
Kinds, Generics and Definite Singulars

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Compared to other types of generics (e.g., bare plurals or indefinite singular generics), definite singular generics (DSGs) show a distinct, and typically more restricted distribution pattern, which, however, has garnered less attention in the literature than other types of generics. We will begin with Partee's observation about the relevance of well-established kinds to generic sentences (cf. 1a-b), which, as is known, is not replicable with the bare plural version (cf. Krifka et al., 1995:11). The usual reasoning is that DSGs should be felicitous when they refer to a well-established kind. However, the distribution of DSGs does not conform neatly to Partee's observation.

- (1) a. The Coke bottle has a narrow neck. [✓generic, ✓token reference]
b. The green bottle has a narrow neck. [*generic, ✓token reference]
c. The bottle has a narrow neck. [*generic, ✓token reference]

“*Bottle*” – lexicalized in English as a simple word – should be an uncontroversial instance of a well-established kind, yet (1c) patterns with the presumed ad hoc kind *green bottle* (1b) against the well-established *Coke bottle* (1a). We will show that the difference in acceptability in (1) can be attributed neither exclusively to the type of kind denoted by the subject, nor to the predicate alone. We will therefore suggest that the determining influence on the acceptability must either be contextual, be located in the relation between the predicate and the subject, or be due to a combination of these two aspects.

This is not to say that DSGs do not impose any restrictions on their subject; for instance, high-level entities in a taxonomy are generally infelicitous as DSGs, as has been observed by Mari et al. (2012: 29).

- (2) a. The mammal suckles its young. [*generic, ✓token reference]
b. ?*The mammal is extinct.

Our task – focusing on DSGs in English – will provide an orderly formulation of the several challenges posed by DSGs, especially in relation to the issue of the types of kinds they can admissibly denote, with an eye to further refining the distinction between well established and ad hoc kinds.

References: • Krifka, M. (2012). Definitional Generics. In A. Mari et al. (eds.), *Genericity*. Oxford: OUP, 372–89. • Krifka, M. et al. (1995). *Genericity: An Introduction*. In G.N. Carlson & F.J. Pelletier (eds.), *The Generic Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. • Mari, A. et al. (2012). Introduction. In A. Mari et al. (eds.), *Genericity*. Oxford: OUP, 1–92. • Mendia, J.A. (2020). Reference to *Ad Hoc* Kinds. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 43, 589–631.