Fully bare nominals in two Creoles:
A description and a tentative constructional account

ALAIN KIHM

Pierre qui roule n'amasse pas mousse 'A rolling stone gathers no moss'
Cão que ladra não morde 'Barking dogs seldom bite'

Abstract

Two creole languages are compared in this paper with respect to the possible reference of fully bare nominals (FBNs) in them. One is a Portuguese-related Creole, Kriyol spoken in Guinea-Bissau and Casamance, the other is a French-related Creole, Haitian. Both languages are similar in allowing for FBNs, i.e. uninflected nouns not in the scope of a determiner or a quantifier, in all syntactic positions and grammatical functions. The main difference between them is that Haitian avails itself of a definite determiner in addition to a specific indefinite determiner, whereas Kriyol only has the latter. Given such empirical data, which are examined at length and in detail, the paper aims to show that the referential possibilities of FBNs in both languages can be analysed as emergent properties from the constructions the FBNs are inserted into, without recourse to functional categories.

1. Introduction

The two creole languages to be examined here are Guinea-Bissau Kriyol (Kihm, 1994) and Haitian (Joseph, 1988). They are lexically related to Portuguese and to French respectively. Actually, Kriyol (Kr) proceeds from the grammatical expansion of a sixteenth century West African Portuguese pidgin (see Kihm & Rougé, 2008), Haitian (H) (probably) from the restructuring of a seventeenth century French colonial koine.

As all known Creoles, Kr and H allow for **fully bare nominals** (FBNs), i.e. NPs unmarked for Number and (in)definiteness, in contexts where Standard European Portuguese (SEP) and Standard French (SF) show overtly definite or indefinite, singular or plural NPs, or bare plurals (BPs), i.e. overtly

plural NPs unmarked for (in)definiteness, or bare singulars, the latter in restricted contexts.

As a matter of fact, FBNs are often confused with bare singulars as they appear in, e.g., *A Maria é **linguista** – Marie est **linguiste*** 'Mary is a linguist' or as ***pierre*** 'stone', ***mousse*** 'moss', and ***cão*** 'dog' in the proverbs quoted in epigraph. This is an impropriety: as we shall see, FBNs in Kr and H (and beyond) may be (interpreted as) singular, but they may also be (interpreted as) plural, and more often than not they are transnumeral, i.e. neither the one nor the other (see Acquaviva, 2008).

A common assumption is that bare NPs refer to properties: *pierre qui roule* and *cão que ladra* or *linguista – linguiste* refer to the property of being a rolling stone or a barking dog or a linguist (see, e.g., Szabolcsi, 1994; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca, 2003). Yet, these NPs or their heads are bare only in the sense of not being in the scope of a determiner, not in the sense of including no feature beyond their lexical meaning. Actually, *pierre* and *cão* at least include a morphosyntactic Number feature having [singular] for a value and they contrast with plural *pierres* (at least in written SF) and *cães*. In spoken SF, the singular value of the feature is revealed through agreement whenever the latter is apparent: cf. *pierre qui atterrit* 'a landing stone' vs. *pierres qui atterrissent* 'landing stones', or through optional *liaison*: cf. *pierre aiguë* /pyèr_égü/ 'sharp stone' vs. *pierres aiguës* /pyèr_(z)_égü/ 'sharp stones'.

True, there is a mismatch here between morphosyntax – where *pierre* and *cão* are singular by virtue of obligatorily being members of the two-cell paradigms *pierre* / *pierres* (homophonous in modern SF except with *liaison*) and *cão* / *cães* – and semantics, according to which they seem to refer to the plural sets of rolling stones and barking dogs. The mismatch is not rescued by assuming reference to kinds, that is to second-order singular individuals (Chierchia, 1998), since rolling stones and barking dogs may hardly be regarded as kinds.

The relevant notion here may be **inclusiveness** (Hawkins, 1978), that is reference to the sum total of rolling stones and barking dogs, then epitomized by "the" prototypical rolling stone and barking dog. *Pierre* and *cão* are therefore genuinely singular, in morphosyntax as well as in semantics. Moreover, rolling stones and barking dogs, while clearly not denoting kinds, may be viewed as naming concepts in the sense of Krifka (1995).[1] Yet, given the inescapability of (overt or contrastive) Number marking in SF and SEP, reference to the concept itself can make it into actual utterances only through a not fully bare nominal that denotes a prototypical individual illustrating the concept.

---

[1] "Similar to kinds, concepts are abstract entities related to real objects. However, they need not be well established, but could be construed from scratch." Krifka (1995:402).

On the other hand, given optionality of Number marking (see below) and absence of agreement, the Kr and H counterparts, *pedra* and *kacur*, *wòch* and *chyen* respectively, are (or may be) bare "as they come from the lexicon", i.e. unspecified for any feature beyond their lexical meaning. They directly refer to the concepts they name, like do Chinese FBNs as analysed by Krifka (1995).

Kr and H thus differ deeply from SEP and SF, which do not allow for FBNs in my definition, while they look similar to languages like Chinese (Krifka, 1995; Chung & Sybesma, 1999) and, more to the point, non-standard Brazilian Portuguese (NSBP – Schmitt & Munn, 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca, 2003; Dobrovie-Sorin, 2008). The present study is not a comparative one, however, so I will not pursue this point, limiting myself to try and make sense of the Kr and H evidence.

In "standard" syntactic theory, nouns "out of the lexicon" acquire definiteness and number values – i.e. they become able to denote particular instantiations of the concepts they name – through insertion within the syntactic functional projections DP and NumP, not necessarily with overt correlates: e.g. Cheng & Sybesma (1999) assume DP for Mandarin Chinese, although no definite determiner exists in the language.

