

The Late Acquisition of Brazilian Portuguese Subject Bare Singulars

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1. Introduction

Brazilian Portuguese (henceforth BrP) is a Romance language displaying definitive and indefinite articles. It also exhibits plural and singular bare nominals, which can be characterized as noun phrases without overt functional heads (determiners, numerals or quantifiers). Bare nominals can appear in the argument positions of the following types of sentences and predicates:¹

(1) Subject position:

- a. Crianças comem doce. (generic sentence)
children eat-pl candy
'Children eat candy.'
- b. Dinossauros estão extintos. (kind-denoting predicate)
dinosaurs are extinct-pl
'Dinosaurs are extinct.'
- c. Professores arrumaram a sala. (episodic sentence)
teachers prepared-pl the room
'Teachers prepared the room.'
- d. Criança come doce. (generic sentence)
child eat-sg candy
'Children eat candy.'
- e. */?/√ Dinossauro está extinto. (kind-denoting predicate)
dinosaur is extinct-sg
'Dinosaurs are extinct.'

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¹ We do not include all the syntactic positions where bare nominals are possible due to space constraints. For a complete list, please see Ferreira (in press).

- f. */?/√ Professor arrumou a sala. (episodic sentence)
 teacher prepared-sg the room
 ‘Teachers prepared the room.’
- (2) Direct object position:
- a. O João compra maçã/maçãs no mercado. (generic sentence)
 the John buys apple/apples at-the market
 ‘John buys apples in the market.’
- b. O Pedro viu professor/professores na festa. (episodic sentence)
 the Pedro saw teacher/teachers at-the party
 ‘Peter saw teachers at the party.’
- (3) Complement of preposition position:
- a. Crianças gostam de brinquedo/brinquedos. (generic sentence)
 Children like-pl of toy/toys
 ‘Children like toys’.
- b. Pedro conversou com aluno/alunos. (episodic sentence)
 Pedro talked with student/students
 ‘Pedro talked with students.’

Examples in (1) illustrate singular and plural bare nominals in subject position of generic sentences, kind-denoting predicates and in episodic sentences. Examples in (1)e and (1)f are judged differently by different authors, as the symbols ‘*, ?, √’ indicate. We will discuss them in the next section.

Examples in (2) bring plural and singular bare nominals in direct object position of generic and episodic sentences, being acceptable in all of them. Bare nominals are also acceptable as complements of prepositions, as shown in (3).

There are a number of important differences between singular and plural bare nouns in the language.² One of them is that bare plurals are associated with a more formal register, while bare singulars are found only in colloquial registers. Due to their formal nature, bare plurals will not be investigated in this study, which focuses on bare singulars instead.

Bare singulars in BrP have drawn a lot of attention in the literature. This is so, because they have a much more limited distribution in the other Romance languages, including European Portuguese. They are also usually absent in languages that display overt plural morphology and a full range of definite and indefinite determiners, as is the case of BrP. As we will see below, all of these facts make BrP an interesting language to study.

In this paper, we aim at investigating children’s behavior in sentences like (1)d, (1)e and (1)f in order to explore how the acquisition of bare singulars

² We refer the reader to Ferreira and Correia (2016), Ferreira (in press) and Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011) for detailed discussions on the differences between plural and singular bare nouns.

proceed in the language. The article is organized as follows. In section 2, we present an analysis for bare singulars as kind-denoting elements in BrP. In section 3, we present the spontaneous production data we collected. Section 4 presents our experimental study and section 5 brings a discussion of these results. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. Bare singulars as kind-denoting nouns

There is consensus in the literature with respect to bare singulars in the subject position of generic sentences (as in (1)d), as these are usually judged as acceptable by authors working on the topic. But this is not the case for bare singulars as subjects of kind-denoting predicates and as subjects of episodic predicates. In this section, we discuss the controversies surrounding these constructions.

