

Subject Bare Singulars in Brazilian Portuguese and Information Structure*

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the debate on the semantics of bare singular nouns (BSNs) in Brazilian Portuguese by looking at the restrictions on their use as subjects. After a reassessment of the literature (e.g., Schmitt & Munn 1999, Müller 2000, Pires et al. 2010), we propose the following descriptive picture: BSN subjects are unconstrained in generic sentences, and somehow constrained with kind predicates and in episodic sentences. The literature has suggested that the constraints in episodic sentences have to do with information structure (e.g., Pires de Oliveira & Mariano 2010, Pires de Oliveira 2012). We submit this suggestion to scrutiny and demonstrate it is not information structure itself that is crucial. Episodic sentences with BSN subjects are utterances about kinds (under an “incompletely involved reading”, cf. Landman 1989) and must be ‘contextually relevant’ (cf. Roberts 1996). We then investigate BSN subjects of generic sentences, argued to be necessarily topics, which would support their analysis as unselective bound indefinites (Müller 2002a, 2004). We show that BSN subjects of generic sentences are not necessarily topics; moreover, they can actually have “incompletely involved kind readings”. We conclude that our results provide

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support to a kind-denoting analysis of BSNs in Brazilian Portuguese, as proposed by Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011).

1. Introduction

Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BrP) seems to quite freely allow for the use of *bare singular nouns* (BSNs) such as *mulher* ‘woman’ or *sapato* ‘shoe’ in contexts where other languages with a singular/plural opposition would use a bare plural. An example is given in (1):

- (1) *Mulher adora comprar sapato.*
 woman loves to-buy shoe
 ‘Women love to buy shoes.’

Since the first extensive discussion of the topic by Schmitt & Munn (1999), the properties of BSNs in BrP have been the subject of much controversy. In particular, there is no consensus on the semantics of BSNs, nor on their grammatical status. According to Munn & Schmitt (2005), BSNs are full DPs with a number neutral, indefinite interpretation. Müller (2002a, b, 2004) also assumes that they are number neutral, but contrary to Munn & Schmitt, she treats BSNs as NPs (predicates) rather than DPs. Dobrovie-Sorin (2010) accepts BSNs are number neutral, but argues they are indefinites when occupying the object position, while they shift to a kind interpretation in subject position. Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011) assume that BSNs come out of the lexicon as kinds, which would explain their use as bare nouns; but, crucially for Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein, BSNs are not number neutral.

One of the reasons for such controversies in the literature seems to be the lack of consensus as regards the restrictions on the use of BSNs in BrP. In general, the literature agrees that their acceptability poses no particular problem in object position and also as subjects of generic sentences, but judgments vary with respect to their use as subjects of episodic sentences and of sentences with kind predicates. Müller (2002a, b, 2004), for example, claims that such cases are unacceptable, hence ungrammatical; Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011) and Pires de Oliveira (2012), on the other hand, claim that they are acceptable, hence grammatical.

Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2002) pointed out that focus and “list readings” do improve the acceptability of BSN subjects of episodic sentences, but they did not explore the observation. Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011) and Pires de Oliveira (2012) not only confirm the observation (as, indeed, Müller 2002b), but also argue that prosodic prominence and information structure *are* the relevant factors because they signal interpretations that are compatible with a kind denotation for BSNs.

In this paper, we want to reassess the restrictions on the use of BSNs in *subject* position reported in the literature on BrP;¹ in particular, the alleged role of information structure in improving the acceptability of BSN subjects. By doing this, we hope to advance our understanding of these constraints and, as a consequence, of the denotation of BSNs in BrP. Our main conclusion is that *it is not information structure itself that is crucial, but the pragmatic relevance of an utterance about kinds*. Of course, this conclusion provides support to the hypothesis that BSNs denote kinds in BrP, as proposed by Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011).

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reexamines the basic facts reported in the literature as regards BSN subjects. Three contexts are particularly relevant: generic and episodic sentences, and sentences with kind predicates. In our view, the descriptive picture that emerges from the data is the following: BSNs in subject position are unconstrained in generic sentences; but they are somehow constrained with kind predicates (which seem to be a non-uniform class) and more severely constrained in episodic sentences. For us, an adequate analysis of BSNs in BrP should be able to explain this picture. In trying to contribute to this endeavour, we then concentrate on the case of episodic sentences, hoping to clarify the role information structure plays in the “licensing” of BSN subjects in BrP.

Section 3 is, therefore, devoted to this task. There we show that simply focalizing or contrasting BSNs in episodic sentences is not enough to ensure their acceptability, against initial suggestions by Schmitt & Munn (1999), as well as Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011) and others. Rather, an idea first suggested by Pires de Oliveira (2012) turns out to be correct: assuming Roberts (1996)’s notion of relevance, we show that “contextual relevance” of the utterance about the kind is crucial for pragmatic felicity, hence acceptability. The role of information structure is indirect: whenever a contrastive topic or a contrastive focus helps evoking the appropriate context (one in which the utterance about kinds is relevant), the episodic sentence with a BSN subject is felicitous. We argue that episodic sentences can be about kinds because of the phenomenon of “incomplete involvement” in the sense of Landman (1989) (also Link 1983 and Dowty 1986).

This approach allows us to take a position similar to that of Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011) and Pires de Oliveira (2012): episodic sentences with BSN subject do, after all, provide evidence for a kind approach to BSNs in BrP. Extension of this idea to other occurrences of BSN subjects in BrP

¹ Of course, we are aware of the relevance of BSNs in object position, whose acceptability is less problematic, though they still show interesting restrictions, cf. Schmitt & Munn (1999), Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011), Pires de Oliveira (2012). Here we will concentrate, however, on BSNs in subject position; BSN objects will have to be taken up in the future; further topics for future research are listed in the final section.

raises at least two questions: (a) why would there be any restriction on their use as subjects of kind predicates? and (b) is there any evidence that BSN subjects of generic sentences should be treated as denoting kinds? We concentrate on question (b) for two reasons: BSN subjects of generic sentences were claimed to be conditioned by information structure as well – they would be topics (cf. Müller 2002a, 2004); and this fact was claimed to support an analysis in which BSN subjects of generic sentences are interpreted as an indefinite unselectively bound by a generic operator (cf. Müller 2000 and subsequent work).

In section 4 we argue, then, that BSN subjects of generic sentences need not be topics – actually, we show that they are not “informationally constrained” at all. In our view, this weakens Müller’s arguments for an indefinite analysis. Moreover, we also show that BSN subjects of generic sentences do have “incompletely involved group” readings – that is, readings that are compatible with a kind analysis, but not with an indefinite analysis. Our general conclusion is that a kind analysis for subjects of generic sentences is tenable, though it does require further work in order to be maintained.

In section 5, we wrap up the discussion and indicate some of the issues we believe should be addressed by future research on BSNs in BrP.

2. Reassessing the basic facts

2.1 *BSN subjects of generic and episodic sentences*

The distribution of BSNs in subject position is not totally controversial. There is at least one context in which judgments are consensual: BSNs are fully acceptable as subjects of generic sentences, as illustrated in (2) and (3), cf. Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2002; henceforth S&M), Müller (2002a, b, 2004), Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011), among others:

(2) *Criança lê revistinha.* [S&M 1999]
 child reads comic-book
 ‘Children read comic books.’

(3) *Político fala muito.* [Müller 2004]
 politician talks very-much
 ‘Politicians talk a lot.’

There is also some partial consensus on the status of BSNs in the subject position of episodic sentences: for most authors, they are not fully acceptable

in out-of-the-blue contexts, as in (4), but become acceptable if under “prosodic prominence” – say, as contrastive topics, as in (5):²

(4) ?? *Ontem, mulher falou de política* [PO&M 2011]
yesterday, woman spoke of politics
‘Yesterday, women talked about politics.’

(5) *Ontem, mulher falou de política, homem falou de futebol.*
[PO&M 2011]
yesterday, woman spoke of politics, man spoke of soccer
‘Yesterday, women talked about politics, men talked about soccer.’

The observations illustrated in (4) and (5) are shared by Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2002), Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011), Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011; henceforth PO&M 2011). Müller (2002a, b, 2004) describes BSN subjects of episodic sentences as unacceptable and concludes they are always ungrammatical – still, she does recognize that their acceptability improves under focus (cf. Müller 2002b). Thus, all authors agree that the use of BSNs are not freely available as subjects of episodic sentences, and accept that the constraint on their use is alleviated under contrast or some other information structure effect. Our own judgments match this broad characterization of the status of BSNs subjects of episodic sentences.³

2.2 BSNs and kind predicates

There is a bit more of controversy in the literature with respect to BSN subjects of kind predicates in BrP. Müller (2002a, b, 2004) claims, again, that

² “Prosodic prominence” here is a descriptive term intended to refer to the use of prosodic devices (pitch accent, duration of the syllable, and so on) that render some part of the sentence perceptually more salient. We do not intend to dwell on issues of proper definition and identification of such devices; later (in sections 3 and 4), it will be enough for our purposes to rely on the descriptive categories widely used in the literature on information structure, such as Jackendoff’s (1972) “accents A and B” (see, e.g., Büring 1997, 2003).

³ Of course, when we speak, here and elsewhere, of “our judgments” relative to sentences in BrP, we are actually referring to the judgments given by the authors of this article who are native speakers of BrP. As the above discussion indicates, our reassessment of the judgments reported in the literature is based partly on the information this literature provides, partly on our own judgments. An anonymous reviewer objects that experimental data seems to be required for a clearer picture of the relevant judgments. We fully agree with the reviewer on this point, but one of our aims is precisely help providing a sounder basis for setting up the relevant experiments in the near future. See more on this in the final section.

they are in general unacceptable and ungrammatical. The contrast below is given in Müller (2002b):

- (6) a. *O dodô está extinto.*
 the dodo is extinct
 b. ?? *Dodô está extinto.*
 dodo is extinct
 ‘The dodo is extinct.’