My rather informal framework, in contrast, implies "wholewheat syntax unenriched with inaudibilia" (Cooper, 1982). Inaudibilia, i.e. functional projections and heads such as D(P), Num(P), etc. formalize properties (definiteness, cardinality, etc.) that pertain to semantics and need not be represented in syntax. Morphemes, i.e. the exponents of the semantic properties, pertain to morphology and the lexicon, and again syntax should not be concerned with them, except insofar as agreement or concord phenomena are involved. (For fully explicit models compatible with this view, see Sadock, 1991; Goldberg, 1995, 2006; Jackendoff, 1997, 2002; Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997). More precisely, in accordance with constructional models of grammar (Goldberg, 1995, 2006), I will assume that FBNs acquire definiteness and number values from the **grammatical constructions** they are members of.

The paper is organized as follows. In sections 2 and 3 I describe the uses of FBNs and plural marking in Kr and H. In section 4 I attempt an account of the previously reviewed evidence along the lines of the preceding paragraph. The numerous factors entering into FBNs' interpretation strongly suggest that the "non-syntactic" account outranks its competitor. I will content myself with showing it is at least a possible alternative.

2. Interpreting nominals in Kriyol

2.1. (In)definiteness

Unlike SEP Kr does not hold a definite determiner or article. It holds a **specific** (strong) indefinite determiner *un* 'a' with the meaning of *a(n)* in "I found an apartment", not in "I'm looking for an apartment" (in the usual

reading). I am taking "specific" in Enç's (1991) sense of being a selected member of a preexisting set, and "indefinite" as in Discourse Representation Theory (DRT), that is as introducing a new Discourse Referent (DR) (see Kamp, 1995). The weak indefinite meaning of *apartment* in "I'm looking for an apartment (or other)" is expressed in Kr by FBNs. Because of that, one cannot infer that a noun is definite from the fact that it is **not** modified by *un*. In other words, while *un N* NPs are unambiguously indefinite and specific, meaning 'a certain N', FBNs out of context are ambiguous with regard to definiteness, they can mean 'the N' or 'an N (or other)'. Plurality marking is through a *-(i)s* suffix, the occurrence of which does not depend solely on the cardinality of the referent as it does in SEP. These features are illustrated in (1):

(1) Minjer   ta   bindi   bon   baley.
     woman   IPF   sell   good   basket
     'The woman sells good baskets.' – *A mulher vende bons balaios*.

What (1) says is that some supposedly identifiable woman sells baskets as her usual activity, she is a basket-seller.[2] The subject FBN *minjer* is given a definite singular reading. Kr thus differs from NSBP where subject FBNs are ungrammatical unless given a generic reading (Schmitt & Munn, 2002; Dobrovie-Sorin, 2008).

The unambiguously singular interpretation of *minjer* in (1) comes from the fact that, given the conditions for plurality marking in Kr, the bare form obligatorily contrasts with overtly pluralized *minjeris* '(the) women / *(as) mulheres*'. I will return to this in section 3.

As for *minjer*'s definiteness, I follow Carlson (2002) in assuming that the external argument position (i.e. external to VP) is reserved for definites, specific (strong) indefinites, strongly quantified NPs, etc., that is everything but weak indefinites.[3] As a result, *minjer* in (1) cannot be weakly indefinite, and since it is not overtly quantified or signaled as a specific indefinite (by *un*), the only remaining interpretation is the definite one.

The exclusion of weak indefinites from external argumenthood entails that agentive weak indefinite NPs have to be introduced through a construction that positions the NP inside the VP or predicate, as shown in (2) where the sentence is embedded in an opaque context in order to highlight weak indefiniteness:

---

[2] See Lyons (1999) for possible identifiability as the basic feature of definiteness.

[3] Although Carlson remains agnostic about it, I consider external/internal argument and VP or predicate to be semantic notions that do not presuppose or entail any particular syntactic model.

(2)   N kuda kuma i tem minjer ku ta   bindi bom baley (na
       fera).
       I   think that it have woman who IPF sell good basket (in
       market)
       'I think there is a woman who sells good baskets.' (in the market) –
       Acho que há uma mulher que vende bons balaios (no mercado).

Notice that … *que uma mulher vende…* is considered at best awkward in SEP as well. I am not claiming that understanding *minjer* in (1) as 'a/sm woman (or other)' is entirely impossible, but it is certainly not the interpretation that first comes to the native speaker's mind.

Specific indefinite external arguments do not raise any problem in contrast:

(3)   Un minjer   say   pa ba paña salton.
                                        (Montenegro & Morais, 1977)
       a woman go.out.PF for go catch frog
       'A (certain) woman went out to go and catch frogs.' – *Uma (certa)
       mulher saiu para apanhar rãs*.

The woman denoted by *un minjer* in (3) is specific in Enç's (1991) sense of being a selected member of a preexisting set identifiable as the set of all possible protagonists in the story of which (3) is the opening sentence. At the same time, it is indefinite in the DRT sense of introducing a new DR, not assumed to be readily identifiable by the hearers. Notice that the bare form of dynamic verbs like *say* 'to go out' is aspectually perfective, referring to a past accomplished event. The bare form of state verbs like *kuda* 'to think, to believe' in (2), in contrast, is aspectually imperfective and refers to an enduring state of affairs.

Given an imperfective context as in (1), specific indefinite subjects can be generically interpreted:

(4)   Un bon lutadur tem di kume por dia un   purku.
                                        (Júlio, 1996: 10)
       a good wrestler have of eat   by day one pig
       'A good wrestler must eat one pig a day.' – *Um bom lutador tem que
       comer um porco por dia*.

Such a sentence may be viewed as an implicit conditional: $\forall x$ (good wrestler, x) $\supset$ (must eat…, x), that is "Whoever is a good wrestler must eat…". Choice functions are therefore the relevant logical tool here: "A function f is a choice function (CH (f)) if it applies to any non-empty set and yields a member of that set" (Reinhart, 1997:372). The specificity of *un* is preserved, since in every set or possible world where wrestlers exist the

choice function associated with *un* selects a certain individual who is a good wrestler and has the stated property (see Kratzer, 2005:134).

