

This study investigates how (in)definiteness is expressed in Hindi bare nominals, aiming to refine current theories of definiteness in article-less languages.

Introduction: Cross-linguistic analysis of definiteness remains relatively underexplored, particularly concerning bare nominals. Languages with articles overtly mark (in)definiteness; article-less languages like Hindi use numerals or pronouns for indefiniteness. Hindi bare plurals act like English bare NPs, giving a kind reading or deriving indefiniteness via kind instantiation (Dayal, 2017; Chierchia, 1998). Hindi also uses bare singulars, which are reported to resist indefinite readings. This paper challenges the generalisation of singular nominals in Hindi, contrasting with Dayal (1992, 2004, 2017), which argues against the indefinite reading.

Main Argument: Various accounts have explored the interpretation of bare NPs in Hindi as definite, indefinite, or kind-denoting (e.g., Mahajan, 1990; Dayal, 1992, 2017). Dayal (2017) argues that bare plurals in Hindi are interpreted either as kind terms or receive an indefinite-like reading through kind instantiation. Bare singulars, however, are limited to definite or kind-level interpretations. (Dayal, 1992) argues that the incompatibility of stage-level predicates with kind-denoting subjects blocks indefinite interpretations in subject position. Even in object position, where bare singulars appear to receive indefinite readings, these are attributed to incorporation structures. Based on such data, Dayal concludes that Carlson’s type-shifting framework does not apply cleanly to Hindi bare singulars (Dayal, 1992), but bare plurals show such type-shifting. However, we observe speakers accept *laRkii* (‘girl’) in (1-b) as introducing a new discourse referent in subject position, disallowing definite use in the given context. It shows that indefinite readings are possible without the incorporation of a direct object or prosodic focus (Dayal, 2004) and does not necessarily depend on syntactic position. Hence, in contrast to Dayal (1992), bare singulars can have a realisation relation under Carlson’s analysis. That would imply that type-shifting to existential readings (\exists) is not entirely blocked for singulars, but may be contextually licensed in subject position instead.

However, we agree that overtly marked nouns are preferred over bare NPs. Sentences like (2-b) show naturalistic usage of bare singulars. Dayal (2017) mentioned the unclarity over non-specific indefinite behaviour and their relation with kind terms. The Neo-Carlsonian account (Dayal, 2017) ranks type shifts such that iota and nom take precedence over existential (\exists). However, we must explain the availability of non-specific indefinite readings, possibly derived through kind instantiation.

The contrast between bare singulars and bare plurals may be revised to stem from two explanations: (a) Bare singulars allow definite readings and plurals do not. (b) There is a variation in the ranking of the type-shifting operation on both. Additionally, this ranking may be influenced by the presence of an indefinite marker, like the numeral *ek*(one). These observations motivate re-analysing whether number marking is important in determining whether indefinite readings are yielded in episodic and generic sentences.

Conclusion: This study highlights that Hindi bare singulars can, under certain discourse conditions, allow indefinite readings. We call for re-evaluating type-shifting constraints and number-based distinctions in current analyses of definiteness in article-less languages.

Linguistic Examples:

- (1) Context:
 Speaker 1 asks why Speaker 2 returned early from the library; Speaker 2 says there were no good spots.
- a. Speaker1: Was there somebody at our favourite corner?
 Speaker2: Yeah,
 - b. **laRkii** kaRii thii (Dayal, 1992)
 girl standing was
 ‘The girl/A girl was standing’
- (2) Context:
 Speaker 1 and Speaker 2 are talking about what objects they have on there side in a game.
- a. Speaker1: Yeah there is a toy dog on my side?
 Speaker2: Okay,
 - b. **kaar** hai, eek-doo Kaars hai alag alag kalrs kii
 car is, one-two cars is different different colors of
 ‘There is a car. one-two cars of different colors’

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¹ISO 15919 is used for romanization of Hindi script