Before discussing these cases, let us first note that, despite being called bare singulars, these elements are not strictly speaking singular. Several authors have noted this fact, as illustrated below (Ferreira (in press) ex. (28)³), where the bare noun *cachorro* ‘dog’ can be resumed by a singular or a plural pronoun:

- (4) Eu vi cachorro na estrada...
 I saw dog on-the road
- a. ... ele parecia doente.
 ... it seemed sick
- b. ... eles pareciam doentes.
 ...they seemed-pl sick-pl

This indicates that the bare singular is not semantically singular, but that it is neutral in number (Schmitt & Munn, 1999). This neutrality is also found with respect to the count/mass distinction:

- (5) Maria comeu maçã esta manhã.
 Maria ate apple this morning

Following Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011), Ferreira (in press) points out that this sentence is true if Maria ate some pieces of apple, several apples or even a sauce made with apples. Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011) claim that both count nouns and mass nouns can appear as bare singulars in the subject position of a kind predicate (6)a and in a generic statement (6)b (examples below taken from Ferreira & Correia (2016), exs (72) and (74)):

³ In what follows, examples cited from other publications will be presented with the original formatting for glosses and translations.

- (6) a. Petróleo está escasso.
Oil is rare
- b. Vinho vazou quando não é posto em um barril bem vedado.
Wine spills when it is not in a sealed barrel

Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011) take these facts as evidence that bare singulars and bare mass nouns are both kind-denoting expressions. However, the reader might have noted that there is an obvious difference between the two. While the nouns appearing in (1)d and (2) refer to atomic properties applying to individuals, *oil* and *wine* do not refer to atomic properties and do not apply to individuals. Nonetheless, Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011) claim that mass nouns can be atomic, such as *furniture*, *jewelry* and *silverware*. Sentences like the ones below, with mass nouns with distribution to atomic individuals illustrate their point (example (7)a taken from Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011), ex. (10b), p. 2157; example (7)b taken from Ferreira & Correia (2016), ex. (76b) p. 14):

- (7) a. Bijouteria (nesta loja) custa 3 reais.
jewellery (in-this store) costs 3 reais
'Jewellery (in this store) costs 3 reais.'
- b. Tinha bijouteria espalhada por todo o balcão.
there was jewelry scattered all over the counter

We have been treating bare singulars as the subject of kind-denoting predicates as acceptable. However, not all of the researchers working on this topic agree with this judgment. While Schmitt & Munn (1999, 2002), Munn & Schmitt (2001), Pires de Oliveira, Silva & Bressane (2010) and Menuzzi, Silva & Doetjes (2015) consider them grammatical and acceptable, other researchers consider them ungrammatical, such as Müller (2002) and Müller & Oliveira (2004). This is the first controversy we find in the literature regarding bare singulars. In order to contribute to this debate, we included bare singulars in subject position of kind-denoting predicates in our study. We hope that our results will bring a clearer picture of these constructions' status in the language.

If we assume with Pires de Oliveira & Rothstein (2011) that bare singulars are kind denoting, we expect them to be ungrammatical in the subject position of episodic sentences, such as we see in (1)f above. The same holds for bare mass nouns, as we see in the ungrammatical example below, with a bare mass noun as the subject of an episodic predicate (example from Ferreira & Correia (2016), ex. (73)):

- (8) * Vinho vazou no chão da adega.
Wine spilled on the cellar's floor.

Here, we arrive at the second controversy in the literature, which has to do with bare singulars in the subject position of episodic sentences, such as in (1)f above. In out-of-the blue contexts, the sentence is clearly ungrammatical, as claimed by several authors, like Müller (2002), Müller & Oliveira (2004), Schmitt & Munn (1999), etc. However, some authors claim that its acceptability increases if some conditions are controlled for. One of these conditions was first proposed by Schmitt & Munn (1999) and was further developed by Pires de Oliveira (2012) and Menuzzi et al (2015). Schmitt & Munn observe that, when the entity denoted by a subject bare singular is contrasted to other entities present in a given context, the sentence tends to be more acceptable than when the contrastive reading is not present. Thus, a sentence like (9) below is acceptable, as there is a contrastive reading among groups of entities in a given event (example from Schmitt & Munn (1999), ex. (25), p. 346):

- (9) Durante a festa, mulher discutiu política, homem discutiu futebol...
 During the party, woman discussed politics, man discussed soccer...
 ‘During the party, women discussed politics, men discussed soccer...’

This is corroborated by a study conducted by Ionin, Grolla & Santos (2018), who found that adult native speakers of BrP judged bare singulars in subject position of episodic sentences more acceptable when they were in a list context than when they were presented as a single NP.

The interesting fact is that bare mass nouns also behave this way. Although they are unacceptable in episodic sentences (as in (8) above and (10)a below), they become acceptable in a list-like contrastive context (examples from Ferreira (in press), exs. (25) and (26), p. 5):

- (10)a. *Água está pingando do teto.
 water is dripping from-the ceiling
- b. Água está pingando do teto, óleo está vazando do cano, ...
 water is dripping from-the ceiling, oil is spilling from-the pipes, ...

