A General Theory of Bare “Singular” Kind Terms  
keywords: reference to kinds, bare singulars, general number

**Background.** Kinds can be derived by either the nominalization operator $^\cap$ (Chierchia 1998) or the $\iota$-operator (Dayal 2004). $\iota$ is only available if $^\cap$ is undefined. It is assumed that $^\cap$ is defined for pluralities, but not for singularities, and that the lexicalization patterns of these operators vary cross-linguistically. The resultant system predicts that if a language possesses a definite article, which encodes $\iota$, singular kind terms must be with a definite article and cannot be bare. Brazilian Portuguese has been claimed to allow bare singular kind terms as in (1), hence a counterexample to Dayal’s theory. However, their empirical status remains unclear (Schmitt and Munn 1999, 2002; Müller 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin and Pires de Oliveira 2008; Ionin et al. to appear).

(1)  
%(O) panda logo estará extinto.  
the panda soon will.be extinct  
‘Pandas will soon become extinct.’  
Brazilian Portuguese

**New data point.** Singlish (Colloquial Singapore English) is just like Brazilian Portuguese, but the acceptability of bare singular kind terms is very high.

(2)  
(The) dinosaur extinct already.  
‘The dinosaur became extinct.’  
Singlish

This paper revises Dayal’s theory to accommodate data like (1) and (2), and shows that the unclear status of bare singular kind terms in Brazilian Portuguese is in fact expected.

**Proposal.** I claim that the nominal number system consists of three basic categories: singular, plural and general. The general is associated with number-neutral properties. I argue that $^\cap$ is not defined for pluralities either; it is only defined for number-neutral properties.

Classifier languages encode these three categories distinctly. Only morphologically bare, general NPs denote kinds as in (3). Plurals in classifier languages denote subkinds rather than kinds as in (4). This interpretation is obtained by means of $\iota$, because $^\cap$ is undefined for pluralities. ‘Classifier + NP’ constructions/constituents are necessarily singular as in (5). Hence, numeral classifiers can be analyzed as a singular number morphology. ‘Classifier + NP’ constructions do not denote kinds because classifier languages lack a definite article, which lexicalizes $\iota$.

(3)  
GENERAL: bare NP  
*Dinosaur* telah pupus.  
dinosaur PERF extinct  
‘Dinosaurs became extinct.’ (kind reading; number-neutral)  
Malay
Two feature compositions are possible for the general: [+Sg, +Pl] and [−Sg, −Pl]. The former triggers both singular and plural morphologies while the latter triggers no morphological marking.

Bare NPs in both Brazilian Portuguese and Singlish are number-neutral (Schmitt and Munn 2002; Gil 2003; Kim et al. 2009). They are ambiguous between the singular ([+Sg, −Pl]) and the general ([−Sg, −Pl]), which were both considered to be “singular” in previous studies. I assume that the definite articles in these languages encode \( ι \) obligatorily and \( ∩ \) optionally as in German. The singular bare NPs denote kinds by \( ι \), leading to definite singular reference to kinds, while the general bare NPs do so by \( ∩ \), leading to either definite or bare “singular” reference to kinds. However, it seems unstable to have both definite and bare “singular” kind terms at the same time in Brazilian Portuguese. This is actually expected because deriving definite kinds by \( ι \) means that the definite article is obligatory whereas deriving them by \( ∩ \) means that it is not. That both definite and bare “singular” kind terms co-exist in Singlish would be due to the fact that number-neutrality of the NP disappears when it is modified by a determiner as shown in (6).

(6) a. dog ‘one or more than one dog’
   b. the/dis dog ‘the/this dog’, *‘the/these dogs’
   c. the/dis dogs ‘the/these dogs’

Definite singular kind terms are necessarily [+Sg], hence could not have been derived by \( ∩ \). This sort of disambiguation does not happen in Brazilian Portuguese.

**Conclusion.** Dayal’s claim that languages with a definite article do not allow bare singular kind terms is valid. Bare “singular” kind terms exist, but they are actually not singular but general. The nominal number system consists of not two but three basic categories, including the general. The three categories are expressed by the combination of two binary features [±Sg] and [±Pl]. Contrary to popular belief, classifier languages do not lack number distinction, but they have the finest basic number distinction.

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