoded meaning; they only provide a schematic indication of the speaker's meaning. The hearer, on the other hand, relies on inference in order to recover what is communicated. By doing so, the hearer necessarily refers to contextual information so as to grasp the intended interpretation, guided by expectations of relevance. Inference is then used in connection with the context so as to reach a meaningful interpretation of indefinite descriptions. An inferential theory of communication, such as relevance theory, is an essential requirement in our everyday communication.

In addition to what has previously been said by the above authors, this study contributes to the documentation of *embós* ì a Bantu language with no article system and suffering from a lack of written literature. It also proves that the contextual use of indefiniteness in a language does not depend on an article system alone. Indeed, the different functions indefinite descriptions may have in an utterance determine its pragmatic features (Kiba Ngapoula 2020:310).

3. Functions of Indefinite Description

The indefinite description in *embós* ì mainly has the function of a first introduction. It may also be attributive, referential, specific, or have a descriptive role.

3.1 First Introduction

The use of the indefinite description involves the lack of presupposition, which is considered in pragmatics as the information (here about the referent) the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance (Yule: 1996). There is no shared information about the referent for both participants. So, the indefinite description, as claimed by Quirk et al. (1985), makes no assumption about an earlier mention.

Indeed, the indefinite description indicates that the participants are not familiar with the referred entity. Communication consists of transmitting information between participants. This information may either be shared, that is, part of the participants' background knowledge, or non-shared, which means new to them. The indefinite description is used to first mention an entity in a discourse. It first introduces an entity that will later be definite or known in the subsequent part of the utterance. Let us illustrate with the following example:

(6) Ng à ì ð í ð à ð ó m ì à ts ó s ò

Me I-buy dad male of chicken

“I bought dad a cock”.

Indeed, the use of the indefinite description *ð ó m ì à ts ó s ò* “a cock” is to first mention it in the discourse. Before this first introduction, this entity was not familiar to the participants, mainly the hearer. The indefinite description describes an entity as unknown, it respects what is attested by our *primary perception*, whereas the definite description respects our *secondary perception* (Harris:1751, cited by Lyons:1991).

In addition, for the hearer in particular and for both participants in general, the indefinite description introduces a new entity he/she or they did not know before. The example below highlights the relationship between indefiniteness, which first introduces an entity, and definiteness, which expresses its familiarity:

(7) Mw á n à ð p ð ð à ð ò ng ì m í à ì ù ù l à mb ó à , mw á n à w á n é à ð ì ì à á n à l à m í à

Child one he-burn fire end of village, child that he-be play with fire.

“A child burnt himself at the bottom of the village, that child was playing with the fire”.

In fact, the noun phrase *mw á n à ð p ð ð* “a child” introduced for the first time in that discourse is indefinite, not known to the participants, and not part of their background knowledge. The noun phrase *mw á n à w á n é* “that child”, which is now definite or particular, refers to the same child evoked at the beginning of the utterance under the indefinite form. So, the indefiniteness first introduces the entity, preparing it to be definite in its second mention (Kiba Ngapoula 2020:312). However, the indefinite description does not only have the function of first introduction, it may also have the function of attributive.

3.2 Attributive Function

Let us consider the following situation in order to understand the attributive function of indefiniteness in embós ì The following utterance happens in a hospital where a son (the speaker) and his mother (the hearer) are taking care of the speaker's sister, who is ill. Both notice that the patient has a fever. The speaker goes to the nursing room to let the nurses know about that fever. When he comes back, he says to his mother:

(8) ð ù è r è m é ð p ð ð à y á á ò m á s à w à t ó ng à

Nurse one he/she-come pick she injection

“A nurse will come to give her an injection.”

Indeed, the indefinite description *βὴἐρέμῃ ἑπισῆ* “a nurse” in this utterance refers to the attributive function. His mother, the hearer, understands that any nurse in that nursing room will come to give an injection. The referred entity may be known to the speaker only with respect to its descriptive properties. This use of indefinite description is said to be attributive, meaning that whoever fits the description of being a nurse in that hospital and being able to make an injection can be considered the referred entity.

