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Lyn Frazier
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Helen Majewski
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Masako Hirotani
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Keith Rayner
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

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Processing Bare Plurals and Indefinites: Evidence from Eye Movements*

Lyn Frazier, Helen Majewski, Masako Hirotsu & Keith Rayner

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

1. Introduction

Listeners and readers interpret sentences using the form and meaning of the sentences and their constituent parts. In accounts of semantic processing, researchers have investigated semantic ‘coercion’ (Piñango, Winnick, Ullah, & Zurif, 2006, Traxler, McElree, Williams, & Pickering, 2005) and the focus has been largely on the verb and its argument structure because verbs play an important role in determining what type of event or situation is described, and what the event-roles are. Equally important, however, are the noun phrases in the sentence. The speaker or writer’s choice of a particular linguistic type of noun phrase can be important for determining what the intended message is. In the present paper we focus on one particular distinction between a singular indefinite (a girl) and a bare plural (girls).

More specifically, we will focus on the occurrence of singular indefinites and bare plurals in two types of sentence. We examined their occurrence in generic sentences (which state a generalization) and episodic sentences (which describe an event). Both singular indefinites and bare plurals can appear in both types of sentences. When they appear in a generic sentence, as in (1), they name a kind – in this case, the generalization is about the kind of animal ‘cat’ (Carlson 1977). When they appear in an episodic sentence, as in (2), they receive an existential interpretation: the sentences in (2) tell us about Mary noticing a particular man (men).

- | | |
|----------------------------------------|------------|
| (1) a. Cats have whiskers. | (Generic) |
| b. A cat has whiskers. | (Generic) |
| | |
| (2) a. Mary noticed a man on the roof. | (Episodic) |
| b. Mary noticed men on the roof. | (Episodic) |

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In the linguistics literature, the topic of indefinite singular versus bare plural noun phrases has been studied intensively. The classic account of bare plurals was proposed by Carlson (1977), who argued that bare plurals name kinds. Carlson did not take up the issue of indefinite singulars, though he noted that they too can name kinds, as in (1). With respect to the existential use of a singular indefinite, Heim (1982) and Kamp (1981) have both argued that the singular indefinite can simply be translated as a variable. In their original system, the variable was bound by an existential operator at the discourse level, which created problems in certain pronoun sentences (see Diesing, 1992 for discussion). Indeed in later work Diesing (1992) and Kratzer (1992) analyzed both singular indefinites and bare plurals as variables. In their system, the interpretation then depends on what particular operator binds the variable. Basically an implicit existential operator associated with the verb phrase (VP) might give rise to an existential interpretation as in (2), or a generic operator might give rise to a generic interpretation, as in (1).

According to these accounts, then, the interpretation of the noun phrase, as existential or generic, is entirely due to the presence in the sentence of a particular (implicit) operator. This is in line with the observation we started with: for both types of noun phrase, episodic sentences give rise to existential interpretations, and generic sentences give rise to kind interpretations. And yet, it may be that the choice between a singular indefinite and a bare plural noun phrase is not arbitrary. It appears that bare plural noun phrases are the default choice for expressing the generic meaning (1a is less marked than 1b). And indefinites (singular or plural) are the default means of expressing an existential interpretation (2a seems more natural than 2b), with exceptions to be discussed later. This generalization can be cast as an empirical hypothesis about sentence processing; we term this the basic form hypothesis: Indefinites preferentially receive an existential interpretation whereas bare plural noun phrases preferentially receive a kind interpretation.

This hypothesis predicts that slow reading times will be found for these noun phrases, or the clause containing them, if the noun phrases are placed in sentences where they may not easily receive their default interpretations. We tested the basic form hypothesis in an eye movement recording study described below.

The basic form hypothesis implies that a bare plural will be the expected form in a generic sentence and the indefinite singular will be the expected form in an episodic sentence. It thus predicts that (1b) should take longer to comprehend than (1a) because in (1b) an indefinite singular occurs in a generic sentence. Similarly, it predicts that (2b) should take longer to process than (2a) because in (2b) a bare plural occurs in an episodic sentence (describing some event), which encourages an existential interpretation of the noun phrase. We tested these predictions in an eye movement experiment described below. The basic form hypothesis also implies that the speaker or author must have a reason for using the marked or unexpected form. We will explore this aspect of the hypothesis in the General Discussion.

