

NORWEGIAN BARE SINGULARS: A NOTE ON TYPES AND SORTS

ATLE GRØNN

UNIVERSITY OF OSLO

atle.gronn-AT-ilos.uio.no

Abstract

The distribution of bare singulars in Norwegian was thoroughly examined in Borthen (2003). The present paper outlines an account of these data in a type-logical semantics of the Neo-Carlsonian kind. The focus is primarily on the syntax-semantics interface, which here, somewhat simplified, amounts to assigning semantic types in the appropriate sortal domain to bare singulars. I argue that bare singulars can have their denotation both in the domain of ordinary individuals and kinds. Furthermore, they can either be used with their property type or function as names. This explains why bare singulars can be both predicates and arguments. Concerning bare singulars in the direct object position, the phenomenon of incorporation also seems to play a role. The various restrictions on the use of bare singulars can basically be accounted for in terms of competition with more marked grammatical forms, notably (in)definite DPs.

1 Introduction

In the Montagovian tradition, common nouns – or bare nominals – are basically properties, that is, the NP “semanticist” denotes for each world or situation the set of individual semanticists in that world. In English, count nouns are rarely used in the pure form of the lexical entry, but turn up in variants like the DPs “a semanticist”, “the semanticist” or the bare plural “semanticists”. The interest in bare nominals in the semantic community was given an impetus when Carlson (1977) proposed that bare plurals in English basically refer to kinds:

- (1) Semanticists are rare in Mainland Scandinavia.¹ (*kind reference*)
- (2) Semanticists are observed in Kjell Johan’s garden. (*object reference*)

¹ ‘Semanticists’ can, of course, always be replaced by ‘dogs’ or by the reader’s favourite well-established kind.

In examples like (2), the context suggests that concrete individuals might realise the abstract kind we find in (1). With a stage-level predicate (“to be observed”), we get an indefinite reading of the bare plural, which in the Carlsonian analysis can be paraphrased as existential quantification over (spatio-temporal) stages of objects realising the kind “semanticist”. Carlson’s ontology is thus richer than the standard Montagovian machinery: ordinary individuals (objects) interact with stages and kinds.

The Neo-Carlsonian approach of Chierchia (1998) maintains the idea of bare nominals being kind-denoting, now through a covert “down-operator”, which turns a property into a kind. For contexts such as (2) above, Chierchia introduces covert operations in several steps; first “semanticists” is shifted from a property to an atomic kind (the down-operator) in order to fill the subject position of the sentence; next, a rule labelled “derived kind predication” repairs – in two steps – the mismatch between the object-level predicate “to be observed” and the kind-denoting subject. An “up-operator” takes the kind entity as input and returns, once again, a property – the set of semanticists (Arnim, Cathrine, Ede, Torgrim, etc.) now conceived as a “mass”, and, finally, existential quantification ensures that at least some of these guys can be found in Kjell Johan’s garden. Chierchia no longer talks about “stages”, so the Neo-Carlsonian ontology merely distinguishes between ordinary individuals (objects) and kinds.

Chierchia’s paper is important in many respects, not the least because it shifts focus from English bare plurals to cross-linguistic investigations into the nature of bare nominals. The conventional wisdom says that in languages without articles, such as Russian, bare singulars do double-duty as indefinites and definites:

- (3) Pozdnej osen'ju v seredine dnja s rejsovogo "Ikarusa" [...] soshel [molodoj muzhchina]_j^[bare singular]. Byl [on]_j odet v sportivnye botinki i dzhinsy [...] [Muzhchina]_j^[bare singular], ne obrashchaja vnimanija na veter i na dozhd', [...] postavil chemodan mezhd'u nog i tak ostalsja stojat' tam, gde soshel. (Uppsala Corpus)

Late in the autumn, in the middle of the day, [a young man]_j got off the "Ikarus"-express. [He]_j wore jogging shoes and jeans [...] [The man]_j, not paying attention to the wind and rain, [...] put his suitcase between his feet and remained standing where he got off.

In such languages, type shifting in the sense of Partee (1987) occurs relatively freely. More generally, however, a universal *blocking principle* is invoked both for Partee’s covert operators (such as \exists and ι – producing indefinite and definite

interpretations, respectively) and Chierchia's operators (mediating simultaneously between types and sorts):

NP denotations can be type shifted freely, unless the type shift is lexicalised (marked) in a language through the existence of an overt determiner.