In fact, the objective of the addresser is not to tell the addressee that he is communicating about an individual or an individual representation of whom he is conscious. The addresser does not expect the addressee to identify the entity he is referring to. He is just talking about some individual who performs the descriptive effect of the indefinite description.

In other respects, Ludlow and Neale (1991), following Grice’s view, suggest the following interpretation to understand the quantitative or attributive use of the indefinite description: They establish a distinction between the proposition expressed (PE), which is the utterance, and the proposition meant (PM), which is the proposition the addresser intends to communicate, i.e., the distinction between what is said and what is meant.

According to them, the proposition expressed (PE) by (8) is understood as: *there is an individual x, that individual x is a nurse, and that x will come to give the speaker’s sister an injection the day of the utterance*. In this condition, what the addresser says, is also what he intends to communicate or what he means. The representation is PE=PM.

Ludlow and Neale (1991:523) also add another expression that they called the “speaker’s ground” (SG), which is the basic proposition of the utterance. In the case of (8), the speaker’s ground is the general proposition that some nurse will come to give an injection to the speaker’s sister in the hospital. So, the quantificational or attributive use of indefinite description is expressed when: SG =PE=PM.

Similarly, the attributive use of the indefinite description in general and of (8) in particular can be analysed through the relevance theory of Wilson and Sperber (1986). Indeed, the relevance theory is understood depending on the contextual effects and processing effort. Rochouta (1994:275) distinguishes three kinds of contextual effects as far as relevance theory is concerned:

- a- A newly acquired assumption may contradict or eliminate an already existing assumption;
- b- A newly presented assumption may strengthen an old assumption;
- c- A newly made assumption may combine with an already existing assumption to yield new information, what Wilson and Sperber refer to as “*contextual implication*”.

However, as far as the relevance view of communication is concerned, every utterance creates an expectation of its own, what Wilson and Sperber call “*the principle of relevance*.”

According to them, an utterance is highly relevant to a given interpretation on the condition that:

- a- It yields an adequate range of effects, enough to be worth the addressee's attention;
- b- It does so without putting the addressee's unjustifiable processing effort into deriving them.

Thus, the pragmatic criterion that Wilson and Sperber propose is consistent with the principle of relevance. According to them, an utterance in a given interpretation is consistent with the principle of relevance, if and only if the addresser might rationally have expected it to be optimally relevant to the addressee in that interpretation.

However, according to (8), the comprehension of this sentence, in which it expresses the proposition "there is an individual x, that individual x is a nurse, and that x will come to give an injection to the speaker's sister in the hospital", is in agreement with the principle of relevance. The proposition indirectly replies to the question asked by the addressee to the addresser and gives more implicatures, such as:

- A nurse is capable of giving an injection;
- The injection will be beneficial for the sister;
- It will get the temperature down;
- The sister will feel better after the injection.

Additionally, taking into account the fact that what the addressee understands is exactly what the addresser means, the utterance is then consistent with the principle of relevance. Any other understanding of this utterance in which it has more contextual effects is inappropriate, and therefore it is not in agreement with the suggested pragmatic standard.

In short, both analyses of (8) lead to the same conclusion. For Ludlow and Neale (1991), the proposition expressed is the proposition meant; what the addresser says is what he means. On the other side, with the relevance theory of Wilson and Sperber, the relationship between the consistency criterion and the principle of relevance tells us that in this context, the proposition expressed is similar to what the speaker intends to convey as a message. However, the indefinite description in *embós ì* may also be referential.