An alternative to the basic form hypothesis might focus on the frequency of occurrence of bare plurals and singular indefinites. Intuitions suggest that bare plurals are less common than either definite (the) or indefinite (a) noun phrases. Gordon, Hendrick, and Johnson (2004) compared the reading of bare plurals and definite plurals in relative clause sentences and found that the bare plurals took longer to read. They also reported frequency statistics showing that bare plurals are considerably less common than definite plurals in the three corpora they checked (Brown, Chiles and Switchboard). Their study thus lends some

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credence to the intuition that bare plurals are less common than other types of noun phrases. We conducted a small corpus search using the Brown corpus, and found that bare plurals (plural noun phrases beginning with an adjective or noun) were less frequent than indefinite singulars (noun phrases beginning with a or an), though only by roughly 10%. Thus it is possible that bare plurals will show a general reading time penalty, always taking longer to read than the corresponding indefinite singular.

2. Experiment

2.1 Methods

Participants. Forty members of the University of Massachusetts community either received course credit or were paid to participate in the experiment. They were all native speakers of English with normal or corrected vision (soft contact lenses) and they were all naive with respect to the purpose of the experiment.

Apparatus. Eye movements were recorded by a Fourward Technologies Dual Purkinje Eye tracker (with resolution of 10 min of arc) which was interfaced with a Pentium microcomputer which ran the experiment. Viewing was binocular, with eye location recorded from the right eye. Eye position was sampled every millisecond by the computer. Sentences were presented on an NEC 4FG monitor with up to 80 character spaces per line. In the experiment, parts of a given sentence spilled over onto a second line. However, the critical parts of the sentence consistently appeared on the same line. During the experiment, the participant was seated 62 cm from the monitor, and 3.8 characters equaled 1° of visual angle. The characters were presented in lower case except when uppercase was called for (e.g., the beginning of sentences and proper names). Luminance on the monitor was adjusted to a comfortable brightness for the participant and then held constant throughout the experiment. The room was dark except for an indirect light source that enabled the experimenter to take notes.

Materials. 20 two sentence scenarios like (3) were constructed with four forms of each.

- (3) a. John noticed a cat on my roof last night. Cats are skilled climbers.
- b. John noticed cats on my roof last night. A cat is a skilled climber.
- c. Cats are skilled climbers. John noticed a cat on my roof last night.
- d. A cat is a skilled climber. John noticed cats on my roof last night.

In the a-form, an episodic sentence appeared first and the episodic sentence contained an indefinite singular (with an existential interpretation). The second sentence was a generic sentence containing a bare plural (with a generic interpretation). In the b-form, the indefinite singular in the first sentence was replaced by the corresponding bare plural (with an existential interpretation), and the bare plural in the second sentence was replaced by an indefinite singular (with a generic interpretation). The c- and d-forms consisted of exactly the same sentences as in the a- and b-forms, except that the order of the two sentences was reversed. An additional 76 filler sentences were constructed with a wide array of syntactic structures. All experimental sentences appear in Appendix.

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As noted earlier, the basic form hypothesis predicts that in the episodic sentence (the first sentence in the a and b versions - and the second sentence in the c and d versions), the indefinite singular should be read faster than the bare plural, whereas in the other (generic) sentence the bare plural should be read faster than the indefinite singular. In addition, having the episodic sentence first may be an advantage over having the generic sentence first, assuming that episodic sentences do not need any special context to 'license' them or make them expected. If this holds, the reading times for the whole condition (i.e., the sum of the reading times of the two sentences in each condition) should be faster when the first sentence is episodic (a, b) than when it is not (c, d).