Müller (2002a) acknowledges that their acceptability improves under focus, though she does not draw any conclusion from this. Other researchers state that BSN subjects of kind predicates are acceptable and no particular constraint is mentioned – for example, no observation is made relative to the role of “prosodic prominence”, contrastive readings, or list readings (Schmitt & Munn 1999, Pires de Oliveira et al. 2010, Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein 2011). The example in (7) is from Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010):⁴

- (7) *Agricultura vai acabar em dois anos.*
 agriculture goes end in two years
 ‘Agriculture will disappear in two years.’

Admitting that these judgments are all correct would seem to lead us to the conclusion that there are at least two dialects to account for. On the other hand, our own judgments vary quite a lot with respect to examples of BSNs as subjects of kind predicates. While (6) and (7) seem to us a bit weird out of context (indicating some constraint in acceptability, as observed by Müller), those in (8) and (9) below are either fully acceptable or almost so (hence, judgments closer to the other authors):

- (8) *Elefante é domesticável.* [S&M 1999]
 elephant is domesticate-able
 ‘Elephants can be domesticated.’

- (9)? *Nos anos 70, relógio digital passou a ser fabricado em Manaus.*
 [S&M 2002]
 in-the years 70, watch digital began to to-be fabricated in Manaus
 ‘In the 70’s, digital watches began to be fabricated in Manaus.’⁵

⁴ We observe that *agricultura* ‘agriculture’ is actually uncountable, which might be a relevant factor. Still, for us – as we state in the text below – sentence (7), out-of-the-blue, is not fully natural.

⁵ For us, two things seem to help in the acceptability of (9): (i) the “domain restriction” provided by the adjunct ‘in the 70’s’; (9) becomes pretty unnatural without this modifier; (ii) *relógio digital* seems to be read as a kind of topic, or

Thus, we find not only judgment variation among speakers (as reported in the literature), but also variation for the same speakers, depending on the sentence and its context (our own case). This suggests we are not really dealing with totally different dialects; in other words, there does not seem to be a clear-cut distinction between one dialect that simply freely allows for BSNs with kind predicates, and another one that simply bans them altogether.

Indeed, just as it is possible to identify factors that improve acceptability of BSN subjects of episodic sentences in BrP (namely, information structure manipulation), the same happens with BSN subjects of kind predicates. Some of these factors, as we might expect, seem to be related to the interpretation of the predicate. (Information structure also appears to be relevant: see fn. 4 above, and also the observations in Müller 2002b.)

For example, discussing the acceptability of (10a) below, claimed to be acceptable by Schmitt & Munn (1999), but unacceptable by Müller (2000), Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011, p. 3746) state the following: “We are not interested in this controversy, for there does not seem to be any doubt that the sentence [(10b)] below is grammatical in BrP and that the predicate *ser um bicho raro* ‘to be a rare animal’ is a kind predicate (Dayal 2004)”. We do share the judgment corresponding to (10b), but also find (10a) a little awkward out-of-the-blue (just as (6) above). Besides, for us it is less clear that ‘to be a rare animal’ is a kind predicate just like ‘to be extinct’ (see Dayal 2011). Consider the contrast between (10c) and (10d):

- (10) a. ? *Baleia está em extinção.*
 whale is in extinction
 ‘Whales are endangered.’ or ‘The whale is endangered.’
- b. *Baleia é um animal raro.*
 whale is an animal rare
 ‘Wales are rare animals.’ or ‘The whale is a rare animal.’
- c. *O Fido é um animal raro.*
 the Fido is an animal rare
 ‘Fido is a rare animal.’
- d. ?? *O Fido está em extinção.*
 the Fido is in extinction
 ‘??Fido is endangered.’

contrastive topic, in (9); for example, this sentence would be fine in a context where the speaker is talking about the history of the watch industry in Brazil. These two observations suggest that acceptability of BSNs as subjects of kind predicates does seem to be affected by information structure, as Müller (2002b) observed. However, we will not discuss the role of such constraints on BSN subjects of kind predicates in this article.

(10c) shows that *é um animal raro* ‘is a rare animal’ is not a predicate only for kinds: it can be predicated of individuals as well. This, of course, is not the case of *está em extinção* ‘is endangered’, which does apply to kinds exclusively, as shown by the semantic anomaly of (10d). Note that this difference might account for Müller’s rejection of (6) and Schmitt & Munn’s acceptance of (8): like ‘is endangered’, *está extinto* ‘is extinct’ is a predicate of kinds (cf. *??Fido is extinct*); *é domesticável* ‘can be domesticated’, however, can be applied to individuals (cf. *O Fido é domesticável* ‘Fido can be domesticated’). What these facts suggest is that it may be relevant for the acceptability of BSN subjects whether the predicate applies only to kinds, or whether it may apply both to kinds and “atomic” individuals.

Arguing for the full acceptability of BSN subjects with kind predicates, Pires de Oliveira e Mariano (2011) seem to suggest that this might even explain some of the variability of judgments with episodic sentences. Discussing cases like (4) and (5), they claim that their occasional unacceptability is “neither grammatical nor semantic, but [triggered] by the combination of a noun denoting a kind and a predicate that is pragmatically compatible with a specimen, and not with a kind” (p. 3748). To support this line of reasoning, they point to examples in which “a predicate that ordinarily (...) apply to specimens can also apply to a kind”, as in (11a) below, a case in which “wear skirts is a property of a stage of the kind”:

- (11) a. *Até o século XX, mulher vestiu saia.*
 until the XX century, woman dressed_{PERF} skirt
 b. *Até o século XX, mulher vestia saia.*
 until the XX century, woman dressed_{IMPERF} skirt
 ‘Until the 20th century, women dressed skirts.’

(11a) does seem to be fully acceptable. However, we have doubts about the claim that the acceptability should be explained simply by assuming that the predicate *vestiu* ‘dressed’, though episodic, applies to a kind. That is, its acceptability would contrast with that of cases like (4) and (5), in which the utterance not only is episodic, but also seems to be about particular specimens of the relevant kind, and not about the kind itself. Our doubts with this line of explanation for the acceptability of (11a) are due to the fact that the past perfect in (11a) may be substituted for the imperfect, as in (11b), preserving the meaning. Indeed, it has been observed that the past perfect is not incompatible with a generic interpretation of the sentence (e.g., de Swart 1991: 254 for the simple past in French). This suggests that (11a) has more of a “generic-like” reading – and, as we discussed previously, BSN subjects of generic sentences are fully acceptable in BrP. That is, genericity may be a contributing factor for (11a). Thus, we do not think cases like (11a) provide support for the assumption that BSN subjects show no constraint with kind

predicates (nor for the idea that cases like (4) and (5) above are not about kinds; we will come back to this last issue later).

Indeed, we must say that, in our opinion, the attempts to empirically support the view that BSNs are not constrained at all as subjects of kind predicates have not been quite successful so far. Let us consider, for example, the evidence gathered by Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010) with their corpus and experimental studies.

We turn first to the corpus study of spoken language reported in their paper. The corpus was composed of interviews found in two of the main corpora of spoken BrP (namely, NURC and VARSUL). The interviews were searched for sentences containing kind predicates (e.g., *acabar* ‘to end, to finish’, in the sense of ‘to become extinguished’). In 442 interviews, only 22 occurrences of such sentences were found. Most of the subjects of these sentences were bare plural nouns (19 cases), and there was only one case of BSN as subject – which happens to be (7) above, an utterance that, as we said, does not sound to us very natural out-of-context.

From these results, Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010) draw the following conclusion: “this [unique occurrence of a BSN subject of a kind predicate] is doubtless an important datum [...] [It] is sufficient for us to discard [the idea] that this combination [of a BSN subject with a kind predicate] is ungrammatical, if we assume that speakers do not produce ungrammatical sentences spontaneously” (p. 123). We are not sure about this assumption; but we think that it is safe to conclude that, even if the mentioned occurrence attests the existence of the construction in the relevant corpus, it shows at the same time that the construction is “marked” in the same corpus (in comparison to, say, bare plurals).

Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010) also searched for occurrences of BSN subjects of kind predicates in a corpus of written BrP, namely, in the websites of Brazilian newspapers (*Folha de São Paulo* and *O Globo*). As they acknowledge, “[t]he great majority [of the occurrences] shows up in the so-called ‘leads’ of the journalistic texts” (p. 124); this is the case of example (12a) below. (12b, c, d) are also ‘leads’ taken by ourselves from similar websites, with determinerless singular subjects:

- (12) a. *Pesquisa comprova que jacaré não está em*
 research proves that alligator not is in
extinção no Pantanal
 extinction in-the Pantanal
 ‘(A) study proves that (the) alligator is not endangered in Pantanal’
- b. *Irmã mais velha de Lula é sepultada em São Bernardo*
 sister more old of Lula is buried in São Bernardo
 ‘Lula’s older sister is buried in São Bernardo’
- c. *Novo presidente do STF será eleito na sexta*
 new president of-the STF will-be elected in-the friday
 ‘(The) New president of the STF will be elected Friday’

- d. *Projeto em Londres recria filmes clássicos em*
 project in London recreates movies classic in
idades cenográficas
 cities scenic
 '(A) Project in London recreates classic movies in scenic cities'

According to Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010), "it might be argued that occurrences of BSNs in journalistic 'leads' is not relevant for the issue [i.e., the acceptability of BSN subjects of kind predicates], since this text gender possess quite peculiar characteristics. [...] It is common to find BSNs with an (almost) definite reading in leads, as in *Ladrão invade o Senado* '(A) burglar invades the Senate'. However, [...] the BSNs in [cases like (12a)] do not have a specific reading, rather they refer to the [relevant] kind. That is why we can take them as an argument that BSNs denote kinds" (p.125).