3.3 Referential Function

Taking into consideration the situation provided by Kiba Ngapoula (2020:314), there is an individual called Elenga living in a village called Ekolo, well known to the participants as being a famous thief in this neighbouring village. The speaker notices the presence of Elenga in their village (participants village), and he/she says to the hearer:

(9) Múù òpóó òd í ts àmb óà y àb í í

Thief one he-be in village of we

- d- The addresser did nothing to stop the addressee from inferring that Elenga from Ekolo is in their village. The addresser wants the addressee to think that Elenga may steal something.
- e- The addresser's implication is that Elenga from Ekolo is in their village.

The concept of Elenga is accessible for the addressee, since, according to the context, Elenga is in the village. The addresser here wants to communicate something about Elenga, the fact that he is at the participants village. The interaction between the proposition expressed or what is said and the proposition meant by the utterance involves a contextual implication that is derived from that interaction. The indefinite description in *embós* ì also has a specific function.

3.4 Specific Function

The term specific is credited to Ludlow and Neale (1991), who distinguish the strongly specific use from the weakly specific use. By the term specific, what is meant is that the indefinite description is used when the addresser intends to communicate that he/she has a particular individual or object in mind but does not intend the addressee to identify that individual or object. Let us illustrate with such an utterance:

(11) An E is B.

Indeed, the addresser in (11) intends to communicate that he/she has a particular individual "E" in his/her mind, but does not have the intention to transmit this knowledge to the addressee. According to Ludlow and Neale, the indefinite description is specific when what is meant or the proposition meant (PM) includes not only what is said or the proposition expressed (PE), but also the proposition that the addresser has, in his/her mind, an individuated representation of the individual or object he is talking about.

Let us consider the following example:

(12) *Obi à yà is ð à à ù ngà l à p ó à*

A friend of. work he/she-help I with yesterday.

A colleague helped me yesterday.

Indeed, in (12), the speaker has an individualised representation of the referred entity; he/she of course has specific information about *obi à* "a colleague" identification. However, what the speaker intends to convey to the hearer is not the identity of *obi à* "a colleague", but rather what he/she performs as action, the fact of helping the speaker the day before the day of utterance. So, this use of indefinite description is said to be specific.

Thus, this utterance is a bright illustration of the specific use of indefinite description. Indeed, in the understanding of this utterance, it is difficult for the addressee not to infer that the addresser is talking about a particular or rather specific individual he has in mind.

In other instances, Grice (1975:31) claims that a general pattern for working out a conversational implicature for the indefinite description may be described as follows:

He (the addresser) has said that p; there is no reason to suppose that he is not observing the maxims or at least the Cooperative Principle; he could not be doing this unless he thought that q; he knows (and knows that I know that he knows) that I can see that the supposition that q is required; he has done nothing to stop me thinking that q; he intends me to think, or is at least willing to allow me to think that q; and so, he has implicated that q.

It comes out from the above quotation that, by (12), the conversational implicatures are involved. The speaker knows that the hearer knows that he/she knows the referent of the indefinite description. The fact that the speaker is ambiguous violates Grice's manner maxim.

Moreover, analysing (12) in order to check whether the specific understanding of the indefinite description is obvious, the following conversational implicatures arise:

- a- The proposition expressed (PE) by the addresser is: (an x: x a colleague) (x helped me the day before the day of the utterance).
- b- We do not have any reason to think that in this utterance, the addresser is flouting the maxims or the Cooperative Principle.
- c- The addresser could not do so, even if he or she thinks that he or she has a specific individual or colleague in mind.
- d- The addresser knows that the addressee can understand that this supposition is needed. The addresser here is relevant, respecting the relation maxim. He has to indicate that he or she has a particular colleague in mind.
- e- The addresser did nothing to stop the addressee from inferring that he/she intends to talk about one of his/her colleague, so he/she intends the addressee to think that he/she has a specific colleague in mind. This means that the addresser has conversationally implied that he/she has a particular colleague in mind.