Procedure. Each participant took part individually in a session that lasted approximately 45 min. For each participant, a bite bar was prepared to eliminate head movements, and the eye tracker was calibrated. The initial calibration procedure took approximately 5 min. Prior to reading each set of sentences, calibration of the eye tracking system was checked to ensure that accurate records were being obtained. Each participant read four practice sentences followed by the set of 20 experimental and 76 filler sentences in an individually randomized order. Participants were told that they would be reading a series of sentences displayed on a video monitor. They were instructed to read for comprehension so that they could answer an occasional comprehension question that appeared on the screen following the experimental sentences.

At the beginning of each trial, a set of fixation boxes appeared on the monitor. Each participant was instructed to look at the middle box until the experimenter said, "Ready" and then to look at the left-most box. Once the experimenter had determined that the participant was fixating the box, the entire sentence was presented on the monitor. When the participant was finished reading the sentence, he/she was instructed to press a button that would end the trial. Participants were offered a brief break approximately halfway through the experiment. Counterbalancing procedures were used to ensure that each sentence was tested equally often in each version and that each participant received an equal number of sentences in each version.

2.2 Results

Trials on which there was a track loss (3.1% of all trials) were eliminated from further analyses. To test the basic form hypothesis appropriately, two analyses were undertaken. In the first analysis, the two sentences (episodic and generic sentence) in each of the four conditions in (4) were made into one large analysis region. This enabled us to compare all the conditions together. Specifically, we could test whether the sentence order (episodic first (a, b) vs. generic first (c, d)) had an effect on the comprehension of the two sentences in each condition and/or interacted with two different types of noun phrases (indefinite singular vs. bare plural). For this analysis, 2 (sentence order) x 2 (noun type) ANOVAs were conducted using error terms based on participant (F_1) and item variability (F_2).

In the second analysis, we divided the sentences into five analysis regions, as illustrated in (4). This analysis allowed an indefinite singular (a cat) and bare plural (cats) to be independent regions, so that the reading times associated with those critical noun phrases were directly compared. Separate pair-wise t-tests were carried out between (a) vs. (b) and (c) vs. (d) to compare mean reading times of each region, using error terms

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based on participant (t_1) and item variability (t_2). (The target noun phrase in (4) is underlined for illustrative purposes but was not highlighted in the actual experiment).

- (4)
- | | | | | | |
|----|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| a. | John | noticed | <u>a cat</u> | on my roof last night. | <u>Cats</u> are skilled climbers. |
| b. | John | noticed | <u>cats</u> | on my roof last night. | <u>A cat</u> is a skilled climber. |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. | <u>Cats</u> | are skilled climbers. | John noticed | <u>a cat</u> | on my roof last night. |
| d. | <u>A cat</u> | is a skilled climber. | John noticed | <u>cats</u> | on my roof last night. |

We first note that prior to analyzing the data it was unclear precisely where in the eye movement record the predicted reading time penalties would show up. There are two issues that are relevant to the timing of the effects we are investigating. The first concerns what information the reader must have processed in order for it to be clear that the non-default interpretation of a noun phrase is instantiated. This typically will require information from the noun phrase together with the verb and maybe the verbs other arguments (see Dickey, 2001). It is only once the generic or episodic nature of the sentence is apparent that it will be clear that a non-default meaning of the noun phrase is intended. The second issue is when semantic processing takes place. Although it is clear that the meaning of words is processed as the words are encountered and that this is revealed in the eye movement record (Rayner, 1998), it is less clear how quickly other aspects of semantic processing occur. What these considerations suggest is that, if reading time penalties due to a non-default use of a noun phrase occur on that noun phrase itself, they should occur primarily in total times not first pass times. But perhaps the effects will not occur until some point after the noun phrase, or even be spread out across the sentence.

Large region analysis. In the analysis based on one large analysis region, the total reading time showed a significant interaction between sentence order and noun phrase type ($F(1, 39) = 4.84, p < .05$, $F(1, 19) = 5.63, p < .03$). That is, the difference between the two generic first conditions was 193 ms ((c) 2684 vs (d) 2877) while the difference was only 41 ms for the episodic first conditions ((a) 2652 vs. (b) 2693)). This result suggests that the mismatch between the sentence type and the noun phrase type resulted in longer reading times for the generic first conditions when compared to the episodic first conditions. In addition, there was a marginally significant effect of sentence order, indicating that the episodic first conditions were read faster (by 108 ms, on average) than the generic first conditions (2673 vs. 2781 ms, $F(1, 39) = 3.02, p = .09$, $F(1, 19) = 4.23, p = .05$).