This kind of iconicity is in line with a common principle of current Optimality Theory: marked forms should be used for marked expressions.

Chierchia makes an additional claim concerning the category of number: the down operation – which produces kind entities – is undefined for singular terms. Hence, bare singular kinds are ruled out in his system.²

Concerning Germanic languages, Chierchia's theory makes the following strong prediction, which is presented as a "fact" in (Chierchia 1998: 341): "[In Germanic,] bare singular arguments are totally impossible". Arguments are prototypically referring expressions of type $\langle e \rangle$, but since a covert shift to $\langle e_o \rangle$ is blocked by (in)definite determiners and a shift to kinds $\langle e_k \rangle$ ³ is barred for singular terms in Chierchia's theory, bare singulars can only be predicates.

Nevertheless, as the readers of this volume dedicated to a Norwegian semanticist probably are aware of, Norwegian is a Germanic language, which, interestingly, does exhibit bare singulars both in predicate and argument positions. In the Neo-Carlsonian literature, Chierchia's theory is constantly challenged and refined as more "exotic" languages are under scrutiny. And now time is ripe for us to have our say.

² This blocking is not due to the existence of a kind-forming determiner (no languages have special determiners for kinds), but is related to the ontological status of kinds in Chierchia's theory. Chierchia argues that properties whose extensions do not have a greatest individual cannot be mapped to a kind. Concerning our initial example "semanticist", it does not make any sense to say that Kjell Johan is greater than Arnim or that Arnim is greater than Kjell Johan; they are both atomic entities from a semantic point of view. This is contrasted with the bare plural "semanticists", where the greatest individual equals the sum of all semanticists in the world of evaluation. I do not share this assumption, and follow Krifka (2003) who finds Chierchia's restriction to plural kinds unjustified. Imagine, 30 years from now, that every linguistic department in the world decided to abandon semantics due to some global quality reform. Despite this deplorable situation, the kind "semanticist" would still be defined and well-established (in memory of happier days) even though the specimen making up this kind could possibly be reduced to the singleton set {Kjell Johan}, an untouchable professor emeritus at the department of German studies.

³ I use the familiar type $\langle e \rangle$ for entities with subscripts 'o' and 'k' distinguishing sortally between ordinary individuals and kind individuals, whenever necessary. For simplicity, I will typically omit the world parameter and stay within an extensional semantics. This means that I tend to gloss over the distinction between, say, the property type $\langle s, et \rangle$ and the predicative type $\langle et \rangle$.

2 Calling Up Norwegian

A serious treatment of the thorny data was given in Kaja Borthen's dissertation (2003) on bare singulars in Norwegian. She distinguishes four main cases:⁴

- (4) I: *the “conventional situation type” construction*
- a. Kjell Johan holdt på med doktorgrad^[bare singular] i 1984.
'Kjell Johan was working on a doctoral degree in 1984.'
 - b. Kjell Johan var doktorgradsstudent^[bare singular] i 1984.
'Kjell Johan was a PhD-student in 1984.'
- (5) II: *the “profiled have-relation” construction*
- a. Kjell Johan har gul ytterfrakk^[bare singular].
'Kjell Johan has a yellow coat.'
 - b. Kjell Johan, det er hammer^[bare singular] i verktøykassa.
'Kjell Johan, there is a hammer in the toolbox.'
- (6) III: *the “comparison of types” construction*
- a. Kjell Johan, hammer^[bare singular] er et nyttig verktøy.
'Kjell Johan, a hammer is a useful tool.'
 - b. Den beste typen framkomstmiddel er t-bane^[bare singular].
'The best type of conveyance is the subway.'
- (7) IV: *the “covert infinitival clause” construction*⁵
- a. Bil^[bare singular] er kjekt.
'(Having) a car is handy.'
 - b. Trenger du bil^{[bare singular]?}
'Do you need (e.g. to borrow) a car?'

The question which will be our main concern here, is how these data can be related to a type-logical framework. Borthen does not address this issue, but points out that bare singulars are prototypically *type-emphasizing*, cf. the minimal pair below:

⁴ Limitations of space force me to refer the reader to Borthen's dissertation for a justification of this classification and the *raison d'être* behind her labels. Below I illustrate each class with two examples, which, like most of the Norwegian data presented in this paper, are borrowed from Borthen's work (with minor modifications, basically “modulo Kjell Johan”).

