

NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Singular Noun Phrases

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Field of Linguistics

By

Laurel Smith Stvan

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

December 1998

© Copyright by Laurel Smith Stvan 1998
All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

The Semantics and Pragmatics of Bare Singular Noun Phrases

Laurel Smith Stvan

This dissertation examines the behavior of bare singular noun phrases, a set of English nominals showing no formal indication of either definiteness or mass/count status. Although they appear to be count nouns, I show that these nominals represent maximal projections. Often disregarded as potential referring expressions and rarely discussed as an NP option, bare singulars are used to assist a hearer in finding relevant information about a referent.

Based on an examination of 922 naturally occurring tokens of bare singular NPs in locative PPs (e.g., *on campus*, *at school*, *in church*), I show that they are used to convey three distinct meanings involving the locatum and the denoted location. Specifically, their use can create a Familiarity Implicature, an Activity Implicature, or can be used generically.

Familiarity Implicature is a form of deixis by which the location is identified by being anchored off one of the discourse participants. Activity Implicature is a use of the whole PP to predicate information about the located person, although the NP itself is non-referential. Bare location forms can also be used as generic expressions to give characterizing information about the location kind. The implicated senses are created through conventional R-based implicature; thus, the implicated meaning is not cancelable, reinforceable, or non-detachable. This non-detachability means that the implicated meaning of these words is connected to the bare singular noun phrase form, but as a necessary, not sufficient, constraint; not all ostensive count nominals used in the bare singular form convey the implicated meanings. The Familiarity or Activity meaning is associated, by convention, with just those nouns that belong to certain semantic classes (social/geographical spaces, recording and framing media, and temporal interruptions), when certain relationships are taken to hold among the discourse participants. I show five morpho-syntactic indicators by which other languages represent the same contrasts which the bare versus articulated form captures in English: omission of articles, contraction, contrasting locative prepositions, locational versus non-locational verbs, and case marking.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people deserve thanks for keeping me excited about language throughout my time as a graduate student, and especially through the long months of dissertation writing. In particular, thanks are due to the chair of my committee, Judith Levi, for intellectual support, sympathetic motivation, and excellent editorial direction. Thanks also to my other committee members Gregory Ward, who first introduced me to pragmatics, and Beatrice Santorini, a swift and reliable guide whether she is near or far. Thanks to all the Linguistics Faculty for advice and camaraderie, and to the Linguistics Department and Northwestern University for their continued financial support. Special thanks to Beth Levin, chairperson and all around motivating force in the Linguistics Department.

For moral support on all fronts, I am grateful to my fellow students Mari Broman Olsen, Talke Macfarland, Vicky Muehleisen, Anne Bertram, Grace Song, and Shahrzad Mahootian. Special thanks also to my own students in Evanston, Chicago, and Hefei.

For examples, native speaker judgments, and references on non-English languages, many thanks to my electronic correspondents: Dan Alford, Lucio Chiappetti, Rich Epstein, Susanne Holthuizen, Suzanne Kemmer, Jee-hong Kim, James Kirchner, Ho-Bae Lee, Sebastian Löbner, Lars Mathiesen, Micheal Palmer, Bernhard Rohrbacher, John Robert Ross, Craig Thiersch, Theo Vennemann, Karin Verspoor, and Henk Wolf.

For their infinite faith, patience, and encouragement, thank you to my husband Jeffrey Stvan and to my parents Roger and Linda Smith.

Finally, in loving memory, thanks to Donna and Otto Stvan.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	xii
CHAPTER 1. IDENTIFYING BARE SINGULAR NOMINALS	
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Organization of the Thesis	1
1.2 Examples of the Constructions	3
1.3 The Markedness of the Constructions	6
1.3.1 Marked Syntax	6
1.3.2 Marked Meaning	10
1.4 Corpus Collection	14
2. Identifying Bare Singular Nominals	16
2.1 Some Similarities to Mass Nouns and to NPs	16
2.2 NPs vs. Lexical Count Nouns and Mass Nouns	20
3. Syntactic Distribution of the Bare Singular Nominals	21
3.1 Introduction	21
3.2 Bare Singular Nominals as Subjects	22
3.3 Bare Singular Nominals as Direct Objects	25
3.4 Bare Singular Nominals as Objects in PPs	29
3.4.1 PPs as Predicate	29
3.4.2 PPs as Modifiers of Nouns	31
3.4.3 PPs as Adverbials	33
3.4.4 PPs as Locative Subjects and Objects	34
3.4.5 Lexicalized PPs and Orthography	36
4. Terminology for the Two Referents in Locative Expressions	40
5. Conclusion to Chapter 1	43

