Background

Previous studies on kind terms

Kinds can be derived by either the nominalization operator (Chierchia 1998) or the ϵ-operator (Dayal 2004). ϵ is only available if γ is undefined. It is assumed that γ is defined for plurals, but not for singularities.

(1) Dayal’s (2004) system

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{Plural} & \text{Sing.} & \text{Features} & \text{Denotation} \\
\hline
\text{γ} & \text{γ} & \text{γ} & \text{γ} \\
\text{γ} & \text{γ} & \text{γ} & \text{γ} \\
\end{array}
\]

The lexicalization patterns of γ and ε vary cross-linguistically.

Prediction

Assumption 1: A type-shifting operation (e.g., γ) cannot apply covertly if it is associated with an overt morpheme (The Blocking Principle; Chierchia 1998).

Assumption 2: If γ is undefined, then ε is the basic function of definite articles.

Proposal

Claims

1. There are three basic number categories for nominals: (i) singular, (ii) plural and (iii) general. The general is associated with number-neutral properties.
   - 2. It is only defined for number-neutral properties, but not for plural as well as singular ones.

Evidence: Classifier languages

Classifiers languages encode the three categories distinctly.
- Morphologically bare, general NPs denote kinds:
  - (6) Dinosaur telah pupus. dinosaur PERF extinct ‘Dinosaurs became extinct.’
- (8) Zek logo soon will.be extinto. ‘The dinosaur became extinct.’

(9) Possible: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Num</th>
<th>Obj</th>
<th>Features</th>
<th>Denotation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sg, Pl</td>
<td>ε</td>
<td>+γ</td>
<td>singularities alone</td>
<td>Singular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>+γ</td>
<td>pluralities alone</td>
<td>Plural</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>singularities and pluralities</td>
<td>General 1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>γ</td>
<td>neither singularities alone</td>
<td>General 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross-linguistic variations

- Languages may collapse one category with another.
- Some languages lack General 2 (i.e., Sg, Pl).
- Q2: Possible ϵ = +γ.

(10) Presentive determiner ϵ is more marked than γ.

Brazilian Portuguese: A counter-example?

Brazilian Portuguese, which encodes γ with definite articles, has been claimed to allow bare singular kind terms:
- (4) %O panda | logo extinto. the panda soon will.be extinct ‘Pandas will soon become extinct.’

However, their empirical status remains unclear (Schmitt and Munn 1999; Müller 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin and Pires de Oliveira 2008; Ionin et al. to appear).

Q1: Should our theory of kind terms include bare singular kind terms as an option available for languages with a definite article?

New data point: Singlish

Singlish (Colloquial Singapore English) also encodes γ with a definite article and allows bare singular kind terms:

(5) (The) dinosaur became extinct.

Unlike Brazilian Portuguese, their acceptability is very high. Therefore, bare singular kind terms are an available option for languages with a definite article.

Q2: What causes the difference in acceptability between Brazilian Portuguese and Singlish?

Analysis

Basic morphosyntax and semantics

(11) Possible:

<table>
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<tr>
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<td>γ</td>
<td>neither singularities alone</td>
<td>General 2</td>
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Definite unmarked/“singular” NPs are necessarily +γ.

(12) In Singlish, bare singular kind terms such as ‘one or more than one dog’ are allowed in certain contexts.

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. They 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.

Selected references