⁵ In the following, I will ignore this particular construction, which from a semantic point of view perhaps should ultimately be grouped together with other constructions. There is a certain overlap also in Borthen's work, where data belonging to the “covert infinitival clause” construction also show up in the discussion of the “profiled have-relation” construction.

- (8) Kari fikk en fin sykkel^[indefinite singular]. Den var blå. (*token reference*)
'Kari got a nice bike. It was blue.'
- (9) Kari fikk sykkel^[bare singular]. Dét fikk Ola òg. (*type reference*)⁶
'Kari got a bike. Ola got one too.' (*literally: "That Ola got too"*).

It might seem paradoxical, but characteristics like “type emphasis” or “type reference” do not belong to the jargon of type-logical semantics, as they do not tell us *which type* we should assign to bare singulars. In this respect, consider also the following remark from Gerstner & Krifka (1993: 970):

“The well-known *type/token* distinction can be treated as a case of this ambiguity of count nouns. For example, *book* may refer to individual books (‘tokens’), like the book with the red cover on the top of my shelf, or to a subspecies of books (‘type’), like Milton’s *Paradise lost*. In a sentence like *This book sells well* it is obviously the latter reading which is selected.”

However, this is presumably not what Borthen has in mind, as she does not adhere to a kind-interpretation of Norwegian bare singulars, cf. for instance this little footnote: “A *type discourse referent* must not be confused with a *kind* in the sense of Carlson (1977)” (Borthen 2003: 23). What, then, does Borthen mean by “type”? Is “type” referring to types or sorts? If it’s not the sort *kind*, it must be the type <et>, the *predicative type*. Or maybe the term is intended to be ambiguous, an ambiguity which, perhaps, is rather welcome and indeed reflects the essence of the proposal I will sketch below.

My approach will share many features with Neo-Carlsonian approaches – including a *type-logical framework* and the idea of *competition*, but it will be more conservative and less complex than Chierchia’s iterated covert type shifts. As pointed out by Krifka (2003: 177) with respect to rules like the “derived kind predication”, simpler derivations are possible and preferable. The big question is what makes it possible for bare singulars to appear in argument positions despite the existence of (in)definite determiners in Norwegian? I will claim that *kind reference* and *incorporation* are two independent ways of avoiding the blocking by articles, and both these phenomena seem to play a role in the Norwegian grammar.

⁶ The peculiar pronoun “dét”, which according to Borthen signals “type reference”, is not the whole story, since “Dét fikk Ola òg” is a possible follow-up of the first sentence in (8) as well. Borthen is, of course, aware of this fact.

3 Two sorts and two types

The exact ontological status of kinds and how they relate to ordinary individuals is a matter which cannot be addressed properly in this setting. As noted in a recent paper on bare nominals by de Swart, Winter & Zwarts (2004), the Neo-Carlsonian community is currently rethinking and redefining the notion of kind. Still, everybody seems to agree that we need both kinds and ordinary objects, and here I will simply assume that these two domains coexist without addressing possible interactions. This is basically also the stand taken in (Dayal 2004) and (Katz & Zamparelli 2005).

Following these authors, I further claim that NPs (common nouns) can be *ambiguous* between an object-level and a kind-level interpretation. More specifically, this ambiguity is what we observe in the case of so-called well-established kinds. The denotation of a bare nominal is split into a property of objects and a property of kinds:

$$[[\text{dog}]] = \{\text{Fido, Lassie, Pluto, ...}\} \textit{ or } \{\text{dog}_k, \text{German shepard}_k, \text{Golden Retriever}_k, \dots\}$$

This accounts for different readings such as:

(10) A dog is barking in Kjell Johan's garden. (*object level*)

(11) A dog was selected for its special features. (*kind level*)

In (11), we get the so-called subkind or taxonomic reading. Note that the "superkind" 'dog_k' is part of the set denoted by the bare nominal; however, the indefinite DP "a dog" in (11) clearly picks out one of the subkinds (say, 'German shepard_k') from the dog-taxonomy. As we will see in section 5, the definite article picks out the superkind itself, when the context selects a kind interpretation. Thus, the standard determiners combine compositionally with the relevant property – be that in the domain of ordinary individuals or kinds.

