
Number and Definiteness in kinds across languages: Insights from an experimental study

Imke Driemel¹, Johannes Hein¹, Desiré Carioti³, Jakob Wünsch², Vina Tsakali⁴, Artemis Alexiadou^{1,2}, Maria Teresa Guasti³ & Uli Sauerland²

¹*HU Berlin*, ²*Leibniz ZAS*, ³*Uni Milano Bicocca*, ⁴*University of Crete*
imke.driemel@hu-berlin.de, johannes.hein@hu-berlin.de,
desire.carioti@unimib.it, wuensch@leibniz-zas.de, tsakali@uoc.gr,
artemis.alexiadou@hu-berlin.de, mariateresa.guasti@unimib.it,
sauerland@leibniz-zas.de

Kind and generic readings can be realized with a multitude of structures within and across languages. Romance languages (1c) and Greek (1d), e.g., use definite plurals but Germanic languages employ bare plurals (Krifka et al. 1995, Chierchia 1998, Alexiadou et al. 2007). German is exceptional, as both definite plurals and bare plurals license generic/kind readings (1b). Recently, Acton (2019) observed that even in English generic readings can be expressed with definite plurals, though with the effect that the speaker distances themselves from the kind expressed.

- (1)
- a. (*The) dogs are widespread.
 - b. (Die) Pandabären sind vom Aussterben bedroht.
 - c. *(I) cani sono diffusi.
the dogs are widespread
 - d. *(Ta) pulja dodo ehun pleon afanisti.
the birds dodo have already disappeared

Kind readings can also be expressed with definite singulars, if the kind is well established – known as the well-defined kind restriction (Carlson 1997, Krifka et al. 1995, Dayal 2004), shown in (2).

- (2)
- a. The polar bear is slowly disappearing. (Carlson 2011)
 - b. ??The white bear is slowly disappearing.

We present results from an experimental study comparing English, German, Italian, and Greek, where we investigate definiteness and number marking for kind and generic readings, distancing effects, and the well-defined kind restriction.

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