Genericity or reference to kind is also an option for subject FBNs, provided the predicate is not perfective:

(5) Saku limpu ka ta firma.
    bag empty not IPF stand
    'An empty bag does not stand upright.' – *Um saco vazio não fica firme.*

(6) Lifanti ka sobra mas na e ladus.
    (Doneux & Rougé, 1988: 60)
    elephant not remain more in this sides
    'There are no longer elephants in these regions.' – *Já não sobram elefantes nestas regiões.*

Example (5) is a proverb. A more clearly kind-referring translation of (6) would be 'The elephant has disappeared from these regions', *O elefante desapareceu destas regiões*. Notice the use of singular definite NPs in English and SEP, which supports the assumption that genera and kinds are second--order individuals. Since Kr subject FBNs denote first-order individuals such as "the woman", there is nothing surprising in the fact that they can also denote kinds like "the elephant" in (6) or concepts like "empty bag" in (5) provided the predicate type allows for it.

Returning now to the internal argument FBN *bon baley* of (1), we see it receives a weak (existential) indefinite plural reading, being understood as a plural count NP denoting a sum of atoms (see Landman, 1997). It is the predicate's imperfectivity, translated by a simple present in English and SEP and denoting an iterative event here, that entails plurality of the internal argument – unless one is ready to condone the (normally) nonsensical meaning that the woman repeatedly sells the same good basket – even though the latter is not marked for plurality (see below for why it is not so marked).

Given the nonexistence of a definite determiner and the absence of the specific indefinite one, the weak indefiniteness of the object FBN may be considered to be by default, i.e. unless a definite reading is shown to be the case as in (7), in which we are no longer dealing with an FBN but with a complex NP including a restrictive relative clause, semantically equivalent to a definite NP:

(7) Minjer ta bindi bom baley ku N fala-u del.
    woman IPF sell good basket that I tell-you of.it
    'The woman sells the good baskets I told you about.' – *A mulher vende os bons balaios de que eu te disse.*

For the default weak indefiniteness of *bon baley* in (1), I again adopt Carlson's (2002) analysis, namely that providing a verb with an internal

argument that just names the concept as weak indefinites do does not change the denotation type of the verb: "to sell baskets" is part of the eventuality denoted by "to sell". In contrast, "to sell the/this/every… basket" is a particular event that needs checking from the discourse context outside the predicate.

Given such a default, there are two ways that an FBN internal argument can receive a definite interpretation: either by being unique in reference, essentially (e.g. *sol* 'the sun') or contingently (e.g. *sinema* 'the cinema' denoting Bissau's only cinema theatre); or by being clearly D-linked, i.e. related to something in previous discourse. D-linking may be overtly realized as when the FBN is topicalized (left-dislocated) as in (8):

(8) Bon   baley,   minjer bindi -l.
     good basket   woman sell.PF-it
     'The good basket, the woman sold it.' – *O bom balaio, a mulher vendeu-o.*

Or it may be covert as in (9):

(9) Omi ka ta   da   ba   minjer janta ku   siya.
                                           (Montenegro & Morais, 1995:69)
     man   not IPF give PAST woman lunch and dinner
     'The man did not give food to the woman.' – *O homem não dava de comer à mulher.*

The context of the story makes it clear that this statement is about a particular woman – the man's wife – already mentioned several times. Yet, with another context, (9) could also describe a state of affairs such that 'the man' did not give food to any woman (weak indefinite reading), although plural *minjeris* would be more expected in this case (see below). Another possible meaning of (9) is that (once upon a time) men in general never gave food to women in general, which BP readily expresses as *(Naquele tempo) homem não dava de comer a mulher*. *Omi* and *minjer* then refer to the kinds or concepts "man" and "woman" (or *Vir* and *Mulier*) in the sense of Krifka (1995). As already pointed out, kinds are second-order individuals, definite by virtue of being unique in a given world like the sun (a first-order individual).

In (10) below we have an example where the generic or concept interpretation of the internal argument *pekadur* 'human being' turns out to be the sole possible one:

(10) Kal   dia   ku   jumé   pudi   padi pekadur?
                                           (Montenegro & Morais, 1995:1)
     which day that marabou cangive.birth human.being
     'When could a marabou give birth to a human being?' – *Onde é que já se viu jumé parir pecador?* [the authors' translation]

2.2. Plural marking

In this section I will only be talking about **count** nouns. Mass nouns like *yagu* 'water' and abstracts such as *macundadi* 'manhood' won't be dealt with at all. As a matter of fact, they do not pluralize – although more research is necessary before this claim can be made with full certainty.

As mentioned, the exponent of plurality for count nouns in Kr is *-(i)s*: e.g., *omi / omis* 'man / men', *minjer / minjeris* 'woman / women'. It is not obligatorily realized as shown by *bon baley* 'good basket**s**' (*bons balaios*) in (1), and there is no agreement when it is realized on the head noun: cf. *minjeris bonitu* 'nice women' vs. SEP *mulheres bonitas*. Special conditions are therefore required for its appearance beyond the mere fact of the NP referring to more than one token or specimen of the denoted concept. There are actually four such conditions, two necessary but not sufficient, two variable.

The first necessary condition is the **cardinality** of the referent. For a count noun to be marked as plural it is necessary, but not sufficient, that the number of instances of the denoted entity be superior to one.

The second necessary condition is **individualization** of the referent. Pluralized NPs are meant to refer to individualized specimens or groups of specimens of the denoted entity. Pluralized NPs are thus not eligible for generic or kind reference, which preclude individualization, reference being to the concept of the entity, not to its specimens. For instance, *Kacur ta ladra* means either 'Dogs (as a kind) bark' or 'The (individual) dog barks (habitually)' (cf. SEP *Os cães ladram* or *O cão ladra*), whereas *Kacuris ta ladra* only means 'The (group of individual) dogs bark (habitually)'.

Individualization is distinct from definiteness, as exemplified below:

(11) Rapas ciga   nunde ku   minjeris ta   laba   nel.
                                              (Montenegro & Morais, 1995:48)
    boy   arrive.PF where that women   IPF wash   in.it
    'The boy came where women were washing.' – *O rapaz chegou a um sítio onde estavam umas mulheres a lavar*. [the authors' translation]

The SEP translation of (11) implies that the storyteller assumes the women he's talking about do not already belong to the data base he believes he shares with his hearers. Hence *umas mulheres* '(some) women' translating Kr *minjeris*. But he could assume otherwise, and *minjeris* in the very same sentence could also mean *as mulheres* 'the women'. In either case, the women are viewed as a group of individuals in the discourse situation. The exponent of plurality is thus compatible with both definite and indefinite readings, which means it realizes the sole feature [Plural], it is a pure plurality marker.