Smaller region analysis. The following reading time measures were analyzed: (a) first pass reading time (i.e., the sum of all fixations on the region on first pass fixations; this is equivalent to gaze duration when the target region contains a single word); (b) second pass reading time; (c) go-past reading time (which includes all fixations until the eyes move forward in the sentence past the target region; this measure includes regressions back to earlier parts of the sentence); and (d) total reading time (which is the sum of all fixations made on the region). For regions that differed in length, a deviation from regression measure (Ferreira & Clifton, 1986) was computed to adjust for the length differences. Table 1 shows the different measures for the analysis regions for the analysis in which different regions were used.

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Table 1. Reading times (all values in milliseconds) for Experiment. Deviation from regression values are in parentheses for relevant regions.

| | First pass | Second pass | Go-past | Total time |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|---------|------------|
| Five analysis regions | | | | |
| Region 1 | | | | |
| (a) | 603 (138) | 41 | 603 | 632 (134) |
| (b) | 577 (113) | 68 | 577 | 650 (155) |
| (c) | 476 (92) | 25 | 476 | 494 (86) |
| (d) | 513 (92) | 35 | 513 | 540 (89) |
| Region 2 | | | | |
| (a) | 428 (-31) | 15 | 486 | 468 (-25) |
| (b) | 422 (-10) | 35 | 511 | 487 (27) |
| (c) | 747 (-16) | 10 | 851 | 829 (-14) |
| (d) | 768 (17) | 37 | 834 | 858 (27) |
| Region 3 | | | | |
| (a) | 490 | 4 | 540 | 532 |
| (b) | 491 | 15 | 536 | 526 |
| (c) | 521 | 32 | 539 | 562 |
| (d) | 507 | 94 | 546 | 607 |
| Region 4 | | | | |
| (a) | 315 (-128) | 23 | 329 | 323 (-143) |
| (b) | 329 (-104) | 17 | 347 | 346 (-121) |
| (c) | 375 (-92) | 12 | 422 | 405 (-97) |
| (d) | 359 (-72) | 38 | 466 | 440 (-22) |
| Region 5 | | | | |
| (a) | 763 | 10 | 890 | 827 |
| (b) | 821 | 7 | 891 | 831 |
| (c) | 552 | 4 | 593 | 570 |
| (d) | 537 | 6 | 729 | 591 |

Turning to first-pass reading times, there was no reliable difference on any of the target noun phrases (Region 4). However, for the spillover region (Region 5) of the generic sentence in the (a) and (b) conditions, the sentence with the bare plural (a) was read faster than the singular indefinite (b) by 58ms., which was marginally significant by participants and reached full significance by items ($t_1(39)=1.91$, $p=.06$, $t_2(19)=2.41$, $p=.03$).

In second pass reading time, there was no reliable effect in (a) and (b) conditions. However, the following significant effects were found in (c) and (d) conditions. In Region 2, the generic sentence with the bare plural noun phrase (cats) was read faster (by 27 ms) than the singular indefinite (a cat) ($t_1(39)=2.10$, $p=.04$, $t_2(19)=2.49$, $p=.02$). In the episodic (second) sentence (Region 4), the bare plural took longer (by 26 ms) than the indefinite singular ($t_1(39)=2.43$, $p=.02$, $t_2(19)=3.14$, $p<.01$). Interestingly, the preceding region (Region 3) also showed a significant difference in second pass times. Region 3 was read slower (by 62 ms) when it preceded the bare plural than the indefinite singular ($t_1(39)=3.52$, $p=.001$, $t_2(19)=4.95$, $p<.0001$).

