

Bare Nouns and DP Number Agreement in the Acquisition of Brazilian Portuguese¹

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to examine the acquisition of number agreement within the Determiner Phrase (DP) and its correlation to a particular parametric feature in Brazilian Portuguese (BP), that is, the existence of bare singular count nouns in argument position. Some of the questions to be addressed here involve what the relevant stages are in the acquisition of DP structure and number, as well as how children treat bare nouns.

We hypothesize that children go through three different stages in the course of development until convergence to adult grammar. In the first stage, the child assumes a *default* singular value for DPs, with the relevant features in D and Number unspecified; the second stage involves number distinction which becomes visible when plural is morphologically marked. Finally, the third stage involves a parametric marking due to the existence of a null determiner in the language, which renders the number feature on nouns unspecified in the target-grammar. We expect to find generic sentences with bare arguments in this last stage, which requires an extra step for children acquiring BP. Data from four children aged 1;8 to 3;7 were analyzed.

This paper is organized in the following way. In section two we will explore some empirical facts about the DP in BP, which will allow us to make a theoretical proposal and explore some predictions for language acquisition in section three. In section four we present our results and discuss them. We close the paper in section five with some final remarks.

2. Some empirical facts about the DP in BP

It is generally assumed that bare nominals tend to be restricted to plural and mass nouns in argument position, unless they are proper names (see Longobardi, 1994, 2002; Krifka, 2004; Chierchia, 1998; among others). Languages like Chinese would be an exception to such a generalization since they license bare nominals more freely, due to the lack of plural morphology and a determiner system (see Chierchia, 1998).^{2,3} In view of that, BP becomes an interesting language to be examined, since, despite having plural morphology and definite and indefinite articles which inflect for gender and number, it allows bare singular count nouns (BN) in argument positions, bearing both generic and existential readings depending on the predicate the BNs are associated with (see Schmitt & Munn, 1999; Kester & Schmitt, 2005; a.o.). Sentences in (1) are instances of BNs with a generic reading, while those in (2) display an existential reading.⁴

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² A discussion on the licensing of bare nominals among languages is far beyond the scope of this paper. See works cited here and references therein.

³ Another characteristic of such languages is that they have a classifier system. Chierchia's assumptions on Chinese-like languages are disputed by Rullmann & Aili You, 2003. We will return to this point.

⁴ The examples are grammatical adult-like sentences produced by the children examined here, although not always pragmatically plausible (see 1a).

- (1) a. **Menino** não tem nome. (G. 3;0)
 ‘Boy-sg not have name’
Boys don’t have names
- b. (Nenéns) gosta de **tomate**. (A. 2;3)
 ‘(Babies) like-3rd-sg of tomato-sg’
Babies like tomatoes.
- (2) a. Tem **caugu** (= carro) aí. (A. 1;8)
 ‘have-3rd-sg car-sg there’
There is/are a car/cars there.
- b. Eu tô penelando (= peneirando) **cenoura**. (A. 2;8)
 ‘I am straining carrot-sg’
I am straining carrots.

Despite the fact that the DPs in (1) and (2) are morphologically singular, their recovery through discourse anaphora shows that they behave differently in regards to number:

- (3) **Criança** gosta de doce. *Ela/elas sempre pede(m) para comprar.
 ‘Child likes of candy. She/they always ask(s) [] to buy []’
Children like candy. They always ask us to buy some for them.
- (4) Tem **maçã** na cesta. Ela/elas não ‘tava(m) madura(s), mas eu trouxe do mercado assim mesmo.
 ‘Have-3rd-sg apple in the fruit basket. It/they not was/were ripe, but I brought [] from the grocery store anyway’
There is “one or more apples” in the fruit basket. It/they was/were not ripe, but I brought it/them from the grocery store anyway

In (3) – a generic sentence – the anaphora has to be in the plural form, whereas in (4) – an existential construction – the DP can be recovered either by a singular or plural anaphora.⁵ We will extend Rullmann & Aili You’s (2003) proposal for Mandarin Chinese to PB, according to which, in that language, BNs with an existential reading bear general number. According to Corbett (2000: 16): [...]
the general/singular form of the noun, together with singular agreement, can be used for reference to one individual or more than one.