We do not challenge the claim that the BSN subject in (12a) denotes a kind (we will come back to this issue below); but we do think that this type of evidence is unreliable: as the examples in (12b, c, d) show, news leads do allow for dropping of articles, definite and indefinite, whether under a specific reading (12b, d) or a non-specific one (12c). Thus, how can we be sure that (12a) is not simply a case of dropping of the definite article (in '(the) alligator'), just as it contains a dropping of the indefinite article (in '(a) study')? There is no reason to assume that the determiner in a kind-denoting DP cannot be dropped, as Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010) seem to suggest.⁶ As such, the data do not offer evidence for an unconstrained use of kind predicates with BSN subjects.

It is true that Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010, p.125) also report BSN subjects of kind predicates to be frequent in the body of running texts in the same corpus. However, the authors provide no comparative numbers (e.g., relative frequency of BSNs and bare plurals, or kind-denoting definite descriptions, in a particular sampling). Moreover, they do not specify the contexts where the relevant cases occur. But we think a study of these cases in context would be necessary, for we have seen that different factors may enhance the acceptability of BSN subjects. For example, the relevant cases may well involve contrastive topics, contrastive focus, list readings, etc. Indeed, some of the examples provided by the authors, as the one in (13),

⁶ Articles can be dropped in headlines even in languages with no kind-denoting bare singulars, as we see in the Dutch example given in (i) (from http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20100315_104, consulted on 5 Sept. 2014):

- (i) Tijger bedreigd met uitsterven
 tiger threatened with extinction
 '(The) tiger (is) threatened of extinction'

On the dropping of determiners in news leads in English, see Mårdh (1980).

seem to indicate that these may be relevant factors (Pires de Oliveira et al.'s (25), p.125):⁷

- (13) *Nota fiscal, lucro, comércio, tudo isso está extinto.*
fiscal note, profit, commerce, all this is extinct
'Invoice, profit, commerce, all this is extinct.'

Finally, Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010) report the results of an experiment, run with 200 subjects, testing the acceptability of BSNs in BrP. The experiment was designed to compare the acceptability of BSNs and kind-denoting singular definite descriptions as subjects of episodic sentences and of kind predicates.⁸ In summary, their results were the following (p.132): with a singular definite description, 64,8% of the speakers rank the sentences high in acceptability and 20,0% rank them low (and about 15% are halfway rankings); when the sentence exhibits a BSN in subject position, 43,2% of the informants rank them high, and 38,6% low (about 20% of halfway rankings).

According to Pires de Oliveira et al. (2010: 132), "[a]lthough the [above] results are not clear, it is possible to say that at least for some speakers [BSN subjects] can be combined with kind predicates. Hence, such sentences are not ungrammatical". The authors' own assessment seems to us to be cautious enough to indicate that BSN subjects *are* somehow constrained with kind predicates: they may not be unacceptable as "clearly ungrammatical sentences" are (see fn. 7); but in most of the circumstances tested by Pires de Oliveira et al., singular definite descriptions are a better option for kind reference. (For example, BSNs may be said to have been rejected by 38,6% of the speakers, twice as many speakers as those who we may say rejected singular definite descriptions – 20%.)

2.3 *Reorganizing the descriptive picture*

Let us take stock of the discussion we have made of the evidence concerning BSN subjects in Brazilian Portuguese. We have seen that, apparently, there is no disagreement with respect to BSN subjects of generic sentences: all

⁷ In the case of (13), it is not clear that 'invoice, profit, commerce' are really part of the subject constituent, since they are summarized by 'all this'. Indeed, we may interpolate material in between, as in *Nota fiscal, lucro, comércio, creio que tudo isso está extinto* 'Invoice, profit, commerce, I believe that all this is extinct'. This suggests the BSNs in (13) are topics, surely a relevant factor. In addition, it has been noted that coordination of bare nouns do affect their semantic, cf. Heycock & Zamparelli (2003), Le Bruyn & de Swart (2014).

⁸ The experiment was also designed to compare the acceptability of sentences containing BSN subjects with the acceptability of clearly ungrammatical sentences. As expected, clearly ungrammatical sentences were judged acceptable by very few informants.

judgments found in the literature report these to be fully acceptable; we find them totally acceptable, too. We have also seen that, though there is no similar consensus with respect BSN subjects of episodic sentences, we do find partial agreement: Müller (2000, 2002a, b, 2004) claims BSNs are unacceptable, hence ungrammatical, as subjects of episodic sentences; the rest of the literature acknowledges that they are somehow constrained, though pointing out that they do become acceptable under certain circumstances – e.g., under contrastive focus, or in “list readings”; our own judgments fit this last picture.

Finally, we have also discussed the more complex case of BSN subjects of kind predicates, which seems to put apart two dialects: on the one hand, there is Müller’s, in which it would be unacceptable; on the other, there are the dialects reported by Schmitt & Munn and by Pires de Oliveira and her associates, who seem to claim that the relevant sentences are acceptable, without pointing out any restriction in an explicit way. Actually, there would seem to be a third, intermediate, dialect, for our own judgments vary with respect to BSN subjects of kind predicates: some sentences seem marginal, others improve, and this may depend on different factors – e.g., whether the predicate only applies to kinds or also to individuals.

Taking all the above observations into consideration, one could assume that there is a continuum between a more restrictive dialect and a more ‘relaxed’ one, perhaps reflecting some change in progress:

(14)

<i>Context for BSN subjects</i>	<i>Dialect A</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	<i>Dialect B</i>
Generic sentences	ok	ok	ok
Kind predicates	??	ok/??	ok
Episodic sentences	??	??	??

However, we have also seen that evidence for considering BSN subjects of kind predicates as unconstrained – even for some of the speakers of the dialect B – is actually fragile. Even for dialect B, there does seem to be some reason to believe that BSN subjects of kind predicates are not freely available.

So, rather than take the current situation of BSN subjects in BrP as characterized by three different dialects, it may be more useful to conceive it as follows: independently of the possible existence of different dialects, in BrP in general we find that BSN subjects are ranked according to the following hierarchy of easiness in contextual acceptability:

- (15) *Unconstrained* *Constrained* *More constrained*
 Generic sentence > Kind predicates > Episodic sentences

Concretely, we think the discussion in this section allows us to say that: (a) BSN subjects are fully acceptable in generic sentences; (b) with kind predicates, they seem easily acceptable in some cases, and “marked” in others; and (c) in episodic sentences, they are “marked” unless they happen to be under focus, contrast, or in a list reading. We think that an adequate analysis of BSNs in BrP should be able to explain this hierarchy of constraints.

From now on, we concentrate on those cases for which information structure was claimed to play a crucial role, namely, BSN subjects in episodic sentences. But we will also consider BSN subjects of generic sentences for two reasons: Müller (2002a, 2004) claimed information structure would be relevant for them as well, and she has taken this in support of a particular view of their semantics. BSN subjects of kind predicates will be not discussed here any further, being an issue we leave for further research (see the final section).

In section 3 below, we take up episodic sentences, for which the role of information structure is generally acknowledged. As we will see, the informational constraints on episodic sentences turn out to be an indirect reflex of a pragmatic requirement for the relevance of an utterance about a kind. As regards generic sentences, we will show in section 4 that no informational constraints seem to hold of their BSN subjects – in particular, they need not be topics, as claimed by Müller (2002a, 2004); hence, information structure does not support a uniform analysis of such cases as unselectively bound indefinites. Moreover, we will show that a kind-denoting analysis must be available for some BSN subjects in generic sentences. Thus, the overall picture provided by episodic and generic sentences does seem to favor the kind approach, once we understand the role of information structure appropriately.

3. On the role of information structure and pragmatics: BSN subjects in episodic sentences

In this section, we try to assess some of the claims made in the literature about the ways in which notions such as topic, focus, contrast, etc., affect acceptability of BSN subjects in episodic sentences. As we mentioned, a first and crucial claim was made by Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2002): they noticed that BSN subjects become acceptable in episodic sentences in “list readings”, as exemplified in (5) above, or “under focus” – for example, as signaled by the particle *só* ‘only’ in (16).

- (16) *Só mulher discutiu as eleições.*
only woman discussed the elections
‘Only women discussed the elections.’

If we take “list readings” as actually corresponding to the presence of contrastive topics (see Jackendoff 1972, Büring 1997, 2003), then it seems to us that the observations originally made by Schmitt & Munn can be recast in the following way: BSN subjects of episodic sentences become acceptable if they receive some role in information structure marked by prosodic prominence, such as being focalized or being a contrastive topic. Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011) seem to view the observations made by Schmitt & Munn in a similar way (see section 3.2 below). Müller (2000, 2002a, b, 2004) is the only author to have rejected the “grammaticality” of BSNs as subjects of episodic sentences; but she does accept that focus improves their acceptability (Müller 2002b). Hence, we will take Schmitt & Munn’s observation as a true generalization about BrP, for it is almost consensual in the literature.

However, Schmitt & Munn themselves do not provide any attempt to interpret the relevant effects. Below we will discuss two possible ways of understanding them, both suggested by Pires de Oliveira.

In her (2011) paper with Mariano, Pires de Oliveira proposes that the alleviating role of focus or contrast has to do with the fact that both involve sets of alternatives, indicating a “truly informational” effect (see section 3.1). More recently, Pires de Oliveira (2012) has suggested a different way of looking at the same facts, now in a more “pragmatic”, relevance-related, way (section 3.2). We will argue that this last way of looking at the facts is on the right track (sections 3.3 and 3.4): indeed, we will claim that episodic sentences with BSN subjects become felicitous if the utterance about the kind is “relevant” – if it is an appropriate answer to the “question under discussion” in the context (cf. Roberts 1996). If this is correct, then we have strong evidence that BSN subjects of episodic sentences do denote kinds.