In go-past reading time, there was no significant effect in the noun phrase regions. However, in the episodic sentence in the (c) and (d) conditions, the go-past reading times

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in Region 5 were longer (by 136 ms) when the preceding region had the bare plural than the indefinite singular ($t_1(39)=2.28$, $p=.03$, $t_2(19)=2.16$, $p=.04$).

The basic form hypothesis predicts that bare plurals will take less time to read than indefinite singulars in generic sentences, but indefinite singulars will take less time to read than bare plurals in episodic sentences. The prediction was confirmed numerically in total reading times for all four comparisons, and statistically for three of the four comparisons. On the target noun phrase in the episodic sentence (a cat/cats), the indefinite singular (a cat) was read faster than the bare plural (cats). In raw times, the difference of 19 ms in (a) vs. (b) (Region 2) and 35 ms in (c) vs. (d) (Region 4) was not significant. However, when the length of the target regions was corrected by performing deviation from regression analyses (Ferreira & Clifton, 1986), those differences were significant (for (a) vs. (b), $t_1(39)=2.57$, $p=.01$, $t_2(19)=2.80$, $p=.01$; for (c) vs. (d), $t_1(39)=3.17$, $p<.001$, $t_2(19)=3.33$, $p<.001$). As expected by the basic form hypothesis, the generic sentence indicated the reversed effect: The bare plural was read faster than the indefinite singular. In (a) and (b) conditions, the 23 ms difference in raw data (Region 4) again did not reach significance. However, the data subjected to the deviation from regression measure showed marginal significance by participants and full significance by items ($t_1(39)=1.67$, $p=.10$, $t_2(19)=2.75$, $p=.01$).

The perplexing case is when the critical noun phrase appears discourse initially, in the generic sentence of the (c) and (d) conditions. Although the difference in raw total reading times was in the predicted direction and marginally significant by participants ($t_1(39)=1.97$, $p=.06$, $t_2(19)=1.64$, $p=.12$) in the (c) and (d) conditions, the effect was non-significant in the deviation from regression measure. We discuss possible reasons for this below.

In sum, episodic sentences were read faster with singular indefinites than with bare plurals; generic sentences were read faster with bare plurals than with indefinites. The total reading time data show these effects for the noun phrase regions (though in discourse-initial position, the effect was not significant). All other significant effects also confirm the predictions of the basic form hypothesis. Why the total time effects were not significant in Region 1 of the (c) and (d) sentences is not clear. Perhaps the considerable variability associated with fixations in initial position is relevant. It's also possible that the penalty for generic first sentences relative to episodic first sentences obscured the preference for the basic form, the bare plural in the initial generic sentence. In any case, the analysis with one large region shows clearly that all the sentences which violate the basic form hypothesis – including the generic first (c and d) conditions – show an overall penalty.

3. Discussion

The results of the experiment support the predictions of the basic form hypothesis. Whether the bare plural or the indefinite singular is read faster depends on whether the phrase occurs in an episodic sentence or a generic sentence. Further, reading was faster when the episodic sentence preceded the generic sentence than vice versa. We think caution is needed in interpreting this latter finding. One possibility is that generic sentences are expected only in restricted contexts, whereas episodic sentences are expected in a less restricted set of contexts. Another possibility is that the generic-first penalty is due to the fact that for the most part our episodic sentences did not provide a prototypical example of

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the generalization of the generic sentence. In fact, in most of our items, the episodic sentence was at most only weakly related to the generalization of the generic sentence (for instance: Dogs are really smart. Seth found a dog near the picnic basket yesterday.). This may have in effect disconfirmed an expectation when the generic sentence came first. If this is indeed the correct interpretation, then slower times for the order generic-episodic should disappear when other sorts of examples are tested, e.g, Cats are skilled climbers. I noticed a cat on a thirty foot telephone pole last night.

Returning to the basic form hypothesis, one question is whether it chooses among distinct linguistic accounts of bare plurals or singular indefinites. In the end, it may not. Theories where bare plurals and indefinite singulars are both treated as variables might appear to be inconsistent with our results, where the complexity of the two forms differs depending on the type of sentence the noun phrase appears in. But if one thinks of the basic form hypothesis as a pragmatic hypothesis about how the grammar is employed, then the semantics of bare plurals and indefinite singulars need not account for the asymmetries observed in the eye movement recording study.