The first variable condition I call the **ontological condition**, and it depends on the position of the referent in a hierarchy that goes as follows: human

animates > humanizable animates (cows, dogs, elephants, lions, marabous, rabbits, etc.) > non-humanizable non-human animates (ants, fish, termites, small birds, etc.) and things. The hierarchy reflects a spontaneous ontology: the higher the entity stands in it, the more it **is** – the more individual substance it is endowed with – and the less permissible it becomes to omit to mention that several specimens are being referred to if such is the case. To put it simply, if you're talking about several women, you feel impelled most of the time to say so explicitly; if you're talking about ants or dishes, you feel no qualms in not mentioning (since grammar doesn't oblige you to) that there are several of them rather than just one. This condition, like the following one, is variable in the sense that it is always possible, albeit at times quite painful, to override it.

The second variable condition is the **discourse-interactional condition**: given all other conditions, does the speaker in the particular discourse interaction she is participating in feel the need to overtly mention that there actually are more than one specimen of the entity she is talking about? Or can she leave that detail out as irrelevant to what she intends to convey and/or assumes her hearers expect? (See the notion of "kind-oriented mode of talk" in Krifka et al., 1995:85ff.)

All four conditions interact in complex ways. To put it as simply as possible, the main upshot of the interactions is that count nouns or NPs denoting pluralities of humans or humanizable animates, **persons** in one word, appear fully bare almost only when reference is clearly to all and every instance in all possible situations in a given world, that is to the kind itself as in one possible reading of *omi* and *minjer* in (9).

A good illustration is given by (11). Since the predicate of *nunde ku minjeris ta laba nel* is imperfective and not anchored to any particular time, another possible interpretation is that the clause refers to a place where women in general come to wash, a washing place for women.[4] (The actual presence of women is then not implied, but that is irrelevant to the present argument.) We would then expect the FBN *minjer* to be usable here, as it is in the generic reading of (9). In fact it is not. And that is because the context is not adequate for kind reference: the 'women in general' who come to the washing place form a group of individuals, possibly unknown and not necessarily always the same, but who nevertheless can in principle be counted. We are certainly not dealing with "women as a kind" here.

The referent of *minjeris* in (11) satisfies the individualization condition. And since it also satisfies the cardinality condition (there are obviously many women) and women stand highest in the ontological hierarchy, it is actually impossible not to overtly mark it for plurality. *Minjer* instead of *minjeris* in (11) would be understood as the definite expression 'the woman'.

---

[4] This is actually the most probable reading despite Montenegro and Morais's SEP translation, which I kept although I suspect its accuracy.

For count nouns denoting persons as defined above, then, the individualization condition almost always voids the discourse-interactional condition, becoming thus sufficient in addition to necessary. Things are different with poorly individualizable entities, where the discourse-
-interactional condition is always able to outrank the individualization condition and very often does so. A case in point is (3) repeated below:

(3) Un   minjer say   pa ba paña salton.
                                              (Montenegro & Morais, 1977)
     a   woman go.out.PF for go catch frog
     'A (certain) woman went out to go and catch frogs.' – *Uma (certa)*
     mulher saiu para apanhar rãs.

Evidently the woman went out to catch more than one frog. Yet, frogs rank low in the hierarchy and their more-than-oneness in the reported state of affairs is so self-evident – who would bother to catch one frog under normal, default conditions? – that mentioning it is indeed irrelevant. Hence the FBN *salton*, not #*saltons* (infelicitous, not ungrammatical and actually generatable).

That said, (3) is not incompatible with a state of affairs such that the woman went out to catch a frog, that is the first frog she found, then returning home with it. In that way *salton* in (3) can be characterized as transnumeral in the sense of Acquaviva (2008). What should be well understood, however, is that transnumerality, far from being an inherent property, represents the outcome of a particular interaction of the conditions for plural marking in Kr, which explains why it is in fact almost (although probably not quite) exclusively an attribute of nonperson-denoting count nouns, an attribute that can be cancelled whenever overt expression of plurality is deemed necessary. See the following example, where it is highly relevant to make it known that the royal gift was of several houses and villages:

(12) Rey da-l   un parti di si tera   ku   kasas, tabankas.
     king give-him a part of his country with   houses villages
     'The king gave him a part of his country with houses and villages.' –
     O rei deu-lhe uma parte da sua terra com casas, tabancas
                     (Montenegro & Morais, 1995:24; the authors' translation)[5]

Notice this example confirms the status of *-(i)s* as a pure plurality marker.

Transnumerality so conceived accounts for the near-exclusive occurrence of FBNs in proverbs like (5). When persons are involved, on the other hand, inclusiveness in the sense of Hawkins (1978) is probably the relevant factor. See (13):

---

[5] *Tabanka* 'village' comes from the Atlantic language Mankanya (see Rougé, 1988:139). It passed into the local Portuguese.

(13) Jugudeka   bay   fanadu, ma i   kunsi uju dentru
     di bariga   di   si   mame.
     vulturenot go.PF initiation   but he know eye inside
     of belly   of   his   mother
     'The vulture was not initiated but he knows things already in his
     mother's belly.'   (Doneux & Rougé, 1988:62)

"Not to have been initiated" can hardly be predicated of the kind "vulture" in the way that, say, "eating carrion" can. It is a legitimate predicate (within a certain world), however, for the totality of existing vultures epitomized by "the" prototypical vulture. Krifka et al. (1995:83) call this reading the *representative object interpretation* "if the object in the situation described is only relevant as a representative of the whole kind".