CHAPTER 2. MASS NOUNS AND COUNT NOUNS

1.	Introduction	45
2.	The Traditional Mass/Count Distinction	46
	2.1 Dividing Languages by Noun Types	46
	2.2 Evidence for the Mass/Count Distinction	48
3.	Contexts Influencing Mass or Count Uses	50
	3.1 Grinder Effects	52
	3.2 Serving Size	54
	3.3 Natural Kinds	55
	3.4 Interfacing with the Real World	55
	3.5 Conclusion to Section 3	57
4.	Nouns That Are Neither Mass nor Count	59
	4.1 More X-Bar Level Tests for Bare Singular Nominals	65
	4.2 Some Traditional Mass Nouns Also Serve as Bare Singular Nominals	69
5.	Questioning the Mass/Count Dichotomy	75
	5.1 A Third Co-hyponym to Count and Mass	76
	5.2 The Contrast Exists, But Not in the Nouns	77
	5.3 English and Japanese Types Are Not Clearly Contrasted	79
	5.4 Mass/Count is Only One Ingredient	81
	5.5 Conclusion to Section 5	82
6.	Determining the Level at the Which the Mass/Count Distinction Applies	82
	6.1 Descriptions Using Features	84
	6.2 What Level is a Mass/Count Nominal?	85
	6.3 N-bar Tests	86
7.	Conclusion to Chapter 2	90

CHAPTER 3. LEXICAL SEMANTICS OF BARE SINGULAR NPS

1.	Introduction	94
2.	Analyzing the Nouns	95

2.1	Senses of the Bare Singular NPs	95
2.1.1	Social/Geographical Spaces	96
2.1.2	Media	104
2.1.3	Temporal Interruptions	130
2.1.4	Untethered Metaphors	132
2.2	Uses of Bare Singular NPs and Their Containing PPs	135
3.	Analyzing the Prepositions	137
3.1	Denotations of the Spatial Prepositions <i>in</i> , <i>on</i> , and <i>at</i>	138
3.1.1	Geometric Aspects	138
3.1.2	Moving Beyond Geometry to Interpretation	139
3.2	From Senses to Extensions of Spatial Prepositions	146
3.2.1	Use Type Patterns	146
3.2.2	Dialect Differences Between <i>in</i> and <i>at</i>	150
3.3	Orienting a Spatial PP	152
3.3.1	Location as a Point	153
3.3.2	Traversable Locations	158
4.	Larger Lexical Chunks	164
4.1	Constructions	166
4.2	Idioms	169
4.3	Use Types	170
5.	Conclusion to Chapter 3	174

CHAPTER 4. PRAGMATICS: USES OF THE BARE SINGULAR NPS

1.	Introduction	176
1.1	Traditional Schematic for Bare Form Uses	177
1.2	Three Special Uses	179
2.	Three Pragmatic Inferences	181
2.1	Introduction	181
2.1.1	Diagnostics for Separating Activity and Familiarity Senses	186
2.1.2	Conversational and Conventional Implicature	189

2.2	Familiarity Implicature	206
2.2.1	Deixis	210
2.2.2	Definiteness	218
2.3	Activity Implicature	220
2.3.1	Which Activities Are Involved	220
2.3.2	Presupposed Information	223
2.3.3	Activity: Duration at the Location	226
2.3.4	Models for Accessing Stereotypes	228
2.3.5	Putting the Implicatures to Work	235
2.4	Generics	238
3	Bare Singular NPs in Other Sentence Positions	250
3.1	Social/Geographical Spaces As Subjects	254
3.2	Social/Geographical Spaces As Direct Objects	257
3.3	Determining the Status of Social Geographical Space NP	261
3.3.1	Nominal Constituent Distribution	261
3.3.2	One Substitution	264
3.4	Recording Media NPs as Subjects and Objects	268
4	Good Bare Nouns and Better Bare Nouns: The Influence of Domain of Use	272
5	Conclusion to Chapter 4	276

CHAPTER 5. CROSS-LINGUISTIC METHODS FOR MARKING NPS

1.	Introduction: Seeking Non-English Data	277
2.	Five Methods of Marking Location NPs for Contrasting Information	278
2.1	Lack of Articles with Count Nouns	280
2.2	Contraction	289
2.3	Contrasting Locative Prepositions	293
2.4	BE/STAY Verbs vs. Nonpositional Verbs	302
2.5	Case Marking	304
3.	Conclusion to Chapter 5	306

CHAPTER 6. APPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Introduction	309
2. Discourse Tagging and Translation	310
3. ESL Applications	313
4. Conclusion to Chapter 6	313

APPENDICES

A. Attested Social/Geographic Space NPs in the Corpus	317
B. Syntactic/Pragmatic Contrast Types in Locative PPs	320

REFERENCES	322
-------------------	------------

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table	Page
1. Samples of Bare Location Noun Categories	5
2. Terms for the Referents of the Two NPs.	43
3. Language Types Correlating with NP Types (adapted from Gil 1987:256)	48
4. PPs Containing Social/Geographical Spaces	97
5. Recording Expressions	106
6. Framing Expressions	107
7. Bare and Articulated Uses of Radio and TV.	120
8. Recording Media Terms Used as Count Nouns	128
9. Temporal Interruption Expressions.	130
10. Untethered Metaphors	132
11. Predicates and Referring Expressions	137
12. Location Point Nominals.	158
13. Traversable Locations	159
14. Implicature Types Conveyed by Bare Singular NPs in PPs	188
15. Uses of Bare Singular NPs in PPs	247
16. Social/Geographical Spaces as Subjects and Direct Objects.	253
17. One Substitution Senses	267
18. Recording Media Terms as Subjects and DOs	271
Figure	
1. Uses of English Articles (Christophersen 1939:76) .	179
2. Three Functions of Bare Singular NPs	185
3. Spatial and Non-Spatial Uses of Locative PPs	314