

Bare Nouns and the mass/count distinction in contemporary semantics

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The aim is to understand the nominal system of BrP in the cross-linguistic panorama. BrP is a challenge since a productive Bare Singular coexists with plural morphology. Chierchia's semantic parameters (1998) does not allow such a language. Schmitt & Munn (1999) argue that the BS is a count noun with no number projection whereas the Bare Plural has number projection. Though both denote the kind, they differ with respect to plurality. Müller (2002) develops this idea and associates the BS with inclusive plurality and the BP to exclusivity. Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011) propose that the BS is not count, but it is mass. Thus, it should behave massively in comparatives. The first section briefly reviews these theories. The second section shows that Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein's prediction found empirical support (Bevilaqua (2015), Lima & Gomes (2016)). This is unexpected according to Bale and Barner's (2005) generalization. Rothstein & Pires de Oliveira (in press), and Rothstein (in press) propose that BrP is a flexible language where all nouns are flexible as rope and stone in English. We argue that this is not the best solution because it postulates ambiguity in the whole nominal system: all count nouns are mass. Moreover it gives raise to wrong predictions. In the third section, we propose that the Bare Singular denotes the kind in the lexicon. In that particular respect, it has a Bare Noun as Mandarin does - Mandarin is the best example of a classifier language where the mass and count distinction surfaces at the classifier level, which are taken to be shifters from kinds to predicates (Chierchia 2015). However, it also has a plural predicate as in English. Cabo Verdean is a better example of this type of language: languages with Bare Nouns and number morphology in the determiner. English has no Bare Singulars because number is checked at the predicate level: thus, in English it is the case that the absence of number marking morphology indicates a singular (=atomic) predicate, as in John has more table than Mary. Partition in English is obligatory because comparison asks for cumulative predicates. The cardinal reading is not possible, because the predicate is atomic. Bare Singulars are not productive in number marking languages. In BrP, John tem mais mesa que a Maria (João has more table that the Mary) is has cardinal, volume, and partitive readings. The indetermination is deu to the denotation of the noun phrase; any realization of the kind may be contextually relevant. This is not the case in English.