
Indefinite Singular vs. Bare Plural Generics: Essential Interpretations and Quantification over Samples.

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It is well-known that indefinite singular generics (ISGs) and bare plural generics (BPGs) cannot always be interchanged, as illustrated in (1):

- (1) a. #A rat reached / Rats reached Australia in 1770 (Krifka et al. 1995)
- b. #A madrigal is / Madrigals are popular. (Lawler 1973)
- c. #An elephant lives / Elephants live in Africa and Asia. (Nickel 2008)
- d. #A barn is / Barns are red. (Leslie et al. 2009, on New England barns)

Various proposals have been made to capture this difference: In addition to the established fact that BPGs, but not ISGs, can refer to kinds and hence allow for episodic kind-level properties like (a), ISGs have been argued to be restricted to predications that are “essential” (Lawler 1973), “principled” (Prasada & Dillingham 2006, Leslie et al. 2009), “normative” (Knobe et al. 2013), “definitional” (Krifka 2013) or “causal” (van Rooij & Schulz 2020). I will review these proposals and argue that ISGs occur in a wider range of environments, as in (2), which are based on non-essential, purely statistical generalizations.

- (2) A 2\$ bill is / 2\$ bills are quite rare.
- (3) #A mosquito carries / Mosquitoes carries malaria.

I will argue that ISGs are acceptable whenever the generalization is grounded in individual entities. This holds for the previous proposals for essential generalizations but also for cases like (2), which states that it is rare to find a 2\$ bill. I will argue that BPGs are preferred under two conditions: namely (a) to avoid an otherwise plausible “essential” reading (cf. Plunkett et al. 2023 on metalinguistic negation) and (b) whenever in statistical generalizations the incidence expressed by the predication is low, as in (3). I argue that with generics based on purely statistical motivation, BPGs express a quantification over samples containing more than one entity, resulting in a much higher probability that the sample will contain positive instances when compared to quantifications over single entities.

References: • Knobe, J. et al. 2013. Dual character concepts and the normative dimension of conceptual representation. *Cognition* 127. • Krifka, M et al. 1995. Genericity: an introduction. Ed. Greg N. Carlson & F. J. Pelletier, *The generic book*. The University of Chicago Press. • Krifka, M. 2013. Definitional generics. In A Mari et al., *Genericity*. Oxford. • Lawler, J. 1973. *Studies in English generics*. U of Michigan. • Leslie, S.-J. et al. , 2009. Conceptual and linguistic distinctions between singular and plural generics. *CogSci 2009 Proceedings*. • Nickel, B. 2008. Generics and the ways of normality. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 31(6). • Plunkett, D. et al. 2023. Generics and metalinguistic negotiation. *Synthese* 201(2). • van Rooij, R. & K Schulz. 2020. A Causal Semantics of IS Generics. *Journal of Semantics* 37.