These examples show that bare singulars are possible in episodic sentences if a list-like environment with some kind of contrast between groups is introduced. Menuzzi et al (2015) present a different analysis for these cases. They show that it is not necessary to have a list-like context in order to license bare singulars as subjects of episodic sentences. For them, what is necessary is that the context must be such that a statement about the kind is relevant. They argue that “the notion of relevance required here is a particular one: the utterance is relevant if it addresses a “question under discussion”.” (p. 41). Thus, bare singulars cannot be used freely with episodic predicates; the context must be such that the utterance containing the kind-denoting subject clearly answers the question under discussion. This is the second issue we address in our experimental study. By manipulating the

context, the stories we presented to participants either provided a contrastive reading to the kind in question or not.

This discussion indicates that children acquiring BrP are faced with several challenges with respect to bare singulars. They need to learn that bare singulars are not really singulars, but number neutral. Children also need to learn that bare singulars are kind-denoting entities, which are possible in the argument position of generic sentences and with kind-denoting predicates. In the subject position of episodic sentences, they are possible if a contrastive reading between entities/groups is introduced in the context.

In order to investigate the acquisition of bare singulars in BrP, we posed the following questions: (i) how frequent are these constructions in children's input?; (ii) do children produce bare singulars in spontaneous speech?; (iii) do children accept bare singulars in the different contexts discussed above? and (iv) are children sensitive to the contrastive context in episodic sentences?

The first two questions are addressed in section 3 below, where we analyze spontaneous production data and the last two questions are addressed in section 4, where we present the experiment we conducted.

3. Spontaneous production data

Santana (2019) is one of the few studies in BrP that investigated the frequency of bare singulars in spontaneous production data. The author analyzed 30 transcriptions of recording sessions of R., a child acquiring BrP as her mother tongue growing up in Campinas, Sao Paulo. Each recording session lasted around 30 minutes, totalizing 11 hours of recordings. In the first session, the child was 1;02 and in the last one, she was 4;10.⁴ The data is summarized in the table below (adapted from Santana (2019), p. 56):

Table 1. Number of bare singulars in the input and in child's productions

Context	Input	Child
Subject – generic	14	2
Subject – kind denoting	0	0
Subject – episodic	0	2
Direct object	233	49
P complement	176	31
Total	423	84

As the table shows, bare singulars are not very frequent in the child's input and in the child's productions. In the input, bare singulars appeared mostly in object position (233 occurrences) and as complements of prepositions (176 occurrences). As subjects, bare singulars are rare: only 14 tokens for generic constructions were found. No bare singulars were found as subjects of kind-denoting predicates or of

⁴ Data from the Oral Language Acquisition Project – IEL/Unicamp, available at <<http://eulalio.iel.unicamp.br/sys/audio/albums.php?action=show&album=18>>

episodic sentences. Below, we provide examples of bare singulars produced by the adults interacting with the child ((11)a, subject of a generic sentence; (11)b, direct object; (11)c, complement of preposition):

- (11) a. Carneirinho é parecido com cabritinho.
Lamb-little is similar with goatling-little
'Little lamb is similar to little goatling.'
- b. Mas você pegou chiclete do chão e comeu?
but you took gum from-the floor and ate
'But did you take the gum from the floor and ate it?'
- c. Ele tem medo de jacaré?
he has fear of alligator
'Is he afraid of alligators?'

These data indicate that bare singulars are present in the child's input, but not in the crucial semantic environments in subject positions. The contexts in which the nominal appears are evidence that bare singulars can have a generic meaning, but they do not bring robust information about the licensing conditions for bare singulars in subject position of kind-denoting predicates and of episodic sentences.

Considering the child's productions, the appearance of bare singulars is even rarer. There were cases of bare singulars in object position (49 cases) and as complement of prepositions (31 cases), but there were almost no productions in subject position. We found only 2 cases of bare singulars as the subject of generic sentences ((12)a-b) and 2 cases as subject of episodic constructions ((12)c-d):

- (12) a. Centopeia não faz nada mãe? (4;10,06)
centipede not does nothing mom
'The centipede does no harm, mom?'
- b. Espinho fura o dedo. (2;10,14)
thorn pierces the finger
'The thorn pierces the finger.'
- c. Cavalo tá papando. (1;9,20)
horse is eating
'Intended meaning: 'The horse is eating.'
- d. Menino andando na estrada. (3;2,17)
boy walking in-the road
Intended meaning: 'The boy is walking down the road.'

