

## **The acquisition of D-genericity in Brazilian Portuguese: an experimental approach**

Ruan de Souza MARIANO  
Santa Catarina Secretary of Education (SED-SC)  
ruan.lettras@gmail.com

Natural languages have different ways in which their speakers can directly refer to kinds; the most common forms in English and Romance languages are, respectively, the bare plural and the definite singular.

Brazilian Portuguese (BP), besides presenting bare plurals and the definite singular as candidates for kind reference, seems to allow another construction in the same context, which is the bare singular, a determiner phrase (DP) wherein D it is not openly realized.

The status of bare singulars in adult grammar generic constructions has been widely discussed in the literature. Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2002), Munn & Schmitt (2001, 2005), Pires de Oliveira et al (2010), Pires de Oliveira (2011) Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011), Ionin et al (2011), Cyrino & Espinal (2015), among many others, argue that bare singulars are welcomed at generic contexts in BP. On the other hand, Müller (2000, 2002, 2003) argues that bare singulars are ungrammatical in kind-reference contexts, specially when it occurs as argument of a kind predicates like ‘be extinct’.

Despite the wide debate concerning BP adult grammar, few studies have focused on BP child grammar. Lopes (2006) has cast some lights on this topic, but in fact, she was interested in investigating number acquisition. In other ways, Augusto (2008) has worked on this topic, but she has focused just on I-Genericity (i.e. the one that is triggered by the verbal aspect in the sense discussed by Krifka et al 1995). This research aims to investigate the acquisition of expressions that refer to kinds in BP (D-genericity), in order to know if children can interpret bare singulars as a kind and, if so, whether they present some difficulty in providing an interpretation for this and other constructions that the BP literature claims to denote kinds.

My hypothesis is that bare singulars not only denote kinds but also it is the default way to refer to kinds in this language. Following Borik and Espinal (2015), I assume that there is no number engaged in the kind denotation and, therefore, there is no number in the syntactic structure of bare singulars in PB. According the authors, constructions with number openly expressed, like bare plurals, denote a sum of individuals instantiating the kind, not the kind itself.

The absence of number is an important assumption, because it supports my claim that there are no stages which children pass through to acquire bare singular in BP, against a current view in the literature (cf. Lopes 2006).

To verify my hypothesis and predictions, I developed two linguistic experiments: A Truth Value Judgment Test and a Selecting Picture Task. In the former, children are asked to answer some ‘yes or no’ questions about kinds, like ‘Dinossauro está extinto?’ (‘Is dinosaur extinct?’). In the latter, they are asked to point to a picture which represents an uttered stimulus, i.e. the announcer utters the sentence ‘dinossauro está extinto’ (‘dinosaur is extinct’) and requires that participants point to the best picture that represents the utterance. As participants, 43 adult speakers of BP have answered this experiment as control group. Children were divided into three groups: 20 approximately aged 4;0:24, 16 approximately aged 4;8:30 and 20 approximately aged 6;7:0, totaling 56 children.

The results confirm the hypothesis that bare singulars denote kinds in BP and that such interpretation is preferred by participants for this construction. It has also been confirmed that younger children have no difficulty in interpreting bare singulars and they behave in the same way as older children.

**Key-words:** kind reference (D-genericity); bare singular; language acquisition.

## References:

- AUGUSTO, M. R. A. Marcação de número e genericidade : interpretação genérica na aquisição do PB. *Letras de Hoje*, v. 42, p. 35–51, 2008.
- BORIK, O.; ESPINAL, M. T. Reference to kinds and to other expressions in Spanish: definiteness and number. *The Linguistic Review*, v. 32, p. 167–225, 2015 (2013).
- CYRINO, S.; ESPINAL, M. T.; Bare nominals in Brazilian Portuguese: more on DP/NP analysis. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* (2015) 33. Netherlands: Springer, 2014 p. 471-521.
- IONIN, T.; MONTRUL, S.; SANTOS, H. An experimental investigation of the expression of genericity in English, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese. *Lingua* 121, p. 963–985. 2011.
- KRIFKA, M.; et al. Introduction. In: CARLSON, G.; PELLETIER, F. J. (eds). *The generic book*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 1-124, 1995.
- LOPES, R. E. V. Bare nouns and DP number agreement in the acquisition of Brazilian Portuguese. In: SAGARRA, N.; TORIBIO, A. J. (eds). *Selected Proceedings of the 9th Hispanic Linguistics Symposium*, 252-262. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 2006.
- MÜLLER, A. L. Sentenças Genericamente Quantificadas e Expressões de Referência a Espécies no Português do Brasil. *Cadernos de Estudos Lingüísticos* (UNICAMP), Campinas, v. 39, p. 141-158, 2000.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Genericity and the denotation of common nouns in Brazilian Portuguese. *DELTA: Documentação de Estudos em Linguística Teórica e Aplicada*, v. 18, n. 2, 2002a, p. 287-308.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Semantics of Generic Quantification in Brazilian Portuguese*. *PROBUS*, v. 1, n.14, p. 279-298, 2002b.
- \_\_\_\_\_. A expressão da genericidade nas línguas naturais. In: MÜLLER, A.; NEGRÃO, E.; FOLTRAN, M. J. (orgs). *Semântica Formal*. 1 ed. São Paulo: Contexto, 2003, p. 61-73.
- MUNN, Alan; SCHMITT, Cristina. Bare nominals and the morphosyntax of number. In: CRESTI, D.; TORTORA, C.; e SATTERFIELD, T. *Current issues in Romance linguistics; selected papers from the 29th Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001. p. 217-231.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Number and indefinites. *Lingua* 115, p. 821-855, 2005.
- PIRES DE OLIVEIRA, R. ; SILVA, J. C. ; BRESSANE, M. R. S. O singular nu denota espécie: uma investigação empírica. *DELTA. Documentação de Estudos em Linguística Teórica e Aplicada* (PUCSP. Impresso), v. 26, p. 115-140, 2010.
- PIRES DE OLIVEIRA, R. Brazilian bare nouns in subject position of episodic predicates. In: *Proceedings of Sin and Bedeutung* 16. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011. v.2. p. 501-512.
- \_\_\_\_\_; ROTHSTEIN S. Bare singular noun phrases are mass in Brazilian Portuguese. *Lingua* 121, p. 2153-2175, 2011.

SCHMITT, C.; MUNN, Alan. Against the Nominal Mapping Parameter: Bare nouns in Brazilian Portuguese. In: TAMANJI, P.; HIROTANI, M.; HALL, N. (eds) *Proceedings of NELS 29*. University of Delaware, 1999, p. 339-353.

\_\_\_\_\_. The syntax and semantics of bare arguments in Brazilian Portuguese. In: PICA, P (ed) *Linguistic variation yearbook 2*. Amsterdam: JohnBenjamins, p. 185-216. 2002.