The question is, of course, how bare singulars in Norwegian relate to these properties. The answer is twofold. As expected, bare singulars can, in principle, occur in predicative positions (see section 4). But, importantly, I will argue that bare singulars lead a double life not only with respect to their sorts, but also with respect to their types. Following various works by Krifka, I claim that common nouns can function as *names* and are thus able to apply to their kind directly. An exceptional case from English illustrates this phenomenon:

(12) Man has lived in Africa for more than two million years. (Gerstner & Krifka 1993: 967)

I will not invoke type shifting for such cases. Type shifting by, say, the ι -operator should be ruled out in (12) on principled grounds due to the existence in English (and Norwegian) of a definite determiner. Instead, I will simply assume that common nouns are inherently ambiguous in the sense that they can be used in the appropriate context with this additional naming function.

Furthermore, at the end of the next section I will also argue that this naming function is *not* restricted to the kind domain.

4 Bare singulars in the domain of ordinary individuals

But let's not rush ahead. Let's first see how far we can get with our standard assumptions, starting with the predicative type. Examples like the following are, of course, just what we expect in a compositional semantics.

- (13) Kjell Johan er professor^[bare singular] i tysk.
'Kjell Johan is a professor of German.'

A predication such as the one in (13) expresses a membership relation, where the predicate NP ("professor i tysk") denotes a set of $\langle e \rangle$ -type entities, and the speaker claims that the subject of the sentence, "Kjell Johan" of type $\langle e \rangle$, belongs to this set. This is also known as *quantitative* predication. We can truthfully assert that Kjell Johan belongs to the set of professors of German, but there is more to say. Let's *qualify* him as in (14):

- (14) Kjell Johan er en utsøkt semantiker^[indefinite singular].
'Kjell Johan is a distinguished semanticist.'

Of course, one would like to know *why* a bare singular cannot be used in the last example. For some reason, Norwegian patterns with English in (14), but not in (13). It is natural to assume an underlying competition, but since no covert type shift is involved in (13), I predict that the indefinite article, expressing qualitative predication as in (14), is the marked form which should be accorded the more specialised meaning.⁷

Many of Borthen's examples can be treated compositionally just as straightforwardly as in (13). For instance, in the following case, the correlation with the predicative type falls out on a standard semantic analysis of the existential *there*-construction:

- (15) Det er lege^[bare singular] i Mandal.
'There is a doctor in Mandal.'

⁷ See de Swart, Winter & Zwarts (2004) for an alternative view and a discussion of the relationship between these two kinds of predication.

The sentence in (15) expresses a relation of non-empty intersection between *the set of doctors* and things in Mandal. Another point worth making is that the felicity of the bare singular in (15) can actually be considered an argument against treating bare singulars as *bona fide* kinds (i.e. $[[\text{lege}]] = \text{lege}_k$) since kind terms are definite, and definite (strong) expressions are known to be ruled out in this environment (the so-called weak/strong distinction).

Finally, we come to the question of when and why we get bare singulars in argument positions. First we recall that such cases are unexpected since arguments are of the basic type $\langle e \rangle$ or the type of generalised quantifiers $\langle et, t \rangle$, and a covert shift from the inherent predicative type of bare singulars to an argumental type is blocked by the existence of determiners in Norwegian.

However, let's push the predicative type still a bit further. It is sometimes claimed that transitive verbs come with different type requirements on their objects. For instance, Zimmermann (1993) argues that certain intensional verbs actually take properties as direct objects on their opaque interpretation. In the case of Norwegian, this gives a quite straightforward compositional semantics for minimal pairs like the following:

(16) Jeg ønsker meg sykkel^[bare singular]. (*only narrow scope reading*)
'I want a bike.'

(17) Jeg ønsker meg en sykkel^[indefinite singular]. (*both narrow and wide scope readings*)
'I want a bike.'

Bare nominals always have narrow scope, as with the property argument in (16). This is to be contrasted with (17) on a transparent, wide-scope reading, where an indefinite generalised quantifier has to be invoked, conveying the meaning that the speaker has a specific bike (token) in mind. If (17) only had this wide scope reading, we could have argued that the wide scope reading, which triggers a shift from the property type to type $\langle et, t \rangle$, is overtly encoded by the article, while the bare singular is preferred when the property type is required (narrow scope reading in intentionalised contexts). However, this competition perspective does not explain why a narrow scope reading exists also for indefinite DPs as in (17). Indefinites (the preposed article “en” in Norwegian) must express more than just existential quantification. Krifka (2003: 127) briefly addresses this issue with respect to Brazilian Portuguese, which patterns with Norwegian in allowing bare singulars in argument positions despite having a full inventory of determiners. Krifka mentions a possible solution to this competition problem: A possibility would be to let indefinite expressions introduce a choice function, in which case we get a wide-scope interpretation of the existentially bound choice function also on a narrow scope reading of the NP.