The first production of a bare singular is (12)c, when the child was 1;9. This case of a bare singular appearing in an episodic sentence is not inherently generic, as it referred to a specific entity in the context. The other bare singular in subject position of an episodic construction ((12)d) has not a generic meaning as well, since the child is referring to a boy she sees in the context. Both of these sentences are unacceptable in adult BrP. However, in the generic sentences in ((12)a-b), the child is talking about things that usually happen: the possibility of having your finger pierced by a thorn, and qualities usually associated to entities, which is the case of the centipede. These sentences are acceptable in adult BrP.

Thus, we have that children do produce bare singulars from an early age, but not all of these productions are adult-like. We could hypothesize that the bare singular subjects in (12)c-d are in fact definite DPs lacking an overt definite determiner. The lack of functional elements in early child language is widely reported in the literature (Demuth (1994); Guilfoyle & Noonan (1992); Lebeaux (1988); Radford (1990); among many others), and the productions in (12)c-d might indeed be related to these early omissions found in child languages. However, not all cases of bare singulars should be analyzed this way. Bare singulars in generic sentences were produced in an adult-like fashion. This indicates that the child has some knowledge about bare singulars in BrP at an early age.

In this section, we showed that bare singulars are somewhat frequent in the child's input, although not in the environments where this would be more relevant for language acquisition. We also showed that bare singulars are found in the spontaneous speech of the child we studied, but they do not appear in all of the contexts we discussed before. In fact, the child's production mirrors what is found in the input, with most of her productions being of bare singulars in object position and as the complement of prepositions.

In the next section, we present our experimental study, where we investigated children's and adults' behavior with respect to bare singulars in the different contexts discussed above. Besides manipulating the syntactic/semantic environments for bare singulars, we also investigated if participants were sensitive to the contrastive context which is claimed to license bare singulars in subject position of episodic sentences. As we saw above, bare singulars can appear in a number of different syntactic positions and can saturate different types of predicates, with different licensing conditions. This variability and the scarcity of the relevant constructions in the input lead us to expect a delay in the acquisition of these elements.

4. Experimental data

This study investigated how children and adult speakers of BrP judge constructions with subject bare singulars when they appear in different syntactic/semantic configurations.

Subjects. We applied a between-subject acceptability judgment task to 44 BrP-acquiring children divided into two groups according to their age range

(Group 01: 5;0-6;0, N = 18, Group 2: 6;6-7;0, N = 26) and to 24 native adult speakers (control group).

Experiment design. Our independent variables correspond to the type of predicates that subject bare singulars saturate: i) generic predicates (control), ii) kind-predicates, iii) episodic sentences with contrastive reading, and iv) episodic sentences without contrastive reading. The participants were divided into two groups: one group was tested in a version of the experiment that contained conditions (i), (ii) and (iii), while the other group judged constructions of conditions (i), (ii) and (iv). There were 6 test-items for each condition in each test.

The test-items we designed for testing conditions (iii) and (iv) were manipulated considering Menuzzi et al.'s proposal discussed above, which claims that bare singulars are possible if they are inserted in a context in which a statement about the kind is relevant. We achieved this by contrasting two groups of elements (our kinds) that are mentioned in the context. If this semantic/pragmatic restriction is on the right track, we expect a significant difference in acceptance rates for conditions (iii) and (iv), i.e., between the judgements of the group that judged constructions with contrastive reading and the group that judged constructions without the contrastive reading for the kinds.

Method. This was an acceptability judgment task, in which participants were presented to a puppet that was learning BrP. They listened to short stories presented on a computer screen. After the story was presented, the puppet would appear on screen and say something that happened (using a bare singular) and the participant had to judge the sentence as 'good' or 'weird'. Given that the puppet was learning the language, sometimes he said things the right way and sometimes he said them the wrong way. Judgments were recorded on video tapes and latter coded.

Materials. We present the translated versions of test-items for each condition below.

(13) Bare singular as the subject of a generic predicate

Context: It's Christmas time! Look how beautiful this Christmas tree is! It seems that Santa brought a lot of cool gifts for the children this year. Lots of toys! It seems Melissa didn't like her gift. She got a pair of socks, but she would like to get toys, like all the kids would love to. You know what? It wasn't Santa that brought socks for Melissa. Her granny did! Santa is coming and bringing toys for her right now! Melissa did not have to cry like that!