2.3. Summary on Kriyol

The definiteness value of Kr FBNs depends on their grammatical function and the aspect of the predicate. FBN subjects of imperfective predicates can be definite or generic/kind-referring, depending on context. FBN subjects of perfective predicates are definite. FBN objects receive a weak indefinite interpretation by default, but they may be understood as definite if their reference is unique or D-linked.

FBNs denoting entities low in the individualization hierarchy (nonpersons) may be treated as transnumeral if they are not actually or virtually individualized and/or mentioning their cardinality is considered irrelevant. FBNs denoting persons are not usually treated as transnumeral, so they are nearly always understood as singular. Singularity may be real (one individual) or it may be generic, one individual standing for the totality of its congeners.

All in all, abstracting for Number, the main divide in Kr count nouns seems to be between FBNs, whose readings vary as just shown, and *un N* nominals, which have only one interpretation, namely specific indefinite.

3. Interpreting nominals in Haitian

3.1. (In)definiteness

To the difference of Kr, H includes two NP-enclitic definite determiners, namely singular *LA* and plural *(LA)yo*.[6] Both are enclitic to the NP they have scope over, as shown in (14):

---

[6] *LA* stands for the array of actual forms *-la*, *-a*, *-an*, *-lan*, *-nan*, depending on the final segment of the item the article cliticizes to (see Joseph 1988:116-122). The alternation *-yo* vs. *-layo* is dialectal: the latter is used in the north, the former elsewhere. In *-layo* the /la/ part does not vary as singular *LA* does.

(14) Pòl   ap   drive kanson ki   twò   jis   pou Selòm yo
     P. PROG wear   trousers REL   too   tight for   S.   the. PL
     'P. is wearing the trousers that are too tight for S.' – *P. porte les*
     pantalons qui sont trop justes pour S.   (Joseph, 1988: 230)

H grammar also includes a preposed specific indefinite article *yon* 'a', analogous to Kr *un*. As in Kr, plurality marking through NP-enclitic *(LA)yo* depends on more than the cardinality of the referent. Unlike in Kr, the bare form of dynamic verbs can be perfective or imperfective.

H shows the same interdependence of predicate aspect and object definiteness as does Kr. However, the fact that H has a definite article crucially reduces the interpretive range for FBNs. Consider (15):

(15) Fanm -nan   vann   bon   laye.
     woman-the   sell   good   basket
     'The woman sells good baskets.' – *La femme vend de bons vans.*

                                                          (Joseph, 1988)

The FBN internal argument *bon laye* receives the same weak indefinite plural interpretation as *bon baley* in (1) and bare *vann* is understood as imperfective. Were its meaning perfective, the internal argument would still appear as an FBN if weakly indefinite (e.g. *Fanm-nan vann mwen bon laye* 'The woman sold me good baskets'), but as an overtly definite or specific indefinite NP otherwise as in (16) and (17):

(16) Fanm -nan vann mwen bon   laye   -a/yo (ki   nan kay
     mwen).
     woman-the sell   me   good basket-the(.PL) (REL in   house my)
     'The woman sold me the good basket(s) (that is/are in my house).' –
     La femme m'a vendu le(s) bon(s) van(s) (qui est/sont chez moi).

(17) Fanm -nan   vann   mwen   yon   bon   laye.
     woman-the   sell   me   a   good   basket
     'The woman sold me a good basket.' – *La femme m'a vendu un bon*
     van.

With state predicates, the bare form of which is only imperfective as in Kr, FBN internal arguments are understood generically as shown in (18):

(18) M renmen chat.
     I   like cat
     'I like cats.' – *J'aime les chats*.

In negative predicates, indefinite internal arguments appear as FBNs, with a singular or plural interpretation depending on context. See (19) adapted from Joseph (1988:88)

(19) Timoun-nan/yo   pa   pote   kalbas   pou li/yo   pran dlo.
     Child -the/the.PL not carry calabash for he/they take water
     'The child(ren) didn't carry (a) calabash(es) to fetch water.' – *L'/Les enfant(s) n'a/ont pas emporté de calebasse(s) pour prendre de l'eau*.

Fully bare *kalbas* is usually understood as plural if the subject is plural, as singular if the subject is singular, because one assumes as many calabashes as children. Discourse context could force other readings, however. In a sense, *kalbas* is transnumeral in (19) – and so is its French counterpart, by the way, given the almost purely graphic character of plural *-s* in Modern French.

Due to the availability of definite determiners, external argument FBNs in H are very much, although not entirely, specialized for generic or kind reference. In particular FBNs with a plural weak indefinite reading in subject position are at least as severely disallowed as in Kr, "there are" constructions being systematically used:

(20) Pral   gen   jwèt   sou tab   -la
     FUT   there.be toy   on   table the.SG
     'There will be toys on the table.' – *Il y aura des jouets sur la table*.
                                                              (DeGraff, 1992:59)

Generic or kind referring subject FBNs are mostly encountered in proverbs (21), gnomic statements (22), or propositions about the kind as a whole (23):

(21) Lè   chat   pa   la,   rat   pran   kay -la.
     when   cat   not there rat   take   house-the.SG
     'When the cat is away, the mice will play.' – *Quand le chat est parti, les souris dansent*.   (Joseph, 1988: 160)

(22) Depi nan   Ginen   nèg   rayi   nèg.
     since in   Africa black.man hate   black.man
     'Since they were in Africa, black men have hated black men.' – *Depuis l'Afrique, le Noir hait le Noir*.   (Joseph, 1988: 160)

(23) Zagoudi tanmen pran   peyi -a   sou   prezidan   Selòm.
     agouti begin take   country-the.SG   under president S.
     'The agouti began to invade the country under president Selòm.' – *L'agouti a commencé à envahir le pays sous le président Sélom*.
                                                              (Joseph, 1988: 172)

Chat and *rat* in (21) evidence the same "generic definiteness" or representative object interpretation as does *jugude* in (13). Subject FBNs in riddle formulae are still another case as exemplified in (24)

(24) Ti   zwazo vole, trip li   pandye.
     little bird   fly   guts   its   hang
     'The little bird flew, its guts were hanging.' – *Le petit oiseau vole, ses boyaux pendent*. (Answer: a needle with thread)

(Tourneux, 1983: 243)

First notice that *ti zwazo* translates equally well as 'the little bird' or 'a little bird'. Yet, given the perfective value of the predicate, it is clearly not generic as it might be if *vole* was given an imperfective interpretation as in e.g. *Zwazo vole* 'Birds fly'. In fact, FBNs in such contexts look very much like NPs modified by the so-called "specific" article in languages like Samoan (see Lyons, 1999:57-58). Specific NPs in this language refer to identifiable individuals, but they take no stand as to whether the said individuals can actually be identified by the hearers – so they are translated as 'the N' or 'a N' – or as to whether they are introduced in order to represent the totality of like individuals (kind-oriented talk *à la* Krifka et al.), since generic statements in Samoan involve specific NPs. In contrast, non-specific NPs imply that any specimen satisfies the description and none is/are particularly denoted.