The basic form hypothesis implied that the grammar of English permits both a bare plural and an indefinite singular to be interpreted as a kind or as an existential. But it raises the question of whether the affinity between bare plurals and kinds, and between indefinite singulars and existentials, is part of the semantics or part of the pragmatics. We suspect that the basic form hypothesis should be viewed as a pragmatic hypothesis about how speakers choose a linguistic form for a particular utterance. Given a pragmatic view of the basic form hypothesis, we might expect that the non-basic form for expressing a given meaning (e.g., using the bare plural for an existential) could be used by the speaker if there is a reason to choose the unexpected form. Several observations suggest this may be correct.

- (5) a. Wolves hunt in packs. In fact, # a wolf is a good hunter.
b. Wolves hunt in packs. In fact, wolves are good hunters.
- (6) a. Tigers usually hunt alone. In fact, #tigers are good hunters.
b. Tigers usually hunt alone. In fact, a tiger is a good hunter.

In a context emphasizing the individual or collective nature of the activity denoted by a verb, it seems that the number feature of the bare plural can boost the naturalness of the sentence as in (5b) or make the choice of the bare plural somewhat less ideal, as in (6a). Similar remarks apply to the indefinite singular where the singular form can be preferred when an individual (non-collective) activity is relevant. Examples like (5) and (6) suggest that the use of the unexpected form (an indefinite singular in a generic sentence) can be preferred when issues about individual vs. collective activities are under discussion.

Another example where the unexpected form seems best is in examples like (7).

- (7) a. Jennifer talked to realtors all day.
b. Jennifer talked to some realtors all day.

Use of the bare plural in an episodic sentence like (7a) seems absolutely natural. An alternative is to use the indefinite (in this case plural) but that seems to imply that Jennifer

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talked to some particular group of realtors all day. If my intent as a speaker is that she talked to a variety of different realtors over the course of the day, then (7a) seems like the best choice to convey the meaning. This meaning is highlighted in (8), where it is unusual to spend a whole day tagging a single cow (hence 8b is odd) and (8c) makes it sound like it was the same group of cow. Hence, (8a), the bare plural seems like the best choice even though it means using a bare plural in an episodic sentence.

- (8) a. Bill tagged cows all day.
 b. #Bill tagged a cow all day.
 c. #Bill tagged some cows all day.

Another circumstance where it seems natural to use the bare plural in an episodic sentence is in contrastive contexts like (9).

- (9) Yesterday I saw some deer in my backyard. This morning there were wild turkeys.

Although the second sentence in (9) is clearly an existential sentence, it seems perfectly natural to use a bare plural presumably because the context contrasts one kind (deer) with another (wild turkeys).

Examples like (10a) are discussed by Sauerland, Anderssen and Yatsushiro (2005).

- (10) a. # Does a dog have tails?
 b. Do dogs have tails?

Their concern is the implicature generated by plurals in certain contexts. But what's of interest for present purposes is that the indefinite singular and the bare plural differ in their felicity in examples like (10). If the presence of the *s* in a bare plural is related to the meaning of the plural morpheme (in Carlson's classic analysis this is not the case), then choosing to use the bare plural (tails) instead of the indefinite singular (a tail) in cases where a one-one relation is intended may be dispreferred, e.g., in examples like (10a) where the speaker presumably does not want to allow for the possibility of one dog having multiple tails. In short, if the semantics of the plural marker is a reason to choose between the two types of noun phrases discussed here, the indefinite singular vs. the bare plural, then a speaker has no reason for choosing a form containing a plural in an example like (10a). Indeed, intuitions suggest that (10a) is not just unpreferred, but really not a viable option.

The above examples suggest that the basic form hypothesis is pragmatic in nature. Speakers have preferred forms for expressing existential meanings (indefinite singular) and preferred forms for expressing generic meanings (bare plurals). But under certain circumstances involving contrast the dispreferred form may be the best choice available to convey a particular interpretation.