Test-item: Criança gosta de ganhar brinquedos.
child likes to get toys
'Children like to get toys'.

(14) Bare singular as the subject of a kind-predicate

Context: This is Jaqueline and this is her mom. Today, after school, Jaqueline had to go with her mom to the gym. While her mom was working out, Jaqueline did her homework. Every time someone entered the gym, they found it

weird to see Jaqueline there, since it is not that common to see kids in the gym. Usually only adult people can do workouts there.

Test-item: Criança não é comum na academia.
 child not is common in-the gym
 'It's not common to see children in the gym.'

(15) Bare singular as the subject of an episodic sentence

a. Contrastive reading

Context: A group of children went to a farm to play and to do some activities. While the teacher asked the girls to pick oranges in the orchard, the boys were asked to pick lemons. However, the orange trees were dry, so the girls ended up picking mangoes and the boys got to pick lemons.

b. No contrastive reading

Context: A group of boys went to a farm to play and to do some activities. Their teacher asked them to pick oranges in the orchard, but the orange trees were dry. No problem! The boys ended up finding a lemon tree in the orchard and they picked a lot of lemons instead.

Test-item (for both conditions): Menino colheu limões.
 boy picked lemons
 'The boys picked lemons.'

Observe that in the context with contrastive reading there are two *kinds* involved (boys and girls) that are engaged in different activities. This should bring a contrast between the two groups. In the context with no contrastive reading, the story does not mention two different *kinds*. Only boys are mentioned.

It is important to stress that participants from all groups judged exactly the same test-items in conditions (iii) and (iv). The only difference between what they heard was in the context. With respect to conditions (i) and (ii), all participants listened to the same contexts and test-items.

All items were randomized and the experiment also had distractors.

This between-subjects design led us to divide the groups of participants into two different groups: those who heard (13a) and those who heard (13b). 'Adult contrast', 'Chi_01 contrast' and 'Chi_02 contrast' all heard (13a), while 'Adult no contrast', 'Chi_01 no contrast' and 'Chi_02 no contrast' heard (13b).

Results. In table 2 below we summarize the results for the conditions we investigated. Remember that, for the Generic and Kind-predicate conditions, all of the groups heard exactly the same sentences, although we report the results separately (divided as 'Contrast' and 'No Contrast'). This separation is only relevant for the 'episodic' condition, where the sentences to be judged were the same, but the contexts preceding them were different, as explained above.

The table shows that adults and children had high rates of acceptance of bare singulars in the subject position of generic constructions. This is not surprising, as all of the previous studies we mentioned in sections 1 and 2 have claimed that

bare singulars are acceptable in this position. We also saw in the spontaneous production data in section 3 that adults produced some of these bare singulars and children produced 2 of them.

Table 2. Percentage of acceptance rates – all groups (N = 68)

	Generic	Kind predicate	Episodic
Adult Contrast (N = 12)	97%	92%	32%
Adult No Contrast (N = 12)	89%	80,5%	28%
Chi_01 Contrast (N = 9)	89%	67%	80%
Chi_01 No Contrast (N = 9)	89%	78%	67%
Chi_02 Contrast (N = 13)	85%	79%	67%
Chi_02 No Contrast (N = 13)	74%	70,5%	55%

Considering bare singulars as the subject of kind predicates, acceptance rates are a little lower than in the generic contexts, but still high. Although it seems that children tend to reject kind-predicate constructions at higher rates than adults, the difference between the judgments of these groups is not significant (a Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out, giving rise to the result: $H = 10,54$, $P = 0.061$).

As for bare singulars in the subject position of episodic sentences, the results show a clear difference between adults and children. Adults from both groups had low acceptance rates for these constructions (32% for the contrast group and 28% for the no contrast group), while children showed much higher rates of acceptance. In children's groups, the participants who heard the sentences after a contrastive context tended to accept these constructions at higher rates (80% for Chi_01 contrast x 67% for Chi_01 no contrast and 67% for Chi_02 contrast x 55% for Chi_02 no contrast).

In the table below, we provide the interactions for all of the groups, using the Mann-Whitney test. The asterisk indicates statistical relevance of group interactions. Let us consider first the shaded cells, which bring the interactions of groups that heard contrastive contexts versus the groups that heard contexts without contrast. All of them lack significance, indicating that contrast was not a relevant factor in improving the acceptability of bare singulars as subjects of episodic sentences.