In any case, it should be clear that the common noun “sykkel” is not a *bona fide* indefinite (even if one assumes that indefinites have the basic type <et> as in various DRT-based approaches). Unlike true indefinites, bare singulars cannot take wide scope. They are *scopally inert*, to use the expression of Farkas & de Swart (2003). At the same time, it seems implausible that the intensional/extensional distinction should play any major role in the distribution of bare singulars. At least it does not explain why bare singulars are often perfectly natural in purely extensional contexts:

- (18) Kjell Johan og Kirsten kjøpte rekkehus^[bare singular] på Tveita.
'Kjell Johan og Kirsten bought a row house at Tveita.'

Instead, a large part of the data discussed by Borthen – probably the majority of the cases where the bare singular occurs in a direct object position – invites an analysis in terms of *semantic incorporation*, also referred to as “pseudo-incorporation” in (Dayal 2003). Pace Borthen, I thus propose to distinguish between (19) and (20) below, which both allegedly belong to “the conventional type construction”. However, in my view, the syntax-semantics mapping is too different in these cases to allow for a unified analysis.

- (19) Kjell Johan er spydkaster^[bare singular].
'Kjell Johan is a javeline thrower.'
- (20) Kjell Johan kaster spyd^[bare singular].
'Kjell Johan throws the javeline.'

The analysis of incorporation proposed by Asudeh & Mikkelsen (2000) for Danish seems to be highly relevant also for Norwegian.⁸ In fact, even Dayal’s incorporation data from Hindi shows strong similarities with Norwegian bare singulars in object position (and as complements of prepositions). For reasons of space, I will here just mention some of the characteristics valid for semantic incorporation cross-linguistically, exemplified with bare singulars in direct object position as in (18) above: the VP forms a complex predicate with an “institutionalised”, stereotypical meaning; the noun phrase is scopally inert (it contributes no quantifier, hence a wide-scope reading with respect to operators such as negation and intensional elements is impossible); the bare singular is

⁸ Contra Asudeh & Mikkelsen, I prefer the term “semantic incorporation” instead of “syntactic incorporation”, since the incorporated noun – at least in Norwegian – can often move quite freely, e.g. to topic positions:

- (i) Bil^[bare singular] er kjekt å ha.
'Having a car is handy.'

semantically number neutral⁹; and the bare nominal has reduced discourse transparency.

The last point is interesting and much debated. Let's look at some relevant data from Borthen:

- (21) Kari kjørte bil^[bare singular] til hytta forrige fredag. ??Den står der fortsatt.
'Kari drove her car to the cottage last Friday. It is still there.'
- (22) Kari sparket fotball^[bare singular]. ??Den var blå.
'Kari was playing soccer. It was blue.'

These incorporation constructions with the bare nominals “bil – car” and “fotball – soccer” in direct object position show full discourse opacity, as expected given an analysis of incorporation where the bare nominal does not contribute any discourse referent (in the sense of DRT). But then, what about Borthen's counterexample in (23) below?

- (23) Kari har bil^[bare singular], men hun bruker den aldri.
'Kari has a car, but she never uses it.'

One possibility would be to give a different analysis of (21) and (23), such that only the former is treated as a case of incorporation, but then we should argue that verbs like “å ha – to have” differ in their inherent logical type from transitive verbs like “å kjøre – to drive” in taking complements of type <et>. A second option would be to treat both cases as incorporation and consider the anaphor (“den – it”) in (23) as an “inferable” (or “bridging” in a broad sense), similar to discourses like (24), where the pronoun “hun – she” lacks an overt antecedent:

- (24) A: Kjell Johan er gift. B: Det visste jeg ikke. A: Jeg tror hun heter Kirsten.
'A: Kjell Johan is married. B: Oh, I didn't know. A: I think her name is Kirsten.'

⁹ Number is a highly important, but rather tricky issue for any theory of bare nominals. Pragmatically, sentences like (18) will of course be interpreted as involving a single house, but as shown by Borthen (2003: 146), in the appropriate context a plural interpretation may emerge:

- (ii) Per har hatt hund^[bare singular] i ti år. Alle har vært veldig snille.
'Per has had a dog for ten years. They have all been very kind.'

