

THE AMBIGUOUS NATURE OF BARE SINGULARS IN BRAZILIAN PORTUGUESE

In this work, I will propose an analysis for the phenomenon of bare singular count nouns (1) in Brazilian Portuguese (BP). Since Schmitt & Munn's 1999 paper, discussing Chierchia's 1998 Nominal Mapping Parameter, there has been an ongoing discussion on the nature of these nouns, which have been under heavy scrutiny by several researchers as to their nature and distribution. Until now, a unified view has not been reached. According to Schmitt & Munn (1999), they are DPs with a covert determiner and a null Number feature. Müller (2002) claims that they are NPs in a left periphery position – and are, thus, not arguments). A third proposal (PIRES DE OLIVEIRA & ROTHSTEIN, 2011) claims that they behave as mass nouns, with a kind denotation. However, I believe that the context in which these bare nouns occur (2, 3) are too widespread to allow for a single definition. Thus, I propose that they are a type of departure from a simple form-meaning mapping, such as some other phenomena analyzed by Biberauer (2016; 2017; 2018). As such, their nature is defined by a set of formal features (FF), which will vary depending on their denotation. There is, thus, no one-to-one form-meaning relation for these bare nouns in BP – that is a mapping between phonological and semantic features and their reading is ambiguous depending on their syntactic-semantic relationship, besides pragmatic factors, such as prosody and other elements that regard information structure. For instance, as BP is a discourse-oriented language, it is possible for bare nouns to occur in topic position as shown by Muller. Also, the fact that bare nouns can, in some contexts, be retrieved by a plural or a singular anaphora proves that they are not (exclusively) mass nouns. On the other hand, as shown by Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011), there are contexts in which they will be interpreted as mass nouns. Hence, such as pointed by Roberts (2019) there are FFs at play which allow this intralinguistic variation during the process of language acquisition for the speakers of Brazilian Portuguese. To explain these features, I will resort to Oosterhof's classification for Dutch singular and plural bare nouns, based on other previous theoretical proposals (ADGER, 2003; LONGOBARDI, 2001). In the case of example (1), for instance, I will assume a bundle of features being $0[-R, +count, -pl]$ – where (0) stands for a null determiner, $[-R]$ for a feature that expresses genericity, $(+count)$ indicates that the noun is a count noun, and $[-pl]$ that it is a singular noun. Nonetheless, other occurrences of bare singulars in BP may have another configuration of features depending on their denotation.

Keywords: Bare singular count nouns. Brazilian Portuguese. Minimalism. Formal features.

Examples:

- (1) Cachorro odeia gato.
dog hates cat
'Dogs hate cats.' (FERREIRA, in press).
- (2) Índio só come carne quando caça ou pesca
indian only eats meat when hunts or fishes
'Indians only eat meat when they hunt or fish.' (FERREIRA, in press).
- (3) Vi *filme* ontem a tarde inteira.
Saw movie yesterday of afternoon all
'I saw movies yesterday all the afternoon.'

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