3.1 *Information structure and BSN subjects of episodic sentences*

As we have seen, it is consensual that BSN subjects of episodic sentences are “marked” in BrP, and their acceptability is improved if they are contrastive foci, contrastive topics, in a “list reading”, etc. A first attempt to explain this effect was suggested by Pires de Oliveira & Mariano (2011) [PO&M], who claimed that it is “prosodic prominence” that makes subject BSNs felicitous in episodic sentences. This would seem to include not only contrastive foci and contrastive topics, but also simple narrow information focus, for it is also signaled by “prosodic prominence” – namely, by the sentence’s nuclear stress (Jackendoff’s “A-accent”).

According to PO&M, the theoretical *rationale* behind this hypothesis has two sources: Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011)’s proposal that BS’s denote kinds; and Büring (1996)’s analysis of specific readings of weak indefinites. PO&M claim, following Büring, that prosodic prominence evokes either previously introduced referents or a set of alternatives. In either

case, it “implicates” the existence of specimens of the kind denoted by the BS, making the utterance about kinds contextually acceptable in episodic utterances. In other words: *semantically*, episodic sentences with BSN subjects are predications applied to kinds, and not to individuals; but prosodic prominence “evokes” alternatives, hence existence of individuals. This is what makes the utterance contextually acceptable – *pragmatically*, it is an utterance about the fact that specimens of that kind satisfy the predication.

It turns out, however, that this explanation runs into problems. Given that PO&M’s suggestion is based on sets of alternatives, they predict that the effect should extend to simple narrow foci as well – these not only do receive prosodic prominence, but are also interpreted by means of sets of alternatives (cf. Rooth 1992, Büring 1997, Wedgwood 2005, among others). That is, BSN subjects of episodic sentences should become contextually acceptable also under simple narrow focus. But this prediction is not borne out. As the example in (17) below shows, the mere presence of information focus on the BSN subject does not seem to be sufficient for a really felicitous episodic sentence (capitals indicate focus accent, which corresponds to Jackendoff 1972’s “A-accent”; see also Büring 1997, 2003):

- (17) A: *Quem (que) falou de política ontem na festa?*
 who (that) spoke of politics yesterday in the party?
 ‘Who talked about politics in the party yesterday?’
 B: ?? *MULHER (falou disso ontem).*
 WOMAN (spoke of this yesterday)
 ‘WOMEN talked about this yesterday.’

In the next section we will compare (17) with sentences minimally different with respect to the subject, or to the context, and we will get a clearer idea of the nature of the constraint.

3.2 *Contextual relevance and BSN subjects of episodic sentences*

Let us now consider the second approach suggested by Pires de Oliveira, based on Landman & Rothstein (2010)’s proposal for episodic sentences with bare plural nouns in English (Pires de Oliveira 2012). The idea is simple, and covers PO&M’s suggestion as a particular case: BSN subjects of episodic sentences will be acceptable if reporting the episode in terms of the kind expressed by the BSN is somehow relevant for the context. In Pires de Oliveira’s own words:

“If a kind context is created, then one may utter [an episodic sentence] felicitously. This happens when the speaker wants to convey that what she is reporting is something extraordinary, something that can count for the kind, where the individual that performed the event is taken to be the representative of the kind. (...) Prosodic prominence and lists are ways of

foregrounding the kind interpretation.” (Pires de Oliveira 2012, p. 509; emphasis ours)

In our view, this idea is related to the more general phenomenon of “incomplete involvement” (Landman 1989), “lack of partaking” (Link 1983) or “pragmatic weakening” (Brisson 1998). As discussed by several authors (see in particular Link 1983, Dowty 1986, Landman 1989, 2000, Lasersohn 1999 and Brisson 1998), there is a contrast between definite noun phrases that require full involvement and others that do not. This is illustrated by the pair in (18), taken from Link (1983: 310):

- (18) a. The children built the raft.
 b. All the children built the raft.

Link points out that (18a) does not presuppose that every child is actively involved in building the raft, while (18b) implies that every child took part in the action. Quantity expressions such as *all* (both prenominal and in floated position) block the “incomplete” interpretation. In the absence of such expressions, some of the children can be ignored, depending on pragmatic factors. However, Link’s semantics of the definite plural noun phrase in (18) is not sufficiently weak to allow for the relevant type of readings (cf. Brisson 1998 for discussion).

According to Landman (1989), the effects obtain when the plural noun phrase denotes a group. Groups, in his view, are interpreted as singular individuals. Given that predicates that apply to a singular individual do not need to apply to all parts of it, “incomplete involvement” is predicted to occur. Take for instance a predicate such as *touch*. If John touches the ceiling, he may only touch the ceiling with his fingertips. In the same vein, if a group of boys built a raft, not all of the boys need to take part in the building of the raft.

An advantage of assuming this approach is that it accounts for the existence of “extreme cases” of incomplete involvement: depending on the context, large or small subsets may qualify as being representative for the group as a whole.⁹ For instance, when discussing universities where one can

⁹ Brisson (1989) argues that Landman’s justification runs into problems in examples such as the following:

- (i) Polly graded the exam(s).

According to Brisson, the incomplete involvement reading is only possible if the definite direct object is plural. For Landman, this rather shows that there may be differences between parts of collections and parts of singularities. Brisson rejects this, and opts for a different approach, involving the notion of “covers” (cf. Schwarzschild 1998). He assumes that under certain pragmatic conditions covers may be ill-fitting, and thus lead to incomplete involvement. It seems to us to be

study formal syntax, one could say that the linguists in Curitiba do formal syntax, even though only a few of them actually do formal syntax.¹⁰ What is important in these examples is that they require a context that makes the use of the group denoting subject relevant, despite the incomplete involvement.

In the cases of the kind-denoting subjects of episodic predicates that interest us here, it is very clear that only a “representative set” of the members of the kind is involved in the event. The size of this representative set depends on the context, and it can actually be (very) small. But the kind is still there in the sense that the members involved are taken as a set “representing the kind”, rather than as an ordinary set of individuals. We will argue below that the constraints found on BSNs in BrP confirm this.

This way of understanding how the BSN subjects become acceptable in episodic sentences does lead to a truly “pragmatic” approach, unlike PO&M’s suggestion. Note that no *direct* appeal is made to prosodic marking or to the semantics of focus, of contrastive topics, etc.; e.g., no relation between evoking alternatives and an inference of existence is necessary. Rather, what matters is that, contextually, “the speaker wants to convey (with the episodic sentence) something that can count for the kind”, even if the kind, taken as a group, is incompletely involved. That is, the episodic sentence is “contextually relevant” if it is “about the kind”. Of course, this is still a vague idea, but we can make it clearer, as we will see shortly. Before that, let us give it some empirical substance.

Let us begin by comparing (17B) above with a number of minimally different sentences, in which the BSN has been replaced by another type of subject. As (19B.a) shows, bare plurals are not so good in the same context either; but a definite plural subject is fully acceptable (19B.b), as is the BSN accompanied by the focus particle *só* ‘only’ (19B.c):

- (19) A: *Quem (que) falou de política ontem na festa?*
 who (that) spoke of politics yesterday in the party?
 ‘Who talked about politics in the party yesterday?’
- B: a)? *MULHERES (falaram disso ontem).*
 WOMEN (spoke of this yesterday)
- b) *AS MULHERES (falaram disso ontem).*
 THE WOMEN (spoke of this yesterday)
- c) *Só MULHER (falou disso ontem).*
 Only WOMAN (spoke of this yesterday)

difficult to allow for “extreme cases” of incomplete involvement when one adopts ill-fitting covers. For this reason, we follow Landman’s proposals here.

¹⁰ In the 1990’s, Teun Hoekstra used to discuss incomplete involvement on the basis of examples of “extreme cases”, one of which was *Wij doen aan fonologie* ‘We do phonology’, where *wij* referred to the linguists at the Linguistics Department in Leiden, only one of whom (crucially not the speaker) being a phonologist.

Consider, intuitively, why answers b) and c) are contextually fine, but not a). The question in (19A) presupposes that somebody talked about politics in the party, but nothing in it indicates the relevance of a classification of the people in the party; the question is intended to obtain, as an answer, a specific set of individuals. Hence, an utterance is “relevant in the context” if it provides such an answer.

Now we can clarify the notion of “relevance” required: we assume, from now on, that an utterance is “relevant” whenever it can be seen as an attempt to provide an answer to the “question under discussion” in a particular point of a communicative exchange (cf. Roberts 1996, and references there; see also van Kuppevelt 1995). We will take this quite literally here, and consider only dialogue situations; but this notion of “relevance” can be suitably extended to other types of discourse (as discussed specially by Roberts 1996).

Let us now turn back to the answers to (19A). Answer (19B.b) does meet the conversational requirement of question (19A): since the subject is a definite, it provides as an answer a specific set of individuals, namely the women at the party. Moreover, by implication, it suggests that the men – another specific set of individuals at the party – did not talk about politics. Answer (19B.c), with the BSN accompanied by ‘only’, does not provide a specific set of individuals as an answer. Indeed, it asserts that an indefinite set of individuals (belonging to the kind ‘women’) talked about politics in the party.¹¹ But, in this, (19B.c) is just like (19B.a), the answer with a bare plural – and (19B.a) is an answer which is not fully natural (hence, more like an answer with the BSN, as in (17B) above). So, what is the difference between (19B.c) and (19B.a)?

