

Bare nouns in Ktunaxa

February 1, 2017

1 Introduction

Ktunaxa arguments are frequently expressed as bare nouns. They can receive a number of different interpretations, being used both for nonspecific indefinite interpretations and to refer to specific entities. There is no indefinite determiner, so all indefinites are expressed by bare nouns (1).¹

- (1) Context: We're at the grocery store and I asked what I could do to help.

Ĉinyax-an kanuhus-nana
go.get-me red-dim

'Go get me some apples'

When the speaker has a specific entity in mind, a demonstrative, such as *niʔi*, may precede the noun (2).

- (2) Context: I'm asking if we have any milk.

Ĉinaʔ ʔiĉkitin (niʔi) kʔisqatimuʔ
go look dem cold-instr

'Go look in the fridge!'

However, the demonstrative is frequently optional, so bare nouns are used in this context as well; in fact, (2) was initially volunteered without the demonstrative.

Bare nouns also appear to participate in quantifier scope interactions. (3), for example, is good in a situation where each child wants a different cat, as well as in a situation where all the children want the same cat. This ambiguity indicates that the bare noun can behave as an existentially quantified phrase that can take scope either over or under the pre-verbal quantifier *ʔukit* 'every'.

¹Plural is only marked on a subset of animate nouns (Guntley, 2015).

- (3) Context A: Neighbourhood kids all want a specific orange cat from the petstore. Context B: Your three kids all want a different orange cat from the petstore.

ʔukit̚ qatwi-ni tkamnihtik kamak̚ci-s pusnana-s.
every want-ind children yellow/orange-obv cat-obv

‘All the children want an orange cat.’

If bare nouns can be used for nonspecific indefinites, to refer to specific entities, and to behave as existential quantifiers, how should we characterize their semantic contribution? There are a number of proposals in the literature for handling this type of ambiguity. Fodor and Sag (1982), for instance, argue that indefinite noun phrases in English can have a referential reading (like a definite noun phrase) or a quantificational reading, which gives rise to quantifier scope interactions (cf. Kratzer (1998) for a similar proposal where referential-type readings for indefinites come about through a choice function). The narrow scope quantificational reading is also responsible for the nonspecific indefinite reading. In this presentation, I examine the different interpretations of bare nouns in Ktunaxa and present preliminary evidence that Ktunaxa bare nouns are not ambiguous between a referential or choice function interpretation and a quantificational interpretation, but rather always behave as existentially quantified phrases. The different interpretations arise because of their different scope taking possibilities.

References

- Fodor, I. and Sag, J. (1982). Referential and quantificational indefinites. *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 5(3):355–398.
- Guntley, E. (2015). Animacy in Ktunaxa: Morphosyntax and ontology.
- Kratzer, A. (1998). Scope or pseudoscope? are there wide-scope indefinites? In Rothstein, S., editor, *Events and grammar*, pages 163–196.