Interestingly the same formulae are encountered in Kr as illustrated by the two riddles below, of which the first one consists in no more than an NP:

(25) Lagartisa dentru di   bonbolon
     lizard   inside   of   drum
     'A lizard inside a drum.' – *Lagartixa dentro de bombolom*. (Answer: The tongue inside the mouth)

(Cooperativa Domingos Badinca, 1979:5)

(26) Moska   banbu   lifanti
     fly   carry.on.back elephant
     'A fly carries an elephant on its back.' – *Uma mosca leva um elefante às costas*. (Answer: the main pillar of the house)

(Cooperativa Domingos Badinca, 1979:11)[7]

Finally, anaphorically definite (D-linked) subject NPs usually appear as FBNs provided the antecedent stands not too far away in the preceding discourse, as in (27):

---

[7] Note that *banbu* 'to carry on one's back' is a dynamic verb, so its bare form is interpreted as PF referring to a specific event: "A fly carried…" Yet, no particular fly is being denoted, so we are clearly running in kind-oriented talk mode and the sentence may be interpreted generically even though it seems to be episodic (see Dahl, 1995).

(27) Chwal-la lage,   Asefi chache -l toupatou,   men chwal
         te   gen   tan   nan poto.
      horse –the run.away Asefi look.for it everywhere but horse
         PAST have   time   in pole
      'The horse ran away, Asefi looked for it everywhere, but the horse
      had already been caught.' – *Le cheval s'est enfui, Asefi l'a cherché
      partout, mais le cheval avait déjà été rattrapé.*   (Joseph, 1988: 102)

The overtly definite occurrence of 'the horse' (*chwal-la*) in the first clause
serves as an antecedent for the coreferent object pronoun in the second clause,
and for the anaphorically coreferent FBN *chwal* in the last clause. If the first
occurrence had been more than two or three clauses away, the definite
description *chwal-la* or *chwal-sa-a* 'this horse' would have been reintroduced
for clarity's sake. A second-occurrence definite description is also what one
expects when the first occurrence is indefinite: *yon chwal… chwal-la* 'a
horse… the horse'.

Overtly indefinite singular subjects can be interpreted generically as in Kr
(see [4]):

(28) Yon timoun   dwe konn   koute   yon   gran   moun.
      A   child   must know listen   a   big   person
      'A child should be able to listen to an adult.' – *Un enfant doit savoir
      écouter un adulte.*   (Joseph, 1988: 168)

3.2. Plural marking

The crucial fact about plural marking in H is that it is impossible to realize
plurality without realizing definiteness at the same time, as the plural marker
yo is actually the plural form of the definite article *LA*. (In the dialect where
the definite plural marker is *layo*, simple *yo* is not used.) This separates H
squarely from Kr where *-(i)s*, as we saw, is a pure plurality marker. It makes it
rather similar to SF, on the other hand, since in spoken SF as well (already in
the seventeenth century) nominal plurality only shows through the form of the
determiner: cf. *le chat* /lə=ša/ vs. *les chats* /le=ša/. To the difference of SF,
however, Haitian has no plural form of the indefinite specific article **yon**
analogous to SF *des*. This and the absence of a pure marker of plurality result
in plural weak indefiniteness being dependent on ambiguous FBNs for its
expression. (This is a fact despite the existence of the quantifier *kèk* 'some, a
few' – cf. *Siriyis achte kèk liv* 'Sirius bought a few books' – because using *kèk*
is a free choice unlike inserting *des* in SF: cf. *S. a acheté des livres* vs. **S. a
acheté livres*.) Consequently, the ontological and discursive conditions on
plural marking that play such a role in Kr have little room to apply. More
exactly, they apply entirely within intentionality and interpretation, without
any possible morphological effect. Take for instance the following example:

(29) Siriyis   achte   liv   /kay   pou   Pòl.
     S.   buy   book   /house for   P
     'Sirius bought books/a house for Paul.' – *Sirius a acheté des livres/une maison pour Paul*.   (Joseph, 1988: 104)

The translation gives the default readings of the FBNs *liv* and *kay* given the widely shared knowledge that houses cost a lot more than books. Yet, the opposite allotment of numbers, i.e. *a book* and *houses*, cannot be excluded on grammatical or extra-linguistic grounds. *Liv* and *kay* are thus truly transnumeral in this example.

3.3. Summary of Kriyol and Haitian FBNs

The two tables below give the possible readings of FBNs in Kr and H according to their syntactic function.

(30) Kriyol

	Definite	Weak indefinite	Generic/kind
Subject FBN	+	−	+
Object FBN	+	+	+

(31) Haitian

	Definite	Weak indefinite	Generic/kind
Subject FBN	−	−	+
Object FBN	−	+	+

As can be easily read off the tables, the primary feature responsible for the difference between Kr and H in that domain is the existence of a definite article in the latter as opposed to its unavailability in the former.