The crucial difference is that, besides asserting that an indefinite set of individuals talked about politics, (19B.c) also asserts that ‘only’ individuals

¹¹ As a matter of fact, what is asserted by an utterance of the form “Only X Y” is far from an obvious issue, as the endless literature on the subject shows (see, for example, Horn 2005 and references cited there). It will suffice for us here to understand such utterances as they work in a context like the following:

A: Which of your friends will come – Bill, Chris or Zac?

B: Only Zac and Chris.

With respect to such a context, we may say that: (a) an utterance of the form “Only X Y” can be an answer to a question Q such that Q presupposes that some among a contextual set S of alternatives satisfy the predication Y; and Q is intended to obtain as an answer which among S’s members satisfy Y; (b) by uttering “Only X Y” in such a context, the speaker asserts that the alternatives in the proper subset X of S satisfy Y, and the alternatives in the complement X’ of S do not. *Only* is a “contrastive focus” marker precisely because exhaustivity is part of its *assertion* – that is, it asserts the exclusion of some contextual alternatives from the relevant predication (Horn 1982). For further discussion on “contrastive focus”, see 3.3 below.

of the kind ‘women’ talked about politics in the party. Such an assertion is relevant under the presupposition that alternative sets of individuals – in particular, sets belonging to other kinds, e.g. ‘men’ – may have not talked about politics in the party. Thus, we can say: the use of ‘only’ in (19B.c) presupposes that the relevant issue behind question (19A) is not precisely “who” talked about politics, but “which kind of people”. In this context, then, a set of the actual women at the party, even if small, becomes representative for the kind ‘women’. Given this, the sentence in (19B.c) is conversationally relevant, hence fully acceptable.

Now, we can see why (19B.a) is unnatural as an answer to (19A). By asserting that an indefinite set of individuals (of the kind ‘women’) talked about politics, it does not meet the conversational expectations of the question – unlike answer (19B.b). Moreover, by not involving, for example, any contrastive focus – unlike (19B.c) –, it does not evoke, by itself, other contextual presuppositions that might signal the relevance of talking about kinds. So, nothing in the context in (19A)-(19B.a) indicates that “kinds of people” is a relevant issue – hence, the unnaturalness of (19B.a). And, we would say, by the same reasoning, we explain the unnaturalness of (17B) above, the utterance that involves a BSN subject.

Now, consider the following version of the dialogue in (19):

(20) A: *Quem que falou de política ontem na festa?*

B: *Só MULHER.*

Only WOMAN.

C: *Não, HOMEM falou de política ontem na festa.*

No, MAN spoke of politics yesterday in-the party.

Observe that a BSN subject is acceptable in the episodic sentence in (20C). But now it is clear why: answer (20B) to question (20A) reveals that the question under discussion is “which kind of people” talked about politics in the party, not merely “who”. Hence (20C) is clearly “about kinds of people” – though it reports a mere episode involving only a contextually representative set of specimens of the kind.

Finally, let us discuss one more adaptation of (19) above (recall: capitals indicate focus accent, that is, Jackendoff’s “A-accent”; and underline indicates contrastive topic accent, that is, Jackendoff’s “B-accent”):

(21) A: *Quem que falou de política ontem na festa?*

B: *Homem* falou de FUTEBOL ontem.

man spoke of SOCCER yesterday

‘Men talked about SOCCER yesterday.’

We see in (21) that a contrastive topic accent on the BSN will make it acceptable as the subject of a felicitous episodic sentence in a context like (17)-(19), unlike simple focus accent (cf. (17B) above). Why?

We think the reason is clear: unlike simple focus, contrastive topics do presuppose that other alternatives are relevant for the question under discussion (see Büring 1997, 2003). Thus, the use of contrastive topic in (21B) triggers a contextual presupposition that is not clear in question (21A), namely, that kinds of people are relevant. And (21B) asserts that, as far as this issue is concerned, men (that is, a representative subset of men present at the party) talked about football. Of course, this assertion can be relevant for the question under discussion – hence, conversationally relevant in the context – for at least two different reasons: either because, given common ground assumptions, speaker A might expect that men were talking about politics; or because, saying that they talked about football, B implies that, if anybody talked about politics, it were *women*, and not men. In this last reading, we have an occurrence of what Büring (1997) calls “implicational topic”.

We hope the discussion in the present section has indicated in which sense we understand the idea that “an utterance about the kind is relevant”: it is “relevant” when it can be seen as an answer to a current “question under discussion”. We also hope the discussion has provided some initial support for Pires de Oliveira’s idea that this is the main factor for improving acceptability of BSNs as subjects of episodic sentences. In the next section, we explore this idea further, in particular trying to establish that it is the contextual relevance of a kind utterance, and not information structure by itself, that really matters.

3.3 *Contextual relevance vs. contrast*

We have argued in the previous section that BSN subjects of episodic sentences are acceptable when the question under discussion has to do with kinds – hence, not directly with information structure roles such as contrastive focus, contrastive topics, etc. However, so far all our examples have illustrated this point precisely with such kind of constructions: (19B.c) is a case of contrastive focus marked by ‘only’; (20C) is a case of corrective contrastive focus (‘MEN talked about politics’ is used to reject ‘Only WOMEN talked about politics’); and (21B) is a case of an “implicational” contrastive topic. The only case in which there was no information structure role bearing some contrast was (17B), in which the BSN subject is a mere simple focus, with no contrast – and that is an infelicitous use. Indeed, we used (17B) to show that focus by itself – hence, evoking sets of alternatives – is not a sufficient condition.

In what follows, we concentrate on whether contrastive focus, as opposed to simple informational focus, is crucial for the acceptability of BSN subjects

of episodic sentences. Following most of the literature, we assume that contrastive focus is distinct from simple informational focus in that either it asserts exhaustivity (as in the case of ‘only’), hence excluding alternatives that are potential candidates in the context, or it involves plain correction of a previously entertained alternative (for recent discussion, see Repp 2014 and references there).

Now, let us establish that it is not contrast in the above sense that matters. We start with (22) below, an adapted version of (17) above, in which the BSN subject is acceptable under simple focus:

(22) A: *Me disseram que tinha gente falando de política na festa ontem; mas, nas nossas festas, os homens nunca falam de política... Quem que tava falando de política ontem?*

‘Somebody told me that there were people talking about politics in the party yesterday; but, in our parties, the men never talk about politics... Who was talking about politics yesterday?’

B: a) *MULHER, é claro.*

WOMAN, it-is clear
‘WOMEN, of course.’

b) ? *MULHER, e não HOMEM, é claro.*

WOMAN, and not MAN, it-is clear
‘WOMEN, and not MEN, of course.’

Note that there is no contrast in the above context, as B’s purpose is to actually *confirm* the expectations of A by giving new information: answering that women talked about politics, B confirms A’s expectations that the men who go to A’s parties were not talking about politics. Indeed, answer (22B.b), in which the contrast between ‘women’ and ‘men’ is made explicit – that is, part of the assertion –, would be a bit awkward, for there seems to be no point in reinforcing A’s expectations beyond confirming it – which is achieved by (22B.a). (Compare (22B.b) with (20C) above, where it would be felicitous to have ‘No, MEN – *and not WOMEN* – talked about politics yesterday.’)¹²

¹² A reviewer objects that “the examples with *é claro* in (22) do seem to involve some sort of contrast (...) [and] answering a question with and without *é claro* requires different accent marking.” For him, “[w]hat makes (22B.b) slightly odd is not contrastiveness per se, but the redundancy of the contrasting element. If redundancy becomes desirable, the answer is simply fine”, as in (i) below (as an answer to (22A)):

(i) *MULHER, é claro, já que HOMEM, como você disse, nunca fala de política.*
‘WOMEN, of course, since MEN, as you said, never talk about politics.’

If there is any “contrast” in (22B.b), it is not of the sort the literature takes as distinguishing simple focus from contrastive focus (see Repp 2014 and references

In any event, the crucial observation is that there is no contrast in B's answer (22B.a), only simple focus; and still the BSN subject of the episodic sentence is acceptable. But note why: when A says that 'the men in our parties never talk about politics', he does make room for the question under discussion to be interpreted, in the context, as not merely about "who", but also about "which kind of person".

Thus, we conclude that contrast – by means of contrastive focus – is not required for the contextual felicity of BSN subjects of episodic sentences. We also deduce that what contrast does, when it improves such subjects in out-of-the-blue sentences, is just to help evoking an appropriate context: one in which the question under discussion has something to do with kinds. Contrast by itself will not do the job, if the context does not help. Recall, for example, the discussion of (19B.c) above. In that utterance, contrastive focus (by means of 'only') on the BSN subject makes it acceptable as a subject of an episodic sentence. This happens only because the contrastive focus interacts with other appropriate contextual information, so that a discussion about kinds – in particular, about *men vs. women* – becomes relevant.

To see that this is, indeed, the case, consider the following context and compare answers (23B.a) and (23B.b) with (23B.c) and (23B.d):

cited there): it does not involve correction, nor does it assert "exhaustiveness", denying a contextual alternative openly. As for this last point, note that (22B.b) is compatible with subsequent addition of alternatives, as in (ii) ('only' makes the utterance contradictory):

(ii) (#Só) MULHER, é claro. Mas alguns homens que aderiram a elas também.
'(#Only) WOMEN, of course. But a few men who joined them did, too.'

Note that, though the focus in (22B.b) *can* be uttered with "a different accent" – perhaps, with some expressive value –, *it does not need to*. Also, there is no clear relation between *é claro* and contrast: in other uses, *é claro* basically seems to have a "reinforced confirmatory role". E.g., it may count as a "yes" answer, with some additional implication, for instance of politeness, as in (iii); but there is no "contrast" at all in (iii).