However, what can be noticed is the distinction between this alleged conversational implicature and pure conversational implicature. When the addresser pronounces such an utterance, it is obvious that he/she clearly intends to implicitly communicate that he has a nice colleague, able to help him if necessary. If this pure conversational implicature has to be applied to the Gricean test, we will get:

- a- The proposition expressed (PE) by the addresser is: (an x: x A colleague) (x helped me the day before the day of the utterance).
 - c- We do not have any reason to think that in this utterance, the addresser is flouting the maxims or the Cooperative Principle.
 - d- Taking into account the context, the addresser could not do so, even if he thinks that he has nice colleagues available for help.
 - e- The addresser knows that the addressee can understand that this supposition is needed. The addresser here is relevant, respecting the relation maxim. He has

to indicate something beyond the proposition that some colleague helped him yesterday.

- f- The addresser did nothing to stop the addressee inferring that he intends to communicate that this is his intention, so he intends the addressee to think that he has a specific colleague in mind. This means that the addresser has conversationally implied that he associates with nice people.

From this Gricean test, the difference between the alleged conversational implicature “the addresser has a particular or specific individual in mind” and the pure conversational implicature “the addresser associates with nice people” is obvious. In a specific context, to understand this utterance, the implicature “the addresser associates with nice people” is crucial, whereas the other “the addresser has a particular individual in mind” is not.

The Gricean analysis is based on the relation, which is probably the least defined of all the maxims. Relevance theory, on the other hand, will give us the difference between the implicature associated with the specific use of the indefinite description and the other implicatures of the utterance.

The understanding of the implicature of the utterance through relevance theory is based on two steps: The first step consists of the addressee decoding the utterance, which is a semantically incomplete performance. This is qualified by Wilson and Sperber as the logical form of the utterance, that is, the set of concepts encoded by the words of the utterance. The second step is concerned with this logically encoded form of the utterance, which constitutes the contribution to an inferential process, as a consequence of which it is contextually enriched and necessary to understand the addresser’s communicative intention.

So, the purpose of pragmatic theory in the understanding of the use of indefinite description is to give an explanation of the way in which the indefinite description is interpreted. In doing so, our main concern is not only to give the supposition that, in some indefinite descriptions, the addresser has a specific or particular individual or object in mind, but also to indicate that he/she intends to communicate that he/she has a particular individual in mind. Moreover, indefiniteness in *embós* may also play a descriptive role.

3.5 The Descriptive Role

Let’s take a look at the scenario where the police search an individual named Ondzéa (the hearer) for an investigation. When the policemen come to his home to interpellate him, he refuses and threatens the policemen. To avoid the situation degenerating, his father, called Ngaporo (the speaker), talks to him and says:

(17) Ondz éa, nɔ òy óng á òb ùn ál à ð ùr ús ù, nɔ òβ íMb údz ú ɔ Bélé (Note 1)?

Ondz éa, you want fight of policemen, you are Mbudzu to Bélé

“Ondzéa, you want to fight against policemen, are you *a Mbúdzú ɔ Bélé?*”

The indefinite description *a Mbúdzú ɔ Bélé* “Mbúdzú in the village Bélé” in (17) does not refer to the famous Mbós ì resistant *Mbúdzú ɔ Bélé*, it does not allude to that particular

individual living in the village BÉLÉ. It rather refers to his resistance qualities against people who depose authority. So, the indefinite description in this context accounts for what *Mb údz ú ɔ BÉLÉ* represents. Thus, the proper noun *Mb údz ú ɔ BÉLÉ* is taken as a common noun under the form of indefinite description, not to refer to the specific individual, but rather to the qualities of that individual, hence its descriptive role (Kiba Ngapoula 2020:316).