4. Theoretical aspects: a preliminary and partial exploration

I will limit myself to examining how (1) – *Minjer ta bindi bon baley* 'The woman sells good baskets' – can be accounted for within a theoretical framework such that (i) morphology, syntax, and semantics are separate components in a parallel architecture; (ii) syntax includes no more structure than is strictly necessary to represent actual word strings making up sentences. Under such a view, **grammatical constructions** constitute the locus were all components of grammar get integrated: 'C is a construction iff$_{def}$ C is a form--meaning pair $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$ such that some aspect of F_i or some aspect of S_i is not strictly predictable from C's component parts or from some other previously established constructions' (Goldberg 1995:4). Such a definition implies that lexical items in actual use, i.e. inserted within a construction, are themselves constructs, as they fuse varying amounts of features or properties in addition to their basic meanings.

As already mentioned, I share with Krifka (1995) the view that lexemes refer to concepts. Languages differ in the extent to which concept-meaning lexemes can be used in construction while retaining their basic concept reference and thus appearing as FBNs. For instance, sentences such as *A Maria é linguista* 'Mary is a linguist' compared with *Fifi é uma gata* 'Fifi is a she-cat' (vs. **Fifi é gata*) show that a subclass of nominal lexemes in SEP can be so used in a certain type of construction, namely the S(ubject)-Pred(icate) construction (Kay & Fillmore, 1999).

In such a case, the only feature that maybe need accrue to the lexeme LINGUISTA to make it a *bona fide* word form is the Number feature [singular] or [–plural] inferred from the virtual contrast with *A Maria e o João são linguistas* 'Mary and John are linguists' (assuming *linguista* to be gender--neutral). One could argue, however, that *linguista* is simply unmarked for Number rather than being singular, in which case the FBN *linguista* as the predicate of the S-Pred construction is indeed fully definable as the realization of the corresponding concept-referring lexeme. Such a possibility is absent in English: cf. "Mary is **a** linguist". It is generalized, to varying extents, in Chinese (see Krifka, 1995), H, and Kr.

I assume that (1) examplifies what may be called the Imperfective Transitive Construction (ITC) which can be given the simplified representation in (32) (for more elaborate formalisms, see Goldberg, 1995; Kay & Fillmore, 1999).

(32) [$_{E/S}$ [$_{A/Su/NP}$ *minjer*][$_{Pred/VP}$ [$_{AUX:Ipf}$ *ta*][$_{Ev/VP}$ [$_{Ev/V}$ *bindi*][$_{P/O/NP}$ *bon baley*]]]]

This is a semantic-syntactic mixed representation. The whole ITC denotes an event (E) and it is realized as a sentence (S). The semantic predicate [*ta bindi bon baley*] corresponds to a syntactic VP. It is predicated of the NP [*minjer*], semantically an agent (A) and syntactically a subject in the specifier of Pred/VP. The auxiliary (AUX) [*ta*] meaning imperfective aspect heads the predicate, which is shown by underlining it. The VP [*bindi bon baley*] is the complement of this head. It denotes an eventuality (Ev), and so does the verb [*bindi*] (see Carlson, 2002). The object (O) NP [*bon baley*] is semantically the patient (P) of the construction.

Given the absence of inflectional morphology in Kr, the imperfective value of the predicate (and of the sentence) is entirely borne by the aspect auxiliary or particle *ta* the verb is in construction with. It follows that, as a lexical construct, i.e. as a lexeme in construction, the verb *bindi* 'to sell' may be analysed as consisting in no more than its meaning, that includes referring to an eventuality with Achievement as Aktionasart type (see Van Valin & LaPolla, 1997:93ff.). Applying imperfectivity to an eventuality such as *bindi* 'to sell' then induces an iterative interpretation at VP level, i.e. reference to repeated instances of the nonstatic, telic, punctual Achievement that *bindi* 'to sell' means.

As already pointed out, the patient/object of such an iterative VP, if it denotes a countable entity, has therefore to refer to a plurality of specimens of

the said entity – unless the repeated application of the same eventuality to the same object makes sense, not the case in (1). So *baley* is **understood** as referring to a plurality just by virtue of its being the object/patient of an imperfective predicate. It **is not** plural (in the sense that SEP *balaios* is plural) because the FBN *baley* is actually the direct realization of the lexeme BALEY having retained its concept reference. (Modifying it with *bon* 'good' does nothing to the reference type.[8]) As an FBN referring to a concept, *baley* may be considered transnumeral, so that plurality is indeed compatible with its denotational potential.

Weak indefiniteness is the actual default translation of concept reference, as already explained.

Turning now to the subject NP [*minjer*], we saw that the lexeme MINJER differs from BALEY by referring to a high entity in the ontological hierarchy. It follows that, unless the whole construction shows it to be denoting at kind level, the FBN that realizes it cannot be understood as transnumeral. *Minjer* with individual denotation is therefore associated with the singular or nonplural value of the Number feature, by virtue of its meaning and of contrasting with *minjeris* 'women', the realization of the construct {{*minjer*},{NUM:+pl}}.

A constructional account of *minjer*'s definiteness in the line of Carlson (2002) has already been given, building on its externality from the VP. Here I would like to suggest that the predicate's aspect value may also play a role. Unlike perfective predicates that mainly describe activities of their subjects, imperfective predicates with habitual-iterative interpretations also fulfil the function of assigning defining properties to their subjects. They are actually quite close to nominal predicates of the "Mary is a linguist" type: cf. *Minjer ta bindi baley* 'The woman sells baskets' (*A mulher vende balaios*) vs. *Minjer i bindidur di baley* 'The woman is a basket seller' (*A mulher é vendedora de balaios*) . Now it seems to be a true generalization that subjects of property assigning (or individual-level) predicates are seldom (never?) indefinite: compare *The new neighbour is a dentist* with ?*A new neighbour is a dentist* (see Carlson, 1977; Milsark, 1977; Lumsden, 1988). The restriction may even be quite stringent: in Coptic, e.g., only personal pronouns can be the subjects of nominal predicates (see Reintges, 2004:171ff.).

It seems therefore that an account of the interpretive properties of the FBN arguments in (1) can be achieved basing oneself exclusively on emergent semantic properties of the construction that includes them. No appeal to inaudible functional categories is necessary. That is all I wished to demonstrate for the present. Whether this account can be generalized to the other constructions described in this study, as I strongly believe it can, is an issue for future work.