It is important to note that sentences like (4) are not ambiguous between a singular or plural reference, they are simply not specified for number, that is, number is neutral, as can be seen in elliptical constructions both in Mandarin Chinese (5) and PB (6):

- (5) Zuotin wo mai le shu. Yuehan ye mai le.
 ‘Yesterday I buy ASP book. Yuehan also buy ASP (“one or more books” each)’
- (6) Ontem eu comprei camisa e a Maria também. (Eu comprei uma e a Maria, dez.)⁶
 ‘Yesterday I bought shirt-sg and Mary (did) too. (I bought one and she bought ten shirts)’

Regarding number, a word on plural agreement is required: It can be marked in every element in the DP (7) – which we will call ‘redundant agreement’ – or only on the determiner (8) – ‘non-

⁵ Grammatical judgments are not categorical for generic sentences. Some speakers accept the singular anaphora as well, although in such cases the sentence still carries a generic reading.

⁶ One of the reviewers has claimed that (6) is in fact generic since it can be followed up by (i):

(i) As lojas já tinham vendido tudo

The stores had already sold everything

We disagree with the judgment. While (i) trully recovers a generic reading, it does not disallow the existential reading in (6). Shifting from an existential to a generic reading does not seem to be prevented in languages that license bare nouns:

(ii) There are bats in the ceiling (EX). Bats are extremely noisy (GEN).

redundant agreement'. The difference is rather a matter of colloquial or non-colloquial register in speakers of standard BP; therefore, both forms are robustly present in the input:

- (7) a. Os/estes/alguns/uns bonecos quebrados
 'the-pl / these/ some-pl /a-pl doll-pl broken-pl'
 The/these/some broken dolls
- (8) Imagina, com [essas perninhaØ gordaØ dela]!⁷
 ... 'these leg-little-sg fat-sg of hers'
 Just imagine having those little fat legs of hers!

The crucial point to take note of here is that plural marking appears at least on the determiner. There are no instances in the input where the plural marking is found on the noun, an ungrammatical option in the language:

- (9) * o livros
 the-sg book-pl

3. A theoretical proposal for BNs in BP and its predictions for language acquisition

We will follow Chomsky's (1998, 1999) standard assumptions about phi-features being interpretable on nouns and we will follow Carsten (2000), according to whom *Agree* should be extended as an operation which also takes place inside the DP. Therefore, the structure for a definite DP would be as in (10), excluding irrelevant details and features for the present discussion:

- (10) [DP [D [def] []# []gender] [NumP [Num []#] [NP [number] [gender]]]]

The interpretable features of the noun enter the derivation valued. The uninterpretable features on D and Num get valued through an *Agree* relation. D may probe N over Num because the latter is a phi-incomplete probe. Number is taken to be an optional head in the language, as proposed by Schmitt & Munn (1999). Their evidence for the optionality of the number head in BP comes from sentences like (3) where the discourse anaphora referring back to the bare singular nouns is always plural, despite the fact that the DP is singular, as has already been pointed out. Contrary to Schmitt & Munn (op. cit.) and Kester & Schmitt (2005), though, we will not assume a unified analysis for the BNs in BP. Our evidence, again, comes from the contrast between (3) and (4) above, where there is a clear distinction for number interpretation depending on whether the BN is generic or existential. Thus, we will follow Kester & Schmitt's (2005) proposal only for BNs derived in generic sentences. According to these authors, BP has a null expletive determiner (see Zubizarreta & Vergnaud, 1992) which functions as a kind creator, in Chierchia's (1998) terms, transforming count nouns into kinds for interpretation. Such a null expletive determiner does not select for NumP.^{8,9}

⁷ Child-directed speech.

⁸ In fact, BP has overt expletive determiners used with proper names – in most dialects – and in true kind predications:

(i) A Maria foi na casa do João
 'The-fem Mary went to_the-fem house of_the-masc John' (*Mary went to John's place*)

(ii) (A) rosa é uma flor.
 '(The-fem) rose is a flower'

⁹ Raposo (1998) has also proposed that there is a parametrical distinction between Portuguese and the other Romance languages, according to which the former has a null determiner (*null d*) in its lexicon, although he treats it as a null counterpart for the definite determiner. The author establishes a welcome generalization with his proposal: Null object languages will always present the null determiner. We will not explore this point here. It is important to note that European Portuguese, differently from BP, only licenses bare plural nouns in argument position.