(iii) [In a bus:] A: *Posso passar, por favor?* B: *É claro.*
 A: May I pass, please? B: Of course.

To us, *é claro* in (22B.b) has a role similar to the one in (iii): in (22B.b), it implies that A should expect that women talked about politics at the party (e.g., because A and B share the assumption that women like to do what men say they should not). As for the reviewer's example (i) above: it makes the same point we did in the text, namely that there is no use for contrast if B's aim is simply to confirm A's expectations. In (i), 'men' can be used contrastively because, as the reviewer says, "redundancy is desirable" – i.e., B has an additional conversational point in mind.

(23) A: *Quem ganhou na loteria?*

‘Who won the lottery?’

B: a) ?? *MULHER* (*ganhou na loteria*).

WOMAN (won in-the lottery)

b) ? *Só MULHER* (*ganhou na loteria*).

only WOMAN (won in-the lottery)

c) *Só TRÊS PESSOAS* (*todas elas mulheres*).

only THREE PEOPLE (all they women)

d) *O vizinho da Maria*.

the neighbor of Mary

Answer (23B.a) is infelicitous for the reasons mentioned above: nothing in the context suggests that an utterance about the kind ‘women’ would be relevant; moreover, BSNs in episodic sentences have the force of a non-specific indefinite, and that would give less information than A expects. Now, (23B.b) is crucial: the BSN *mulher* is under contrastive focus by means of ‘only’, just like in (19B.c) above. Still, *só mulher* ‘only woman’ is fully acceptable in (19B.c), but in (23B.b) it makes the answer awkward. Why? Of course, the difference lies in the context.

In (23), asserting that ‘only WOMEN’ won the lottery does not seem to be relevant: usually, only one or two people win the lottery; why would classifying one or two people by gender be relevant? Of course, there is nothing “extraordinary” – to use Pires de Oliveira’s words – if, in millions of runners, the three who win the lottery happen to be women. It is a perfectly possible accident, so there is no way in which question (23A) – without further contextual information – can be seen as “about which kind of people”. It can only be seen as a question “about who” (hence, the felicity of (23B.d)) – or about “how many people” (hence, the felicity of (23B.c)).

In short: (23B.b) above is infelicitous – though having contrastive focus on *mulher* – because the context does not provide any information which would turn women a kind relevant for the discussion. Now, just to close the argument, consider the following slightly adapted version of (23):

(24) A: *Como é? 40 ganhadores!? Você sabe quem ganhou (na loteria)?*

‘What? 40 winners!? Do you know who won (the lottery)?’

B: a) ?? *MULHER*.

WOMAN

b) *Só MULHER*.

only WOMAN

(24B.a) shows that a BSN as the subject results in an infelicitous answer, just like in (23B.a) above. But now, under contrastive focus by means of ‘only’, the BSN subject turns the sentence felicitous – compare (24B.b) with (24B.a). And the reason is that this statement about the kind ‘women’ is relevant in (24): it is completely unexpected – it is “extraordinary” – that, having 40 winners (already something quite unusual in the lottery), all of them would, by an accident, be women, and include no man. This is really unlikely.

Note: by asserting that only women won the lottery, utterance (24B.b) presupposes that other kinds of people – in particular, men – did not win; and this is relevant – for it is really unlikely. This does readjust the “question under discussion”, which becomes about “which kind of person”. Thus, context (24) is like context (19) above. And, just as a BSN subject is infelicitous in (19) without ‘only’, it is in (24) too – we submit –, precisely for the same reasons.

3.4 *Contextual relevance of utterances about kinds vs. contextual relevance of kinds and of information structure*

We would like to close our excursion on the role of information structure and pragmatics in the licensing of BSN subjects in episodic sentences with a final qualification. So far, we have been dubbing the constraint as something like “the question under discussion in the context must be *about* kinds of people”, or “the context must be such that a statement *about* the kind is relevant”, and similar modes of speaking. Of course, if the “question under discussion is about *kinds* of people”, the BSN will be focus; and saying that the utterance is “about the kind” suggests that the BSN will be a contextual topic – hence, apparently we did not escape so far from the pervading presence of information structure.

As a matter of fact, if the reader goes through all the examples of section 3, he/she will find out that either the BSN was the focus of the utterance, or it was a contrastive topic. Let us say that, if the (BSN that denotes a) kind has a specific informational role (i.e., it is the focus, or the topic) in a particular context, *the kind is contextually relevant*. Would the constraint on BSN subjects of episodic sentences be, after all, that they need to have some informational role, that is, the kind itself must be “contextually relevant”?

We believe this is *not* the case: we can build examples in which a BSN subject of an episodic sentence has no particular informational role – it is not a topic, nor the focus, of the sentence – and the sentence is still felicitous. Consider (25):

(25) A: *O que aconteceu na festa? Por que você ficou tão surpreso?*

‘What happened in the party? Why were you so surprised?’

B: a. (?) *Porque [mulher ‘tava falando de FUTEBOL lá.]_F*

because [woman was speaking of SOCCER there]_F

- b. *Porque [tinha mulher falando de FUTEBOL lá.]_F*
 because [there-was woman talking of SOCCER there]_F

Answer (25B.b) is totally natural, and it is expected to be so, for postverbal BSNs are much less constrained in BrP, as observed by Schmitt & Munn (1999) and many others since then. We resort to (25B.b) here just for comparison, to indicate the level of acceptability of (25B.a), which contains a BSN subject of an episodic sentence. For us, (25B.b) is still the best option in the context, but (25B.a) is almost as acceptable as (25B.b). We take this to indicate that (25B.a) is a felicitous answer to (25A).

Now, consider the information structure of (25B.a): the focus is on the whole sentence, for the whole sentence is what answers to the question “why are you so surprised?”; indeed, the only prosodic prominence required is nuclear (focus) stress on ‘football’; crucially, there is no required prosodic prominence – that is, no focus accent or contrastive topic accent – on the BSN subject. And, indeed, the question under discussion is not about “which kind of person was talking about what”, but “which things happened in the party that made you so surprised”. That is, there is no sense in which the question under discussion is “about kinds of people”; nor is the utterance relevant because the context requires it to be “about the kind *women*” – the kind ‘women’ is not a “contrastive topic” (nor an active topic) in the context. In short, the kind ‘women’ is not “contextually relevant” in the sense we characterized above.

Still, we can say that, in the context above, the utterance is about the kind ‘women’ and the fact that it is so *is* relevant. The question under discussion is “which things happened in the party that made you so surprised”. Now, at least in Brazil, women in general do not find any amusement in talking about football; so, if you go to a party and you find there many women talking about football, or just a few, but talking (say, to men) very enthusiastically about football, and similar situations, this is noteworthy – “extraordinary”, in Pires de Oliveira’s terms –, for it is a behavior we do not expect of people of the kind ‘women’. So, describing such situation *is* a reason to be surprised with a party. That is, *the utterance is about the kind “women” and this is relevant in the context* – though the question under discussion has nothing to do with the kind ‘women’, nor is this kind a “topic” in the context. In other words: *the kind ‘women’ by itself is not “contextually relevant”; but the utterance about the kind ‘women’ is; and this is what makes the BSN subject of the episodic sentence acceptable in (25B.a).*

Let us give another, different, example, but one in which the general reasoning is the same, as well as the result: the BSN subject of the episodic sentence becomes acceptable even if it is not “contextually relevant” – only the utterance about it is:

(26) [Context: a magazine reporter interviews a couple who spends their time sailing]

A: *Quando vocês resolveram sair pelo mundo?*

‘When did you decide to go around the world?’

B: *Quando[filho deixou de ser PROBLEMA.]_F*

when kid let from to-be PROBLEM

‘When kids stopped being a problem.’

Clearly, the kind ‘kids’ is not a focus, or a topic in the above context. Still, the utterance about the kind ‘kids’ is relevant, for it is common ground that kids are a kind that makes a couple keep settled (unlike, say, the kind ‘neighbors’).

A reviewer objects that we “dismiss too quickly the idea of relevance being equated with ‘being about a kind’ and move to an alternative pragmatic notion of ‘reporting something extraordinary, that can count for the kind’”. This is way too vague, and in many cases plainly wrong.” We do concede that the notion of relevance, even when formulated as “answering the question under discussion” in a particular context, is still open to some indeterminacy.¹³ It may be useful to consider these difficulties in the context of a dialogue provided by the reviewer as a possible counterexample to our generalization:

(27) A: *Por que o cientista ficou tão assustado?*

why the scientist got so scared?

B: ?? *Porque dinossauro apareceu na frente dele.*

because dinosaur showed-up in-the front of-him

According to the reviewer, “B’s answer [in (27B.a)] seems to [him]” – and touts, too – “to be clearly marked, even though its content is certainly extraordinary, given that we all believe that dinosaurs are extinct”. Indeed, this may seem to be a problem; but before we conclude that, we must make sure that (27) is the sort of context in which an utterance about kinds is “clearly relevant”. Now, compare (27) with a more elaborate version of it:

(28) [Context: Scientist A is on a mission to a recently found, very isolated, island. He discovered, among other things, that dinosaurs and other prehistoric animals still live there; and that the dinosaurs are not a threat

¹³ Let us be clear: Pires de Oliveira’s notion of “reporting something extraordinary about the kind” has inspired us, but our notion of “relevance” is independent – and, we believe, quite operational. We hope that the discussion below reinforces this point. As we said before, we take “relevance” to be defined in terms of “questions-under-discussion” (cf. Roberts 1996, van Kuppevelt 1995, Buring 2003, among others).

