

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Quantification without Quantifiers

Among the recent developments in model theoretic semantics is the study of cross-linguistic variation. Do all languages use the same structures for interpretation? Are all semantic operations universally available? Is the locus of variation across languages restricted to the morphological/syntactic component? These are some of the questions that form the backdrop of the proposed investigation into the quantificational properties of bare nominals.

The phenomenon at issue was first discussed by Carlson 1977. According to him, the interpretation of English bare plurals requires reference to a new type of entity, namely a *kind*. Semantic operations, cued to the lexical and aspectual properties of the verb, mediate between the kind and its individual instantiations to yield the observed variation between universal and existential readings of the bare plural. This approach was further developed and systematized within a theory of type-shifts (Chierchia 1984, 1998a, Partee and Rooth 1983, Partee 1987). An alternative account of the phenomenon was proposed by Krifka 1987, Schubert and Pelletier 1987, Wilkinson 1991, Diesing 1992 and Gerstner and Krifka 1993. Assimilating bare plurals with the account of indefinites proposed within Discourse Representation Theory (Lewis 1975, Kamp 1981 and Heim 1982) they argue that bare plurals, in addition to denoting kinds, denote variables that get bound by implicit generic operators or existential closure. While kinds must still be admitted in the ontology, the need for reference to kinds in deriving the universal/existential variation is obviated.

The present study seeks to broaden the empirical base against which the proper analysis of bare nominals can be evaluated. The phenomenon it takes as a starting point comes from Hindi, a language that allows bare singulars as well as bare plurals. There are two properties that make Hindi bare nominals typologically interesting. One, in addition to universal and existential readings, they also have definite readings, a fact that correlates with the absence of a lexical definite determiner in the language. Two, Hindi bare singulars and bare plurals show subtle differences in interpretation that mirror differences between English bare plurals and English singular definite generics. An analysis of Hindi bare nominals, then, has a bearing not only on our understanding of bare plurals in natural language but also on the relation between the regular and the generic definite determiner, a problem that has remained largely unaddressed in the vast literature on genericity. Conclusions based on English and Hindi are then tested against two other types of languages. One differs from both English and Hindi in not having morphological number distinction but patterns with Hindi in lacking definite and indefinite determiners. Mandarin Chinese, Korean and Japanese are examples of this type. The other language type has number marking like Hindi and English but differs from both in having only one lexical determiner. Hungarian and Modern Hebrew instantiate this type.