As for the existential DPs, we suggest that they bear the same structure as indefinites having the indefinite determiner derived as the head of NumP (see Schaeffer, 1997; a.o.), either as an overt or a null article – the former bearing an [+indefinite] interpretable feature and the latter, an [-indefinite] one, and whose uninterpretable number feature can only be valued by a general number feature (see 5 and 6, above), while the overt indefinite determiner will be valued either as singular or plural for morphological spell-out.¹⁰

The analysis above allows us to predict that the child acquiring BP will go through three different stages, as hypothesized in the introduction. Throughout the first stage, a default singular value is attributed to DPs. This is the period during which the child will select the relevant features for D and Number. Until this selection process takes place, the features in D and Number remain unspecified in the child's grammar and will therefore not get valued in a derivation. Two other related phenomena should be expected during the first stage: (i) if there is any non-adult-like D-dropping in the child's grammar, it will appear; (ii) if there is any production of grammatical BNs, they should have an existential flavor, since the general number is realized as a singular form and might be interpreted as such by young children. The second stage involves number distinction and will be visible when plural morphology is marked.¹¹ Finally, the third stage involves acquiring the null expletive determiner and, therefore, converging to a grammar in which number is an optional head. Since the structure of such a DP triggers a complex semantic operation (type shifting), it is likely to delay the process. Needless to say, that is when BNs in generic sentences should appear in the child's production.

4. The acquisition of number and BNs

4.1. Participants and procedures

Spontaneous speech production from two children (A. & G.), ages 1;8-3;7, was examined and quantified. Data from two other children (C. 1;9 – 2;6 and S. 2;6 – 3;5) were examined but analyzed qualitatively only. All of the children, monolinguals exposed to standard BP, are daughters to monolingual parents with graduate-level education or beyond.¹² The children were taped at home, always in the presence of one of the parents, in playful naturalistic situations. Sessions lasted from 30 to 60 minutes.

Only DPs bearing some nominal lexicalized material other than single pronouns were analyzed in both argument and predicative positions. Since (i) we hypothesized different DP structures to be mapped for interpretation and (ii) bare nouns are dependent on the predicate they are associated with for interpretation, examining isolated DPs would be irrelevant for our purposes. Data were scored for statistical significance through chi-square tests and results will be discussed below.

Table 1 below presents the number of utterances analyzed for each child in the different files.

¹⁰ One of the differences between indefinites and existential BNs pointed out by Rullmann & Aili You (2003) and Kester & Schmitt (2005) has to do with scope. Existential BNs only have a narrow scope, while indefinites are ambiguous between a wide and a narrow scope (i and ii, respectively):

(i) Eu não vi mancha no chão.

'I not see spot-sg on-the floor' (I did not see one or more spots on the floor)

(ii) Eu não vi uma mancha no chão. ($\exists >$ or $\sim > \exists$)

I didn't see a spot on the floor.

¹¹ This does not imply that children cannot deal with numerosity. It has been extensively shown that young babies (6 to 12 months old) present a perceptual awareness of numerosity (see Xu, 2003; among many others). The singular/plural distinction, therefore, is not a cognitive matter but a linguistic one.

¹² I would like to thank CEAAL/PUCRS (Centro de Aquisição e Aprendizagem da Linguagem) for allowing me access to their database (A. & G.). The two children whose data will be analyzed qualitatively belong to my own database (C. & S.)

Children	AC	G	
Age	# of utterances		
1;8	4	-	4
1;10	18	17	35
2;1	51	47	98
2;3	84	112	196
2;8	154	50	204
3;0	172	117	289
3;6 – 3;7	70	114	184
Total	553	457	1010

Table 1: Number of utterances analyzed per child per file.

In order to assess children's comprehension of generic sentences, as well as their preference for a singular or a plural anaphora recovering the BNs in such sentences – the kind of data lacking from their production –, a *truth-value judgment task* (see Crain & Thornton, 1998) was applied to 9 children (mean age 3;1), although results from 2 children were disregarded due to performance at chance level. The acceptance of the plural anaphora would be indicative of their having figured out that Num is an optional head within the DP in the language.

Three stories testing target sentences such as (11) were tested in two conditions: recoverability by discourse anaphora in the singular and plural forms:

(11) Jogador é chato! Ele/eles tem medo de voar!

'Player-sg is annoying! He/they is/are afraid to fly!'

Soccer players are annoying! They are afraid to fly (on the magic carpet).