Finally, in recent analyses of semantic incorporation there have been several attempts to incorporate (sic!) a certain limited dynamic potential into incorporated nouns, cf. Dayal (2003) and Farkas & de Swart (2003). The proposal of the latter is couched in a DRT-framework in which they distinguish between normal discourse referents and thematic arguments. Determiners (or the plural morpheme) are the locus for introducing discourse referents, hence in the case of an incorporated bare singular, we merely get a “thematic variable”. This enrichment of the DRT-architecture is not so straightforward to implement formally. But even if we assume with de Swart and Farkas that there is such a distinction, and furthermore that discourse referents are better antecedents than thematic arguments, then how do we account for examples like (25), where the pronoun seems to be able to pick up the bare singular despite the presence of a “better” alternative, the full-fledged discourse referent of the definite subject?

- (25) Traktoren_i^[definite singular] til naboen har tilhenger_j^[bare singular]. Den_{i/j} er lite brukt.
'My neighbour's tractor has a trailer. It is seldom used.'

The issue of semantic incorporation and its formalisation will most certainly receive much attention in the future. Here I can merely suggest that the Norwegian data seems to share all the relevant features with pseudo-incorporation in Hindi (not to say Danish!) – and deserves further investigation. This line of research was ultimately dismissed by Borthen mainly because bare singulars are also found in subject position (sisterhood seems to be required for incorporation). And, indeed, pseudo incorporation is *not all* there is to say about bare singulars in Norwegian.

In section 3, I mentioned the possibility of using bare singulars with a *naming function* in the domain of ordinary individuals. These are the data I had in mind:

- (26) Kelner^[bare singular], kan jeg få menyen?
'Waiter, can I have the menu?'
- (27) Rektor^[bare singular] var rasende.
'Our headmaster was furious.'
- (28) Vesle^[definite singular adjective] mor^[bare singular] sto ute i hagen.
'My dear mother was outside in the garden.' (*literally*: “*little mother*”)

These examples are all from Borthen's introductory chapter, where she explicitly excludes this kind of construction from her definition of bare singular

count nouns because of the “definiteness”, which, true, shows up in agreeing adjectives as in (28).¹⁰ My claim is that the alleged definiteness is due to the use of the bare nominal in the naming function, which must be of type $\langle e_o \rangle$. For some reason, the overt definite determiner is ruled out in the examples above, and it is therefore conceivable that this function of the bare singular is due to a covert type shift. However, in this paper, I entertain the possibility that we have a genuine ambiguity: Lexical nouns, which traditionally are thought of as properties, can be used as names of type $\langle e \rangle$.

5 Bare singulars in the kind domain

There is a subject-object asymmetry with respect to bare singulars in argument position: When the bare singular has the syntactic function of a direct object, we are typically dealing with incorporation, but in a subject position the NP denotation is often in the kind domain (except for cases like (27)-(28) above). Furthermore, I claim that kind reference with bare singulars is achieved through the naming function, which gives us the requisite argument of type $\langle e_k \rangle$ and saves the type-logical machinery by referring directly to an atomic entity.

The kinship between kinds and proper names is particularly transparent when the verbal predicate itself puts “naming” on the agenda:

- (29) Denne arten kalles “ulv”^[bare singular].
'This species is called the “wolf”.'

Consider finally some examples with bare singulars in subject position:

- (30) Bil^[bare singular] er ikke det samme som buss^[bare singular].
'A car is not the same as a bus.'
- (31) Tiger^[bare singular] og løve^[bare singular] er beslektede arter.
'The tiger and the lion are related species.'
- (32) Tiger^[bare singular] er i motsetning til løve^[bare singular] en truet dyreart.
'The tiger is, unlike the lion, an endangered species.'

Examples like (30) are particularly interesting since the generic definite seems to be blocked (“*bilen”, “*bussen”). In other cases, e.g. (31) and (32), the definite generic (“tigeren”, “løven”) would be a possible alternative. The use of bare singulars as kind-denoting names is in fact quite restricted since this option is typically outranked by the definite generic article:

¹⁰ I find it somewhat odd that semantic effects of “definiteness” or “indefiniteness” should play any role in the demarcation of *bare* nominals. Bare is bare!

