Bare noun phrases in focus

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The international cooperation research program between Brazil and France, CAPES/COFECUB, entitled "Bare Nouns in Brazilian Portuguese: the Syntax-Semantics Interface" (2009), coordinated by Roberta Pires de Oliveira (UFSC/CNPq) and Carmen Dobrovie-Sorin (CNRS-LLF, Paris 7), aims at a deep understanding of the syntax and semantics of bare noun phrases in natural languages, and of Brazilian Portuguese (BrP henceforth) in particular.[2]

The first event within this cooperation project was the *Workshop on Bare Nouns and Indefinites*, held in Florianópolis, SC, at the Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, June 4th and 5th, 2009. Alan Munn and Cristina Schmitt, from Michigan State University, the pioneers in the research on the bare singular in BrP, Ana Lúcia Müller, from USP/CNPq, who studies Karitiana, a language without any determiners, and Carmen Dobrovie-Sorin, CNRS-LLF, Paris 7, were the invited speakers, who have greatly contributed to the discussion of the papers presented during these two days conference and published in this issue.

Characterized by the absence of a determiner, bare noun phrases may occupy argument positions, and be accompanied by adjectives, as exemplified below:

(1) Minhoca pequena cava buraco grande.
worm small digs hole big
'Small worms dig big holes.'

Sentence in (1) is a proverb. Proverbs, as shown by Khim's epigraphs, are usually built with bare noun phrases even in languages like European

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Portuguese and Standard French in which singular bare nouns have a very restricted use.

The fact that languages differ with respect to their determiner systems is Chierchia's point of departure for his semantic parameters (1998): Chinese only has bare noun phrases (and all of them are said to be massive by Chierchia, a hypothesis refuted by Cheng & Sybesma, 1999). Brazilian Portuguese has a completely overt system of determiner phrases. Besides quantifier phrases, BrP has definite and indefinite determiners, both singular and plural, heading both countable and mass predicates. Moreover, it has bare nouns, singular and plural, and bare mass nouns. Differently from other Romance languages, including European Portuguese, bare singulars in BrP may be in argument position, one of the arguments raised by Munn & Schmitt (1999, 2005) to show that Chierchia's parameter cannot account for BrP, the language studied by four papers in this issue: Dobrovie-Sorin, Ferreira, Bertucci *et al*, and Braga *et al*.

Guinea-Bissau Kriyol, a European Portuguese creole, only has a specific indefinite determiner, whereas Haitian, a French related creole, has a strong indefinite plus a definite article. Khim's paper in this volume deals with both languages. In Basque, the language studied by Etxeberria, bare nouns cannot appear as arguments, and the overt presence of the determiner is obligatory. But the definite determiner in Basque may be interpreted as a week indefinite, very much alike the bare plural in English.

This very brief typological survey of the nominal systems in different languages already raises several theoretical issues: the syntax and semantics of bare noun phrases, their relation to number, and number neutrality, the (in)definite interpretations, and the count versus mass distinction. Perhaps the most striking one is the fact that bare nouns may be in argument position, a claim that at first sight goes against Longobardi's (2001) generalization according to which determiner phrases must be headed by a determiner. The existence of bare nouns in argument position may be accounted either by dropping the generalization or by exploring the idea of "null" elements, in particular null determiners. The latter is the hypothesis explored by most of the papers in this volume, except from Khim's approach which relies on Cooper's maxim: "wholewheat syntax unenriched with inaudibilia" (Cooper, 1982 *apud* Khim).

Khim's "Fully bare nominals in two creoles: a description and a tentative constructional approach" explains the interpretation of bare noun phrases without any recourse to null functional categories, like determiners or number phrases. In both creoles, number marking is optional, and (in)definiteness is marked marginally: Kriyol only has a strong indefinite, and Haitian has such a specific indefinite plus the definite article. How then speakers arrive at a common interpretation? The author shows that there are constructional constraints that guide the interpretation, for instance, a bare noun phrase in the external argument position cannot be a weak indefinite (Carlson, 2002).

Verbal aspect also plays an important role in determining both number and definitude.