4.2. Results and Discussion

We will start our discussion by examining the grammaticality of the DPs used by both children in Table 1, in order to verify whether or not they go through an "NP-only stage" (see Radford, 1990) and whether they produce licit BNs from the onset. Let us compare Figures 1 and 2:

Figure 1: Mean percentage of DPs for both children with or without a Determiner

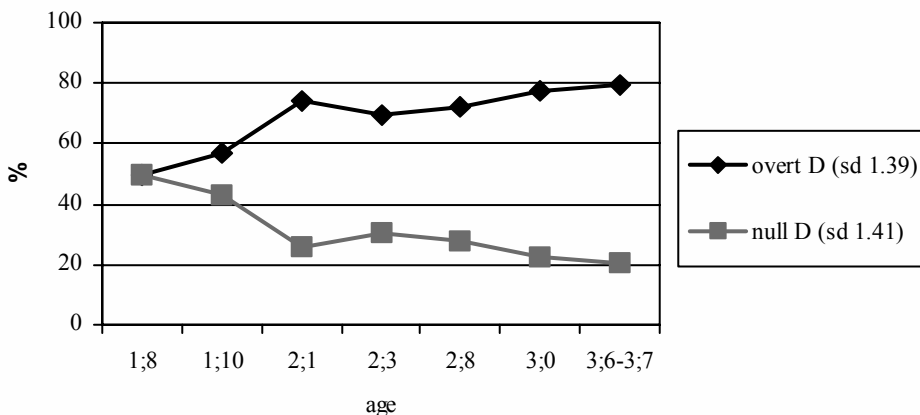


Figure 2: Mean percentage of (un)grammatical DPs and BNs for both children

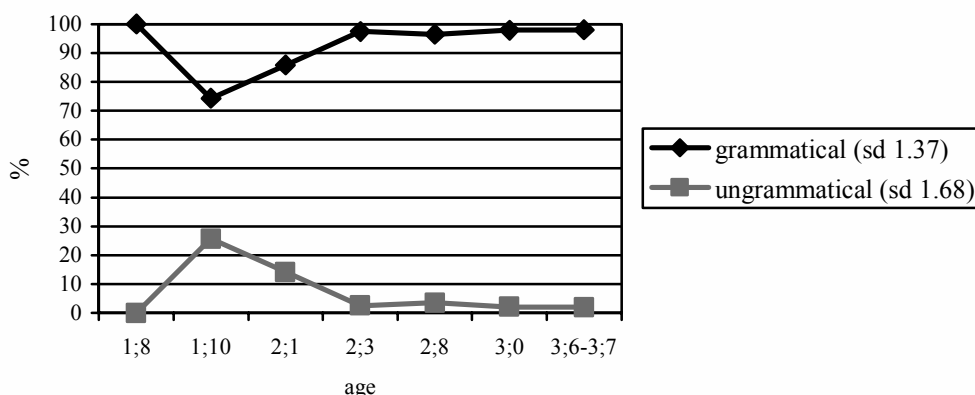


Figure 1 shows that overt determiners are produced since the first file examined. However, there is a significant increase in their production from the age of 2;1 on ($\chi^2 = 4.28$, $df = 1$). Figure 2 shows that although there are very few ungrammatical cases they tend to decrease and, in fact, go away within the same age span ($\chi^2 = 3.87$, $df = 1$) when overt Ds are produced in a more stable fashion.¹³ Thus, to have a clearer picture, we have crossed grammaticality results with determiner use:

	Grammaticality		Total
	✓	*	
Overt D	99,6	0,4	100
Null D	95,9	4,1	100
Total	965/1010 (95,5%)	45/1010 (4,5%)	100

Table 2: Mean percentage of (un)grammatical DPs and presence of determiner for both children

There are only 45 occurrences of DPs that were rated as ungrammatical (0/4, 9/35, 14/98 for the first three files examined, respectively). Most of them (41/45) are D-dropping cases of DPs in subject position or involve inalienable possession, such as in (12) and (13). The 4 occurrences of ungrammatical DPs with an overt determiner involve the overuse of a definite determiner under an existential predicate. In any event, these results reveal that the ungrammatical cases do not have to do with the production of BNs, but are instances of D-dropping that happen for independent reasons (see Lopes, 2003). It is also fair to claim that the children do not go through an “NP-only stage”, since they produce overt determiners starting from the first file examined, as the contrast in (14) reveals:

