Rikbaktsa (Macro-Jê):
Notes on the semantics of noun phrases in a bare language

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The paper aims to explain the distribution and interpretation of bare noun phrases in Rikbaktsa (Macro-Jê). It argues for the need to distinguish kinds are singularity and kinds as sum of individuals, and proposes a semantic derivation that generates the pattern of interpretation of bare nouns, which challenges both Chierchia (1998) and Dayal (2011) hierarchies.

1.1 Language Situation - Rikbaktsa (Macro-Jê) is an endangered, under documented language spoken in the nother of Brazil.

1.2 Background - Silva's (2005, 2011) morpho-syntactic description of the language and s the recent literature on the semantics of noun phrases in this language is our background. Dellai et al (2021) collected data using Lima & Rothstein's (2020) questionnaire, and concluded that it is a number marking language (Chierchia 2021), because it distinguishes count and mass nouns. Only count nouns can be pluralized, and counted directly, without the intervention of a classifier. The morpheme for plurality *-tsa* also conveys gender information, since it only attaches to non-female nouns. The distinction female/non-female crisscrosses the gramar of this language (Silva et al submitted 1). Ern et al (2023), Tsaputai et al (2024), Silva et al (submitted 2) collected data using Dayal (forthcoming), comparing the singular, N, and the plural forms, N-tsa, in definite, indefinite, and generic contexts. Silva et al (submitted 2) concluded that this is a "bare" bare language, because it does not have articles, and it does not have nominal quantification.The paper aims to explain this data.

1.3 Data - Most of the data come from elicitation with two speakers of the language, and fieldwork. The methodology includes elicitation sessions, judgment of acceptability of the sentences in context, and verification with other speakers. In some contexts, the two forms, N, and N-*tsa*, seem to give the same contribution; plurality seems to be optional:

(1) a. ikza=katsa morosok p-Ø-ebyk
1subj.feminine=focus marker pan n.past-3o.sg-take
'I myself will take one or more than one pans.'

b. ikza=katsa morosok-tsa my-s-ebyk
1subj.feminine=focus marker pan-pl n.past.-3o.pl-take
'I myself will take (one or) more than one pan.'

Descriptively, the verb conveys information about tense, it is non-past, and about the object, either 3rd person singular, (1a), or plural, (1b). If there is only one pan, (1a) is the only option, but it might be definite or indefinite. If there are more than one pan, both are fine. Both are acceptable with reciprocals, and kind predicates. They can introduce and to recover entities already introduced in the discourse. They do not interact with negation, in particular they do not show *de re* reading. However, there are contexts where just one of the forms is acceptable. For instance, in the internal position of dispositional predicates, (2a), and in morphological processes, (2b), the bare plural is ungrammatical:

(2) a. piku$_1$ huehara (*huehara-tsa) i$_1$-akpara-wy
tapir fruit 3subj.sg-like-nominalization
'The tapir likes fruit.'

b. pazahae-tsa$_1$ si$_1$-pepeha(*pepeha-tsa)-ẽ-tsa$_1$
peccary-pl 3subj.pl-tick-predicator-non.female.pl
'Peccaries have ticks'.

In (2a), the verb *-akpara-* (like) is conjoined to the internal argument, *huehara* (fruit), and *-wy* nominalizes the verbal phrase (Silva 2011), literally, likers of fruit. In (2b), the morpheme *-ẽ* forms predicates from nouns, it turns the noun *pepeka* (ticks) into those who have that property, the "tickers". Thus, the predicates in (2) are mono-argumental, individual level predicates, and the denotation of the nouns are generic. Individual level predicates when combined with human predicates are interpreted as about a habit or a property of an individual. So, in principle, (2a) could be about one tapir.

The bare singular is contradictory, if the predicate is the same, (3a); thus, it is maximal; the bare plural is not, (3b):

(3) a. * tsikuparini ø-p-urubaka, tsikuparini ø-my-paparaka
dog 3subj-n.past-sleeping dog 3subj-n.past-running

b. tsikuparini-tsa ø-p-urubaka=naha,
dog-n.fem.pl 3subj-n.past-sleeping=pl.subj
tsikuparini-tsa ø-my-paparaka=naha
dog-n.fem.pl 3subj-n.past-running=pl.subj
'Dogs are sleeping and dogs are running around'

The bare singular has more features of definiteness than the bare plural. It is either about an individual or the kind. With human predicates it is about an individual, either definite or indefinite. Assuming there are only three alternatives, definite, indefinite or kind, the ranking for the bare singular is definite < kinds < indefinites, challenging Chierchia (1998), who predicts that the interpretation of the bare forms is kinds < definite or indefinite, and Dayal (2011) who argues that the ranking is kinds or definite < indefinite.

1.4 Proposal - Rikbaktsa is an Argument Formation Language, i.e. it is number marking and does not have overt determiners. It has bare singulars, *N*, and bare plurals, *N-tsa*. The distribution and interpretation of the noun phrase depends on a combination of properties of the context. The data shows that the ranking for the bare singular is sensitive to these properties, though the default reading is about individuals. It might be definite or indefinite, though it tends toward defineteness. The proposal is that nouns are polysemic. They denote the set of individuals that realize the particular property, and the set of kinds that name it. We distinguish kinds as singularity, when the reference is the individual kind, which is realizad by ordinary individuals (Carlson 1977), from kinds as plurality, which is a sum of the individuals. The ranking reflects the fact that kinds are derived. The number neutral interpretation, and indefiniteness of the bare singular are derived from the kind denotation. Kinds are also activated by morphological processes, because in those, ordinary individuals are blocked. The bare plural, on the other hand, denotes a plurality, a sum of individuals. It is not maximal, but may denote the kind. It has more features of indefiniteness. The plural form indicates a sum of individuals, while the singular form denotes an individual.

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