Turning now to the other interactions, we see that there is significance when we compare all of the adults' groups results with those of the children's groups. This means that what is driving the differences is not the presence of a contrastive context, but age. Both groups of children behaved differently from adults and these differences were significant, irrespective of context. Children's acceptability rates were higher in the presence of a contrastive context, but the difference between the contrast groups and no contrast groups was not significant. Younger children behaved similarly to older children, as the lack of relevance in the p-values show. Children tend to accept bare singulars as subjects of all the sentence types we tested. Adults behaved differently, making a distinction

between generic and kind-denoting contexts on the one hand and episodic sentences on the other.

Table 3. P-values of the Mann-Whitney Test, conditions for episodic constructions (N = 68)

Group 1	Group 2	P-values
Adult Contrast	Adult No Contrast	0.5661
Adult Contrast	Chi_01 Contrast	0.0005*
Adult Contrast	Chi_01 No Contrast	0.0121*
Adult Contrast	Chi_02 Contrast	0.0114*
Adult Contrast	Chi_02 No Contrast	0.0493*
Adult No Contrast	Chi_01 Contrast	0.0002*
Adult No Contrast	Chi_01 No Contrast	0.0176*
Adult No Contrast	Chi_02 Contrast	0.0138*
Adult No Contrast	Chi_02 No Contrast	0.0936*
Chi_01 Contrast	Chi_01 No Contrast	0.2936
Chi_01 Contrast	Chi_02 Contrast	0.5081
Chi_01 Contrast	Chi_02 No Contrast	0.1020
Chi_02 Contrast	Chi_02 No Contrast	0.4353

5. Discussion

In this experimental study, we wanted to explore the following questions: (a) do children accept bare singulars in the subject position of generic, kind-denoting predicates and episodic sentences? and (b) are children sensitive to the contrastive context in episodic sentences?

The findings reported above suggest that adults and children accept bare singulars both as subjects of kind-predicates and of generic sentences. Thus, our results bring supporting evidence to Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein's (2011) analysis, which claims that bare singulars denote kinds in BrP.

Adults had a low rate of acceptance of bare singulars in subject position of episodic sentences. These results are in line with what has been claimed in other studies (Müller 2002, Müller & Oliveira 2004, Ionin et al. 2018), bringing additional supporting evidence that indeed these elements are not acceptable in this environment. Our results do not corroborate Menuzzi et al's (2015) claim that bare singulars in episodic sentences are licensed when they are used to answer the question under discussion brought by the context. Somehow, our experiment was not able to capture this contrast and future studies should explore this issue further.

Children over-accepted bare singulars as subjects of episodic sentences. Children's behavior indicates that by the age of 7;0, they have not yet acquired the full range of constructions related to bare singulars in BrP. What we see is that children accepted bare singulars in all of the environments at similar rates. Future studies should test older children in order to detect when adult behavior is reached.

6. Final remarks

In this paper, we investigated the acquisition of bare singulars in BrP. Spontaneous production data from one child acquiring the language and from her input indicate that bare singulars are somewhat frequent in BrP, but mostly in object position and as complement of prepositions. Our main interest was to observe bare singulars in subject position of generic sentences, kind-denoting predicates and episodic sentences. However, we found only a few productions of bare singulars in these positions both in the input and in the child's spontaneous productions. Children do produce bare singulars in subject position in generic sentences from an early age in an adult-like fashion, but bare singulars in subject position of episodic sentences were not adult-like, as they seem to be definite DPs lacking an overt definite determiner.

In our experimental study, we observed that adults accepted bare singulars in subject position of generic sentences and in kind-denoting predicates, but had a much lower percentage of acceptance in episodic sentences. The presence of a contrastive context did not improve their acceptance rates. Children behaved similarly to adults in generic sentences and in kind-denoting predicates, but differed from adults in sentences with bare singulars in episodic sentences, accepting them at higher rates, irrespective of contrast in the context.

Both spontaneous and experimental data are similar in showing that children are not adult-like with respect to bare singulars as the subject of episodic sentences. This is precisely the environment where most of the debate in the literature resides, as researchers have not yet fully grasped what are the licensing conditions (if any) for bare singulars in episodic sentences in adult BrP. The scarcity of this construction in the input adds another layer of complexity to this already intricate phenomenon, rendering the delay in its acquisition not surprising.

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