- (33) Tigeren^[definite singular] er truet flere steder i verden. (*tiger^[bare singular])
 'The tiger is an endangered species in many parts of the world.'

All the examples (30)-(32) of the bare singular in subject position belong to Borthen's third group ("comparison of types construction"). In this respect, it is worth noting that an entity, according to Dayal (2003), qualifies as a subkind only if it belongs to a contrast set.

This is how I propose to account for the observed competition between the bare NP and the definite DP: The definite generic article is nothing more than the definite article applied to the taxonomic domain. As always, the definite determiner picks out the maximal element out of a set, which, in this case, is the superkind itself. The relevant domain of quantification is the domain of subkinds, which includes the superkind, as noted in section 3. This disambiguation of the definite article is a welcome result of our ontological (sortal) distinction between the domain of ordinary individuals and kinds. In other words, there is nothing special about the so-called generic definite determiner; it is the common noun that has two possible denotations, one in the object domain, the other in the taxonomic/kind domain, cf. similar ideas in (Dayal 2003) and (Katz & Zamparelli 2005).

Thus, the speaker has the following choice in examples like (32) and (33) above:

a) tiger_k

vs.

b) [[tiger-en]] = ι k. tiger(k) iff 'tiger' is a property of kinds.

Given standard OT-reasoning, the marked form in b), the overt definite article, is the preferred choice, everything else being equal. Then why is the alternative in a) still viable in contexts like (32)? The reason for this seems to be that the definite article comes with an additional *familiarity presupposition* which is absent in the case of the direct kind reference with a bare singular in its naming function. In the case of well-established kinds, the presupposition is readily accommodated in absence of any "distracting factors", hence the definite determiner "wins" in cases like (33). On the other hand, the so-called "comparison of types construction" makes salient taxonomic hierarchies in which the kind denoted by the bare singular is *not* a superkind, but a "proper" subkind. I suggest that this fact reduces the chances of the definite determiner coming out as a winner. For instance, in (32), both the tiger and the lion are conceptualised as subkinds of "endangered species" in a taxonomy of wild animals. Although it would have been possible to refer to each noun in the comparison construction as the maximal element, i.e. the superkind "tigeren – the tiger" of the set of tigers and the superkind "løven – the lion" of the set of

lions, the comparison construction makes the speaker more reluctant to invoke the familiarity presupposition of the generic definite. The question under discussion (topic) is not the otherwise well-established kinds of these wild cats, but a different taxonomy. The comparison of types construction is thus a case of *partial blocking*, where direct reference to kinds by a bare singular is possible despite the existence of the generic definite article. The common feature of (30)-(32), where a bare singular is licensed, is that a different/larger taxonomic hierarchy is under discussion in which the well-established kind of the bare nominal is not a superkind.

6 Conclusion

For a common noun N which is considered a well-established kind by the language community, I have argued for the following type-sort ambiguity:

N is of type $\langle e_{o/k} \rangle$
or
N is of type $\langle e_{o/k}, t \rangle$

In this paper, I have left open the question of whether we should reduce this picture by letting some variants be primitive and others arise through coercion.

The existence of (in)definite determiners in Norwegian puts severe restrictions on the use of N in its purest form. However, in the data discussed above, we have encountered 3 out of the 4 admissible variants: $\langle e_o \rangle$, $\langle e_o, t \rangle$ and $\langle e_k \rangle$ with the last two being most frequent, explaining prototypical occurrences of bare singular count nouns in predicative/incorporated positions and in the subject position, respectively.

While a type-logical framework equipped with this sortal distinction shows *why* a bare nominal is possible in various contexts, it cannot explain the restrictions on its use and I have only discussed a subset of the intriguing data presented by Borthen (2003). However, I believe that this paper shows that Norwegian bare singulars do not constitute an isolated phenomenon, but should find their proper place in the Neo-Carlsonian research paradigm.

These somewhat sketchy remarks invite a closer inspection of the competition at each micro level (i.e. for each construction/context) between the bare singular, various determiners, the bare plural form etc. Something like *weak bidirectionality* (see for instance Blutner, this volume) seems to be what we are looking for. This version of Optimality Theory allows for partial blocking, where the unmarked form (the bare singular) “survives” and is accorded its own unmarked meaning. However, since the bare singular competes with different marked forms in different contexts, the set of “unmarked meanings” assigned to the bare singular may become rather large and heteroclitic.

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