– actually, they keep at a distance from his camp. Scientist A is now updating journalist B on his most recent findings:]

A: *Achei que não haveria mais novidades, mas hoje eu fiquei bem surpreso...*

‘I thought there would not be any further news, but today I was very surprised...’

B: *Por quê?* (‘Why?’)

A: a. (?) *Porque dinossauro apareceu caminhando em volta*
because dinosaur showed-up walking around
do ACAMPAMENTO.
of-the camp

b. *Porque tinha dinossauro caminhando em volta*
because there-was dinosaur walking around
do ACAMPAMENTO.
of-the camp

For us, (28B.a) is pretty acceptable in context (28), much more that (27B) in context (27) (which is the reviewer’s example). Indeed, (28B.a) is just slightly less natural than (28B.b), which is the best option – basically, the same distinction we have found between (25B.a) and (25B.b) above. Thus, we take (28B.a) to be a legitimate option in context (28), indicating that talking about kinds can address a “question under discussion” in (28).

Now, of course, the question is: why is context (28) such that talking about kinds may be relevant in it? We think this is pretty clear. Though the kind ‘dinosaurs’ is neither the focus of A’s answer, nor is it an immediate topic in (28), it is clearly a relevant part of the common ground. First, context (28) indicates that both A and B are aware that A has been to the island in order to find out precisely what animals live there, what habits they have, etc. Second, both A and B know that A has discovered the existence of dinosaurs in the island and has identified some characteristic features of their behavior. Finally, both A and B know that one of the characteristic features of the dinosaurs’ behavior appeared to be that they do not like to get close to humans (that is, dinosaurs are smart beings).

Given this background, it is clear that, in the interactions between A and B, talking about any animal species in the island is a relevant concern. Now, of course the fact that dinosaurs showed up close to A’s camp *is* news about one of the island species, for dinosaurs did not do that before. Thus, (28) does provide a context in which it is easy to see that talking about the kind ‘dinosaurs’ is relevant – it does address the immediate “question under

discussion” in (28).¹⁴ As for (27) – the reviewer’s case –, our guess is that not enough of the common ground is given for readers to evoke a context in which talking about kinds is clearly relevant. In any event, (28) shows that our previous conclusions were correct.

In short: BSN subjects of episodic sentences need not be foci, nor contrastive topics – they need not have “prosodic prominence”, nor “contrast” is necessary. Indeed, we think we have shown that the role information structure plays in improving their acceptability is indirect: what matters is that the utterance about the kind be relevant for the question under discussion, and not that the kind itself play a particular informational role in the context.

4. On BSN subjects in generic sentences

In the previous section we have shown that BSN subjects of episodic sentences do provide support for a kind approach to the semantics of BSNs in BrP. It is not only the case that they are acceptable given an appropriate context – as previously observed by Schmitt & Munn (1999) and others. Crucially, they happen to be acceptable precisely when an utterance about the kind denoted by the BSN subject is “relevant” in a specific sense – when it addresses the “question under discussion” in that particular point of the discourse interaction. This is expected under our assumption that episodic readings are kind readings with “incomplete involvement”. As a result, the set of individuals who take part in the event represent the kind as a whole, which only leads to felicity if the utterance is relevant in the given context.

Admitting that the conclusions we reached so far are on the right track, two immediate issues arise for the extension of the kind approach to all occurrences of subject BSNs in BrP: (a) why would there be any restriction on their use as subjects of kind predicates? and (b) is there any evidence that BSN subjects of generic sentences should be treated as denoting kinds? As regards this last case, it should be recalled that a semantics based on unselective binding of an indefinite would seem to be adequate as well (see Müller 2000 and subsequent work). In this section, we will end our discussion providing some initial support for a positive answer to issue (b). We will not address issue (a) in this article, leaving it for future research.

¹⁴ Indeed, B might have followed his ‘why?’ question with another question that would make his expectations about this explicit: ‘Did you find anything new about any of the island species?’ If B had actually uttered this question, of course ‘the island species’ would become an active topic in the context, hence implicating the kind ‘dinosaurs’ as a potential subtopic. As things are in (28), ‘the island species’ is just an accessible, inactive topic. On the activation of topics, see Prince (1981), Lambrecht (1994), among others.

However, given our answer to question (b), we will conclude that question (a) cannot be discarded by claiming that BSN subjects cannot be kind-denoting at all.

Before we take up issue (b) above, we quickly address a different claim, made by Müller (2002a, 2004), concerning BSN subjects of generic sentences: she argues that these are, necessarily, *topics*. As we will see, Müller’s claim not only has some initial empirical support but specially it is embedded in an coherent picture of BSNs in BrP: in this picture, an indefinite semantics for BSN subjects provides an alternative explanation for the constraints found in episodic sentences and sentences with kind predicates.

4.1 BSN subjects of generic sentences as topics

According to Müller (2002a, 2004), BSN subjects in generic sentences are indefinite NPs in A-bar position restricting the generic operator of the sentence (cf. Partee 1991). As a result of this, she claims, they need to be interpreted as topics. The generic operator binds the indefinite’s variable as well as a subject *pro*. The syntactic representation of such an analysis is indicated in (29a) below, and its logical form in (29b); the logical form can be read as in (29c):

- (29) a. [Criança_i [_{IP} *pro*_i chora muito]] ‘Children cry a lot.’
 child *pro* cries a-lot
 b. GEN [x_i] (x is-a-child; x cries-a-lot)
 c. Usually, if x is a child, x cries a lot.

One of Müller (2002a, 2004)’s arguments in favor of this claim is that in a question-answer pair, BSNs can be the “topic” – or “theme” (TH), in her terminology, as shown in (30) (underline below represents “topic accent”, which happens to be basically the same as the accent for contrastive topics – that is, to Jackendoff 1972’s “B-accent”):

- (30) A: *O que você me diz dos políticos?*
 ‘What can you tell me about politicians?’
 B: [_{TH} *Político*] [_{RH} *fala demais*].
 politician speaks too-much
 ‘Politicians speak too much.’

Another of Müller (2002a, 2004)’s arguments is that, in sentences with other “dislocated material”, BSNs can permute with left-dislocated elements quite freely:

- (31) a. *Pra mim, político é ladrão*
 for me, politician is thief

- b. *Político, pra mim, é ladrão.*
 politician, for me, is thief
 ‘Politicians, for me, are thieves.’

Now, this analysis of BSN subjects in generic sentences can explain why BSN subjects are restricted in episodic sentences and in sentences with kind predicates: BSNs do not denote kinds, but are indefinites that must be bound by some unselective operator; this is what happens in generic sentences, where they are bound by the generic operator; in absence of such an operator in episodic sentences or in sentences with kind predication, they cannot be interpreted – hence, their unacceptability (see Müller 2002a, 2004 and references cited there).

Note, however, that the above arguments show that BSN subjects of generic sentences *can* be topics; none of them actually show that they *need* to be topics. Indeed, it appears to us that none of the arguments in Müller (2002a, 2004) shows this. Actually, we would be surprised if BSN subjects of generic were required to be topics, for they were never reported to be anything but fully acceptable in out-of-the-blue sentences (see section 2 again). For us, this indicates that they do not require a very specific type of context to be felicitous, as it happens to BSN subjects of episodic sentences. We come back to this difference between the two cases in the final section.

In any event, it is quite easy to show that BSN subjects of generic sentences are not necessarily topics; we need only vary the information requirements of the context. In (32) below, we see that a BSN subject can be the information focus of a generic sentence; and in (33), that the sentence can have wide focus (as before, capitals indicate focus accent; (33) is an adapted version of (28) above):¹⁵

- (32) A: Que tipo de pessoa reclama sem motivo?
 ‘What sort of person complains for no reason?’
 B: **POLÍTICO** (tá sempre reclamando “de barriga cheia”).
 ‘**POLITICIAN** (is always complaining “with a full belly”).’

- (33) [Context: Scientist A is on his mission in the mentioned island. He discovered, among other things, that dinosaurs and other prehistoric

¹⁵ Note that if (32A) is answered not only by the focused constituent, but rather by the “full” sentence in (32B), this sentence would contain a second occurrence focus (see Krifka 2004): the adverb of quantification *sempre* takes the second occurrence focus as its scope, and the focus frame as its restriction. This leaves open the possibility of analyzing the BSN subject in “full” (32B) as a variable bound by the adverb of quantification. In any event, this does not affect our argument in the next section, where we will offer independent evidence that BSNs subjects of generic sentences must be allowed to have a kind reading.

animals still live there and that they all seem to be herbivorous. He is now updating journalist B on his most recent findings:]

A: *Achei que não haveria mais novidades, mas hoje eu fiquei bem surpreso...*

‘I thought there would not be any further news, but today I was very surprised...’

B: *Por quê?* (‘Why?’)

A: *Porque (eu descobri que) dinossauro come CARNE aqui.*

Because (I found out that) dinosaur eats MEAT here.

So, our first conclusion is that BSN subjects of generic sentences are *informationally unconstrained*: they can be topics – as Müller has shown –, but they can also be foci, or in the domain of wide focus, etc. This fact is quite important for us here: their presumed “topichood” cannot be taken, anymore, as an argument in favor of an analysis in which BSN subjects of generic sentences are necessarily interpreted as indefinites bound by a generic operator. Indeed, we will argue in the next section that, in certain cases, BSN subjects of generic sentences must denote kinds, and cannot be analyzed as indefinites. Before we go on, let us stress one point: we will *not* argue that BSN subjects of generic sentences do not have an indefinite reading; rather, we will argue that, besides this reading, they can have a *kind reading* as well.