---

[8] *Bon* 'good' is a member of a small set of adjectives that may precede the noun they modify with a special meaning: a *bon baley* is not 'good' in the sense that a *minjer bon* is!

References

Acquaviva, P. (2008) *Lexical Plurals: A Morphosemantic Approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Baptista, M. (2002) *The Syntax of Cape Verdean Creole: The Sotavento varieties*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Carlson, G. (1977) A unified analysis of the English bare plural, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, **1**, 413-456.

Carlson, G. (2002) Weak indefinites. In *From NP to DP: the syntax and semantics of noun phrases* (M. Coene & Y. d'Hulst, editors), pp. 195-210. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Carlson, G. & Pelletier, F. J. (eds) (1995) *The Generic Book*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Chierchia, G. (1998) Reference to kind across languages, *Natural Language Semantics*, **6**, 339-405.

Cheng, L. L. & Sybesma, R. (1999) Bare and not-so-bare nouns and the structure of NP, *Linguistic Inquiry*, **30**, 509-542.

Cooper, R. (1982) Binding in wholewheat* syntax (*unenriched with inaudibilia). In *The Nature of Syntactic Representation* (P. Jacobson & G.K. Pullum, editors) pp. 59-77. Dordrecht: Reidel.

Cooperativa Domingos Badinca (1979) *N sta li N sta la: Livro de adivinhas*. Bolama: Imprensa Nacional.

Dahl, Ö. (1995) The marking of the episodic/generic distinction in tense-aspect systems. In Carlson & Pelletier (eds), 412-425.

DeGraff, M. (1992) Haitian null subjects revisited. In *Travaux de recherche sur le créole haïtien*, **11** (C. Lefebvre, editor), pp. 59-74. Montréal: Université du Québec à Montréal.

Dobrovie-Sorin, C. (2008) Number neutrality and kind reference in Brazilian Portuguese. Ms.

Dobrovie-Sorin, C. & Laca, B. (2003) Les noms sans déterminant dans les langues romanes. In *Les langues romanes: problèmes de la phrase simple* (D. Godard, editor), pp. 235-279. Paris: CNRS Editions.

Doneux, J.-L. & Rougé, J-L. (1988) *En apprenant le créole à Bissau ou Ziguinchor*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Enç, M. (1991) The semantics of specificity, *Linguistic Inquiry*, **22**, 1-25.

Goldberg, A. E. (1995) *A Construction Grammar Approach to Argument Structure*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Goldberg, A. E. (2006) *Constructions at Work: The nature of generalization in language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hawkins, J. A. (1978) *Definiteness and Indefiniteness: A study in reference and grammaticality prediction*. London: Croom Helm.

Jackendoff, R. (1997) *The Architecture of the Language Faculty*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Jackendoff, R. (2002) *Foundation of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Joseph, F. L. (1988) *La détermination nominale en créole haïtien*, Thèse de doctorat, Université Paris 7.

Júlio, F. (1996) *3 N'kurbados: Lutadur di Banjul*. Bissau: The author's publication.

Kamp, H. (1995) Discourse Representation Theory. In *Handbook of Pragmatics* (J. Verschueren et al., editors), pp. 253-257. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kay, P. & Fillmore, C. J. (1999) Grammatical constructions and linguistic generalizations: The *What's X doing Y?* construction, *Language*, **75**, 1-33.

Kihm, A. (1994) *Kriyol Syntax: The Portuguese-based Creole Language of Guinea--Bissau*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kihm, A. & Rougé, J.-L. (2008) *Língua de Preto*: the Basic Variety at the root of West African Portuguese-related Creoles, to appear in *Journal of Pidgin and Creole Languages*.

Kratzer, A. (2005) Indefinites and the operators they depend on. In Carlson & Pelletier (eds), 113-142.

Krifka, M. (1995) Common nouns: a contrastive analysis of Chinese and English. In Carlson & Pelletier (eds), 398-411.

Krifka, M. et al. (1995) Genericity: an introduction. In Carlson & Pelletier (eds), 1--124.

Landman, F. (1997) Plurality. In *The Handbook of Contemporary Semantic Theory* (S. Lappin, editor), pp. 425-457. London: Blackwell.

Lumsden, M. (1988) *Existential Sentences: Their structure and meaning*. London: Croom Helm.

Lyons, C. (1999) *Definiteness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Milsark, G. L. (1977) Toward an explanation of certain peculiarities of the existential construction in English, *Linguistic Analysis*, **3**, 1-29.

Montenegro, T. & Morais, C. (1977) *Junbai: Storias de Bolama e do outro mundo*. Bolama: Imprensa Nacional.

Montenegro, T. & Morais, C. (1995) *Uori: stórias de lama e philosophia*. Bissau: Ku Si Mon Editora.

Reinhart, T. (1997) Quantifier scope: how labor is divided between QR and choice functions, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, **20**, 335-397.

Reintges, C. H. (2004) *Coptic Egyptian (Sahidic Dialect). A learner's grammar*. Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

Rougé, J.-L. (1988) *Petit dictionnaire étymologique du kriol de Guinée-Bissau et Casamance*. Bissau: INEP.

Sadock, J. M. (1991) *Autolexical Syntax. A Theory of Parallel Grammatical Representations*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Schmitt, C. & Munn, A. (2002) The syntax and semantics of bare arguments in Brazilian Portuguese, *Linguistic Variation Yearbook* 2, 253-269.

Szabolcsi, A. (1994) The noun phrase. In *Syntax and Semantics 27: The Syntactic Structure of Hungarian* (F. Kiefer & K. Kiss, editors), pp. 179-274. San Diego: Academic Press.

Tourneux, H. (1983) 106 devinettes créoles d'Haïti, *Espace créole*, 5, 231-266.

Van Valin, R. D. Jr. & LaPolla, R. J. (1997) *Syntax: Structure, meaning and function*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Alain Kihm
Laboratoire de Linguistique formelle, CNRS
Université Paris 7
alain.kihm@linguist.jussieu.fr