Returning to the experimental results, note that it is not self-evident or obvious that one would find effects of violating the basic form hypothesis in the eye movement record. The preference for a particular form need not have had an influence on-line during the reading of a sentence. It is easy to imagine that the intuition that there are default forms for expressing a kind versus an existential interpretation might arise due to judgments about

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what speakers are likely to say but do not influence ongoing comprehension. It is also easy to imagine that frequency alone might have determined reading times, giving rise to generally slower reading times for bare plurals than for indefinite singular noun phrases.

Many questions remain unanswered by the current investigation. Whether there might be differences between subject and object position is not an issue which can be addressed properly here, given that, in our materials, when the critical phrase was in subject position it was also discourse-initial where long and variable fixation times are common. Also, whether a reading time penalty may persist for the non-default use of an indefinite singular or bare plural noun phrase even when there is a motivation for using the non-default form is a matter we have not yet investigated.

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Lyn Frazier, Helen Majewski, Masako Hirotani
Department of Linguistics
South College
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003

Keith Rayner
Psychology Department
Tobin Hall
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003

Contact us at lyn@linguist.umass.edu

Appendix

In (a) and (b) conditions, an episodic sentence appeared first and then a generic sentence. The order of these sentences was reversed in (c) and (d) conditions. (a) and (c) conditions had an indefinite singular (a cat) in the episodic sentences and a bare plural (cats) in the generic sentences. In (b) and (d) conditions, the bare plural appeared in the episodic sentences and the indefinite singular in the generic sentences.

1. (a) John noticed a cat on my roof last night. Cats are skilled climbers.
(b) John noticed cats on my roof last night. A cat is a skilled climber.
(c) Cats are skilled climbers. John noticed a cat on my roof last night.
(d) A cat is a skilled climber. John noticed cats on my roof last night.
2. Seth found a dog (dogs) near the picnic basket yesterday. Dogs (a dog) are (is) really smart.
3. Tom saw a horned owl (horned owls) last winter. Horned owls (a horned owl) are (is) difficult to spot.
4. Today Ann saw (a) deer in her backyard. (A) deer will forage anywhere these days.
5. Kurt saw a bald eagle (bald eagles) in Alaska. Bald eagle (A bald eagle) are (is) rare in most places.
6. Kyle noticed a new Porsche (Porsches) at work today. Porsches (A new Porsche) are (is) expensive.
7. Paula saw an ostrich (ostriches) at the zoo. Ostriches (An Ostrich) are (is) incredibly fast.
8. Debbi took care of a horse (horses) at the ranch. Horses (A horse) are (is) temperamental animals.
9. Lisa bought a guinea pig (guinea pigs) yesterday. Guinea pigs (A guinea pig) make(s) great pets.
10. Elizabeth scared a porcupine (porcupines) last night. Porcupines (a porcupine) startle(s) easily.
11. Jim spotted a reporter (reporters) near the ambulance. Reporters (a reporter) are (is) cruel sometimes.

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12. Sue cursed an antique dealer (antique dealers) yesterday. Antique dealers (an antique dealer) are (is) quite cunning.
13. Ray spoke to a travel agent (travel agents) for hours today. Travel agents (a travel agent) are (is) very talkative.
14. Megan hired a carpenter (carpenters) last month. Carpenters (A carpenter) are (is) really handy.
15. Pat interviewed an architect (architects) for the show. Architects (an architect) are (is) quite reserved.
16. Jen met a social worker (social workers) at her last job. Social workers (a social worker) are (is) nice and friendly.
17. Sara dated a rock star (rock stars) two years ago. Rock stars (a rock star) are (is) usually unconventional.
18. Ken photographed a model (models) today. Models (a model) attract(s) lots of attention.
19. Daniel invited a journalist (journalists) for dinner. Journalists (a journalist) like(s) free food.
20. Peter praised a policeman (policemen) last week. Policemen (A policeman) have (has) a dangerous job.