4. Conclusion

The contextual understanding of the indefinite description in *embós* mainly depends on its interaction with pragmatic features through the different functions it may have in a discourse. The indefinite description is well known to first introduce an entity, which may be specific or unspecific in a discourse. After being first mentioned, this indefinite entity will later become familiar in subsequent parts of the conversation. It may be attributive; the identity of the referred entity is not required; rather, whoever or whatever fits the description is considered the referent. The indefinite description may also be referential when the speaker wants to first communicate something to the hearer about the referred entity, and then wants him/her to identify it. In *embós* indefinite description may also be specific, when the speaker communicates about an entity he has in mind, but does not want the hearer to identify it. Finally, this paper has demonstrated that the indefinite description in this language may be descriptive in using a proper name as a common noun under the indefinite status to refer, not to the specific individual, but rather to what that individual depicts.

So, a better understanding of *embós* indefinite description is highly implicature dependent. However, indefiniteness in *embós* is not expressed by noun phrases alone. This study did not settle the pragmatic approaches to all parameters of indefinite descriptions in that language. Therefore, researchers on *embós* language are invited to focus on pragmatic features of indefiniteness with other linguistic issues such as quantifiers.

References

- Apondza Gombe, G. R. (2003). *Esquisse Phonologique de Ndongonyama: Une Variété Dialectale Akwa*. M.A. Thesis, Marien Ngouabi University.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things With Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (6th ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and Conversation. In P. Cole, & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics: Speech Arts* (pp. 41-58, 3rd ed.). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004368811_003
- Guthrie, M. (1948). *The Bantu Languages of Western Equatorial Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Harris, J. (1751). *Hermes: Or, A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar*. London: T. Bolas.

- Heim, I. (1983). File Change Semantics and the Familiarity Theory of Definiteness. In P. Portner, & B. H. Partee (Eds.), *Formal Semantics: Essential Readings* (pp. 223-248). Blackwell Publishers Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470758335.ch9>
- Itoua, J. (2007). *Les Mbosi du Congo: Peuple et Civilisation*. Paris: Harmattan.
- Kouarata, G. N. (2001). *Contribution à la Description Phonétique de Parler Mbochi de Boundji C25*. M.A. Thesis, Marien Ngouabi University.
- Ludlow, P., & Neale, S. (1991). Indefinite Description: In Defence of Russell. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 14: 171-202. New York: Springer.
- Lyons, C. (1991). Reference and Articles, in *English Traditional Grammars: An International Perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin's Publishing Corporation.
- Ndongo Ibara, Y. P. (2000). *The Phonology of embos à Tsambitso dialect*. M.A. Thesis, Marien Ngouabi University.
- Ndongo Ibara, Y. P. (2012). *Embosi-English Dictionary*. Frankfurt, Peter Lang.
- Ngapoula, K. (2016). *The Semantics and Pragmatics of Demonstratives in English and Embosi*. M.A. Thesis, Marien Ngouabi University.
- Ngapoula, K. (2019). Embos à Demonstratives: A Semantico-Pragmatic Account. *Flaly*, 7, 116-124.
- Ngapoula, K. (2020). *Semantic and Pragmatic Analysis of Definiteness and Indefiniteness in English and embos à* Ph.D. Thesis, Marien Ngouabi University.
- Ngapoula, K. (2023). embos à Definiteness: A Pragmatic Approach. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 13, 163-173. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2023.131010>
- Obenga, T. (1976). *La Cuvette Congolaise: Les hommes et les structures*. Paris: Présence Africaine.
- Ollasa, P. H. (1969). *Phonologie du Mbochi*. M.A. Thesis, Bordeaux University.
- Quirk, R., Leech, G., & Greenbaum, S. (1985). *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman.
- Rouchota, V. (1994). On Indefinite Descriptions. In *Journal of Linguistics*, Vol 30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and Cognition*. Oxford: B. Blackwell.
- Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2000). Truthfulness and Relevance. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 12. London: Richard Breheny.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Note

Note 1. Mbúdzú ɔ Bèlè is one of the famous resistants of Mbós ì community who fought against the arrival and activities of white men during colonization. He even organised a rebellion against the settlers and killed two of them before being killed later. He is the symbol of resistance against the white men and was the first to use the storm lamp in Mbós ì **area**.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)