It is not unfair to claim that Carlson's account (1977) of bare plurals in English has laid down the foundations of the contemporary research on bare nouns, highly influenced by Chierchia's (1998) Neocarlsonian semantic parameters. Exteberria, in "Making a definite be interpreted as an indefinite", claims that the definite determiner in Basque is an argument for the Neocarlsonian view, against the ambiguity view. For the the definite determiner is not ambiguous in Basque, although in some contexts it is ambiguous between a definite and a weak indefinite interpretation, both with countable and mass nouns. The author's explanation for the behavior of the definite singular relies on Chierchia's account of the bare plural in English: like the bare plural, the definite determiner in Basque always denotes a kind; the weak indefinite interpretation is generated by type mismatching which forces the application of Derived Kind Predication.

Munn & Schmitt's (1999, 2005) papers show that the bare singular in BrP is almost unrestricted in argument position and it is number neutral, since it may be resumed by both the singular and the plural pronouns. In "Number neutral amounts and pluralities in Brazilian Portuguese", Dobrovie-Sorin challenges their definition of number neutrality, i.e., the bare singular is number neutral because it denotes both the atoms and the pluralities in a semi-lattice structure, a definition that is also in Bertucci *et al.*'s paper. The author shows that this definition leads to predictions that are empirically inadequate. According to Dobrovie-Sorin, number neutrality should be understood as minus singular and minus plural, because number neutral phrases denote amounts. In that respect the bare singular and mass nouns function alike. This proposal relies on an ontological distinction between amounts, which are not integrated wholes, and individuals. The distinction crisscrosses that between mass and count nouns, since the bare singular denotes amounts and is countable. Her analysis also aims at answering the data discussed in Ferreira's paper, which shows that the bare singular may denote atomic individuals.

As pointed out, her approach relates mass nouns and bare singulars. The parallel could be even stronger, if we remember that Chierchia's definition of mass nouns is the same as Munn & Schmitt's definition of number neutrality: they denote both atoms and pluralities. However, Munn & Schmitt explicitly refuse to relate mass and bare singulars, because they do not behave alike when they are combined with individuating predicates like 'pesar 20 kg nessa idade' (to weight 20 kg in this age): to combine mass nouns with individuating predicates generates ungrammatical sentences. Thus, they go back to Link's (1983) approach to mass nouns. Braga *et al.*'s "Bare singular and bare mass nouns in Brazilian Portuguese: First results of an empirical survey" present some empirical results that defy their empirical claim, because their survey show that not all combinations of bare singulars with individuating predicates are grammatical, and not all bare mass nouns are

incompatible with this type of predicate. Their results open space for reconsidering the similarities between the bare singular and the bare mass nouns, without dropping the distinction between them.

In "The morpho-semantics of number in Brazilian Portuguese bare singulars", Ferreira argues against Munn & Schmitt's claim that the bare singular is morphologically singular but semantically number neutral. Analyzing the relation between agreement and the interpretation of the bare singular, the author concludes that bare singulars are ambiguous between denoting both atoms and pluralities, i.e., it is unspecified for number, and denoting atomic individuals. The paper also calls attention to the fact that the bare singular in BrP does not behave like the bare plural.

The close relation between aspect and indefinites was explored by Khim: the presence of an atelic predicate leads to a plurality reading of the bare noun phrase. The literature has also shown that indefinites have aspectual implications (de Swart, 2006, among others); in particular they shift telic predicates into atelic ones, giving raise to habitual, frequentative or repetitive interpretations. Bertucci *et al.*'s "Bare plurals and achievements: a case study of aspectual verbs" explains how the bare plural in BrP affects the structure of the VP headed by an achievement. Its influence is clearly perceived when achievements are combined with aspectual verbs, since it licenses such a combination, blocked by the use of the definite determiner. Bare nouns in BrP are unbounded.

The papers gathered in this issue reflect long term researches, and, as we saw, open up several issues which are of interest to the broader community of linguists. Publishing them in the *Journal of Portuguese Linguistics* is an invitation to strengthen the links between linguistics in Brazil and in Portugal, a way of opening a new research issue: how to explain the ubiquity of bare singular in BrP, which, we believe, may also explain other syntactic and semantic differences between these so closely related languages, in particular in the nominal domain.

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