

Brazilian Bare Nouns: Experiments and Adult Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Experiments (Bevilaqua 2019 for a review) show that Brazilian Bare Singulars - *mesa* in *quem tem mais mesa?* - is counted (Schmitt & Munn, 1999, Müller, 2002) and measured (Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein, 2011). Bevilaqua & Pires de Oliveira (2020) data from 4 languages led them to claim that Bare Singulars is a locus of semantic variation (Chierchia, 2010, 2015). In judgment tasks, English speakers never count the BS *table* in *who has more table?*; they measure. Brazilians oscillated: measure and count. Bare Singulars in English are atomic predicates. Pires de Oliveira (2020) argues that Brazilian BSs are not atomic; the noun denotes the kind. These results point to atomicity as a grammatical feature (Rothstein 2010, 2017); objecthood is cognitive. Since all languages count 1, language variation is where this happens: in the noun or in the determiner. ??*much table*, if interpretable, must be massified; *muita mesa* is acceptable and its interpretation oscillates depending on the context, because *muito* and *mesa* are not atomic. In BrP, atomicity is mandatory in the determiner. The prediction (assuming Slabakova 2017) is that Brazilian learners' interlanguage has a “foreign” use of *much*. English learners of Brazilian will overuse bare plurals *mesas* where Brazilians use bare singulars. Adult language acquisition might be a window into our theoretical predictions.

Key-words: Bare Nouns, language variation, Adult language Acquisition, Experimental Semantics