4.2 *Kind readings of BSN subjects in generic sentences*

In the previous subsection, we have argued that BSN subjects of generic sentences do not need to be topics. Hence, we do not need to maintain that their semantics must be compatible with this requirement, as Müller claims. In a more positive line of argument, we think we do have independent evidence for the availability of a kind reading for BSNs in generic sentences. It is based on the binding of pronouns in generic sentences containing both a kind-denoting subject (clearly marked as such by a definite article) and a generic operator, as discussed in Krifka et al. (1995). Consider the first type of sentence:

(34) The lion roars when it smells food.

This sentence may be interpreted in two ways, depending on the way in which the generic operator binds the subject. On the one hand, the bound variable may be identified as the kind as a whole. Alternatively, it may be identified as possible realizations of the kind. In the first case, *it* will refer to the kind “lion”, and in the second case, it will refer to realizations of the kind.

In this latter case, then, the sentence states that, in general, when a realization of the kind “lion” smells food, this same realization of the kind “lion” roars.

The other interpretation, interestingly, is less strict, and should be understood, in Krifka et al.’s terms, as a ‘kind oriented mode of speaking’. Under this reading, Krifka and associates claim, it is possible that the lions that smell food are not necessarily the same ones that roar. This actually illustrates that kinds can be used in generic sentences with incomplete involvement, as we also assumed above in order to understand the BSNs with episodic predicates. Due to this “incomplete involvement” reading, the identity of the roaring lions and the food smelling lions does not need to be perfect.¹⁶ In this respect, (34) differs from a parallel sentence with an indefinite subject: in (35), *a lion* cannot be interpreted as a kind, and the sentence only has a reading in which the lions who smell food are also the ones that roar – that is, only the reading that would be represented by a logical form similar to (29b) above:

(35) A lion roars when it smells food.

Thus, according to Krifka et al. (1995), (34) can have a reading that can be appropriately expressed by an indefinite semantics – e.g., as represented by a logical form like (29b) – and a reading in which *the lion* denotes a kind. This last reading cannot be expressed by an indefinite semantics, that is, it cannot be represented by a logical form like (29b).

Turning back to the BSNs in BrP, we now can make a strong prediction concerning the status of the BSNs in generic sentences. If they can be interpreted as kinds, the ‘imperfect identity’ reading should be available, next to a strict identity reading, as in the case of the kind-denoting subject *the lion* in (34). If, however, the BSN subject in a generic sentence is necessarily an indefinite, only the strict identity reading is available, as in the case of the indefinite *a lion* in (35). Consider now the BrP examples in (36) and (37):

¹⁶ Brisson (1998:87) discusses a parallel example showing that incomplete involvement may affect a pronoun and its antecedent differently:

- (i) The girls went swimming and then they played basketball.

It may be the case that some of the girls who did go swimming did not take part in the basketball game or vice versa. The parallel behavior of the interpretation of pronouns in (i), with a definite non-kind-denoting subject, and cases involving kinds is in accordance with our claim that these are both instances of the same phenomenon.

- (36) *Funcionário público faz greve quando não consegue*
 servant public makes strike when not gets
negociar com o governo.
 to-negotiate with the government
 ‘Public servants go on strike when they don’t get the government into negotiation.’
- (37) *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.’

The preferred reading for both of these examples, pragmatically, is a reading in which the understood subject of the sentence embedded under *quando* ‘when’ is not referring to exactly the same individuals as the subject of the main clause. The public servants who negotiate with the government do not need to be exactly the same individuals as the ones who go on strike. Similarly, not all the Indians who eat the meat need to fish or hunt themselves: usually, the group of Indians who eat the hunt or the fish is bigger than the group that does the hunting or the fishing.¹⁷ This type of interpretation is not the one expressed by logical forms like (29b) above; moreover, this type of reading cannot be derived when the subject is taken to be an indefinite, as illustrated by the contrast with (38), which has only the strict identity reading:

- (38) *Um índio só come carne quando caça ou pesca.*
 an Indian only eats meat when hunts or fishes
 ‘An Indian only eats meat when he hunts or fishes.’

Given this, we conclude that BSN subjects of generic sentences can be interpreted as denoting kinds with “incomplete involvement” – just like BSN subjects of episodic sentences. This, of course, is an argument in support of the view that the kind approach to BSN subjects in BrP can, after all, be extended to generic sentences as well. However, in order to keep this line of

¹⁷ The kind readings of (36) and (37) are possible only if the *when* clause has a null subject. If the subject is an overt singular pronoun, as in (i) below, then only the individual bound-variable interpretation is available.

- (i) *Índio só come carne quando ele caça ou pesca.*
 Indian only eats meat when *he* hunts or fishes
 ‘An Indian only eats meat when he hunts or fishes.’

We will not discuss this issue here; for some initial observations, see Schmitt & Munn (1999), Müller (2004).

analysis, the next step is to show that the bound variable, strict identity, reading can be derived somehow from a basic kind-denoting semantics.

Of course, it must be recalled that Müller correctly claims that this bound variable reading is fully compatible with her indefinite semantics for BSN subjects; however, we must stress, her semantics is *not* compatible with the readings we have just shown to be the preferred ones for cases like (41) and (42). Moreover, it is not only that the indefinite semantics requires additional assumptions to explain the acceptability of BSN subjects of episodic sentences; actually, it is simply incapable of explaining the readings those cases actually receive – namely, they are utterances about kinds that must address a question under discussion.

Thus, all in all, it seems to us that the kind-denoting approach to BSN subjects of both episodic and generic sentences has a better chance of generalizing over all cases of BSN subjects than the unselectively bound indefinite approach.

5. Concluding remarks

Despite the varying judgments found for sentences with BSN subjects, we argued in this paper that this variation should not be taken as evidence for radically different representations of BSN subjects in BrP, or for radical differences among distinct dialects of BrP. As we have seen in section 2, judgments reported in the literature – and confirmed by our own – do reveal an identifiable pattern: sentences with generic subjects seem to be unconstrained for all speakers; sentences with kind predicates are acceptable for some speakers but not for others, depending on factors still to be understood; and sentences with episodic sentences are sometimes acceptable, and sometimes not, their acceptability being determined by context – in particular, when modeled by information structure. As we said before, an adequate theory of BSNs in BrP should be capable of understanding these differences in acceptability, explaining away the apparent chaotic nature of the variation in judgments.

Given that the general nature of the constraints on episodic sentences is generally acknowledged, we focused on these cases in order to get insight into the nature of the varying judgments. In section 3 we argued that the constraints found on BSNs in the subject position of episodic sentences can be understood once we make more concrete a suggestion made by Pires de Oliveira's (2012): such sentences are used “to report something extraordinary, that can count for the kind”. Our particular way of implementing this idea has two main ingredients. The first is the possibility of “incomplete involvement”. If an episodic utterance contains a kind-denoting subject, only a “representative subset” of the kind is involved in the event – where “representative” may contextually refer to sets of different

sizes. Adopting Landman's (1989) assumption that incomplete involvement is found with groups, we assumed that kinds may be taken to be groups, and as such give rise to incomplete involvement readings.

The second ingredient in our approach is "relevance". A kind-denoting subject – in its "incompletely involved group reading" – is acceptable in an episodic utterance if the utterance is "relevant". We argued that the notion of relevance required here is a particular one: the utterance is relevant if it addresses a "question under discussion" (cf. Roberts 1996, van Kuppevelt 1995, Büring 2003, among others). This second aspect explains why BSNs cannot be used freely with episodic predicates: the context must be such that the utterance containing the kind-denoting subject clearly answers the question under discussion in that particular point of the exchange. We have shown that this explains the effects of information structure on the felicity of BSN subjects of episodic sentences; and we have also shown that these effects are indirect: what really matters is relevance of the utterance about the kind.

Thus, one of our main conclusions is that, when properly understood, the constraints on BSN subjects of episodic sentences do provide an argument for a kind-denoting approach to them.

This raises the question as to how one should analyze BSN subjects of generic sentences. As shown by Müller (2000) and in her subsequent work, these can quite successfully be analyzed as indefinites unselectively bound by a generic operator. In section 4, we tried to strengthen the point against the indefinite analysis and in favor of a kind analysis with two arguments. First, we have shown that BSN subjects of generic sentences are not necessarily topics – something Müller (2002a, 2004) claimed would support the indefinite analysis. Second, and more importantly, we have shown that, for some cases, we need to say that BSN subjects of generic sentences must get a reading in which the kind can be "incompletely involved" – just like in episodic sentences. Thus, given the range of facts we have considered here, the kind-denoting approach does seem to be closer to generalizing to all occurrences of BSN subjects.

Our conclusions fit well with Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011)'s kind-denoting analysis of all occurrences of BSNs in BrP. However, at this point of our research, we cannot exclude other ways of explaining our observations. For all we can see, they are compatible with, say, an analysis in which the kind reading is derived by application of the down operator, and is the only reading available for BSNs for independent reasons (see, for instance, Dobrovie-Sorin and Pires de Oliveira 2008). Further research will be necessary to clarify the source of the kind reading. In relation to this, a particular interesting issue to investigate is why postverbal BSNs seem to be less restricted than BSNs in subject position – even in episodic sentences, apparently under the same "incompletely involved kind" reading (see discussion of (25) and (26) above and fn. 1).

A final issue we want to mention was also referred to previously (see fn.3): we would like to stress that, given the variation and the subtlety of the judgments involved in our discussion, an urgent task is to ground the empirical claims made here on a more reliable basis. We hope we have made some progress in clarifying some of the factors that do intervene in the relevant judgments. For example, we believe discriminating “relevance” from “information structure roles” will help obtaining a sounder set of conditions to be experimentally tested. Moreover, our proposals do make explicit, testable predictions. In particular, we expect a correlation between the acceptability of episodic sentences with BSN subjects and the level of accessibility of kind information in the common ground.

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