

THE INTERPRETATION OF BARE NOMINALS IN CATALAN AND SPANISH

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Catalan and Spanish productively allow bare count nominals (BNs) in object position of a restricted class of verbs. In this talk we address two questions. First, why might BNs exist in Catalan and Spanish grammar alongside singular indefinites and bare plurals (BPs)? And second, if BNs are not canonical arguments, what is their syntactic structure and how are they interpreted?

We begin by briefly reviewing the differences between BNs and singular indefinites on the one hand, and between BNs and bare plurals on the other. The facts lead to the conclusion that Catalan and Spanish BNs in object position are not singular but rather number neutral; they are also distinct from mass terms. We capture this observation with a syntactic analysis on which the BN projects neither a syntactic Num(ber) projection (assuming there is one) nor a DP. On the semantic side, we argue largely on the basis of modification facts that these BNs denote properties not of individuals but rather of kinds. We then suggest that the role of the Num projection to turn properties of kinds into properties of token entities.

The proposed semantics for the BN raises questions for semantic composition which are long familiar from the “Semantic Incorporation” literature. Among the various alternative compositional strategies available, we will advocate a slightly modified version of Dayal’s (2003) semantics for pseudo-incorporation. Specifically, our proposal for Catalan and Spanish consists of a lexical rule that creates the class of verbs that can productively combine with BNs, along with a compositional semantic rule that guarantees that the object BN is interpreted as a predicate modifier. We close by concluding that while this option is preferable for Catalan and Spanish BNs, other incorporation-related semantic composition strategies are arguably preferable for other sorts of data.