- (12) Adult: Quem é que te deu (o tênis)?
Who gave you the tennis shoes?
 Child: * **miguinha** (= amiguinha) deu. (A. 1;8)
(The/a/my) friend gave (it to me)
- (13) * Vai limpar **narizinho**. (A. 1;10)
 ‘[] go-3rd-sg clean nose-little’
I’ll clean the/my nose.
- (14) Adult: o globo tá aqui. (*the globe is here*)
 Adult: viu que bonito o globo? (*see how beautiful it is?*)
 Child: **bóia**. (*ball*) (A. 1;8)
 Child: **a bóia**. (*THE ball*) (A. 1;8)
 Adult: a bola. (*the ball*)

¹³ Grammaticality judgments of the children's utterances were rated by three adult native speakers other than myself.

Let us examine now the occurrences of the different determiners and other noun modifiers across ages:

	Bare Ns ^a	Definite Det.	Indefin. Det.	Demonstratives (+ N)	Possessives (+ N)	Numerals	Quantif.	Total
1;8	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	4
1;10	15	18	2	0	0	0	0	35
2;1	25	55	15	3	0	0	0	98
2;3	60	86	37	7	3	2	1	196
2;8	57	83	43	9	11	1	0	204
3;0	65	121	48	20	18	8	9	289
3;6-7	38	87	29	15	6	5	4	184
Total #	262	452	174	54	38	16	14	1010
Overall % ^b	25,9	44,8	17,2	5,3	3,8	1,6	1,4	100

Table 3: Use of different “determiners” across age (# of occurrences)

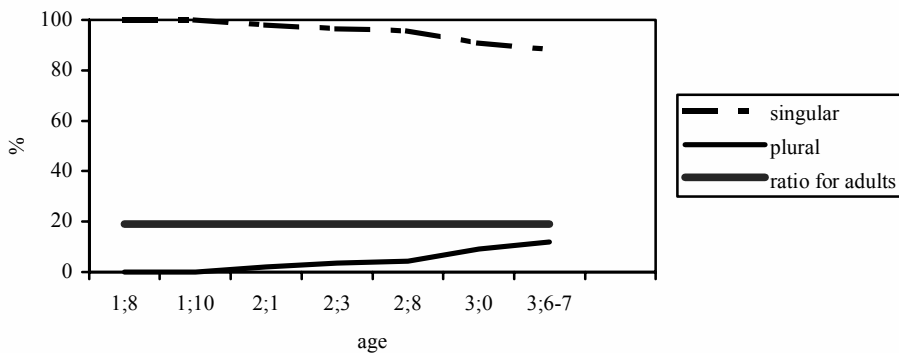
^aGrammatical and ungrammatical instances; ^bOverall % for each type of category

The most striking result in Table 3 has to do with the significant use of definite determiners, followed by the BNs. Another interesting result is the fact that the indefinite determiners kick in later than the bare and definite DPs. Again, the age span between 2;1 and 2;3 seems to be the turning point for the acquisition of the DP structure in BP, which has yet to be confirmed in relation to the appearance of number morphology other than the singular form.

The fact that both children produce adult-like BNs – cases of existential DPs, as we will see below – before they produce indefinite determiners seems to constitute evidence that they treat them differently. This is a welcome result that supports our predictions made in section 3. Müller & Schmitt (forthcoming) have investigated the comprehension of existential BNs and indefinite DPs by children acquiring Chilean Spanish and have concluded that “like Spanish-speaking adults, Spanish-speaking children distinguish between bare singulars and indefinites, which indicates that 4-6 year old children understand the scopeless nature of bare singulars and the ambiguity of indefinites.” (p. 10)

Let us turn now to the results regarding the morphological marking for number within the DPs.

Figure 3: Mean percentage of singular and plural DPs for both children across age *vs.* a baseline for plural DPs in adults (child-directed speech)



In order to establish whether or not the use of singular forms by the child was non-expected, we have drawn a baseline for the adults interacting with the children. Considering all the files examined, a proportion between singular and plural forms was established. The results in Figure 3 show that both children start out producing only singular forms – which include here both existential BNs and other morphologically singular DPs –, and even up to the last file examined they still have not reached the same proportion of plural forms as the adults. Once again, the age span in which plural forms start to be produced is the same in which an increase in determiner use is observed, together with a decrease in

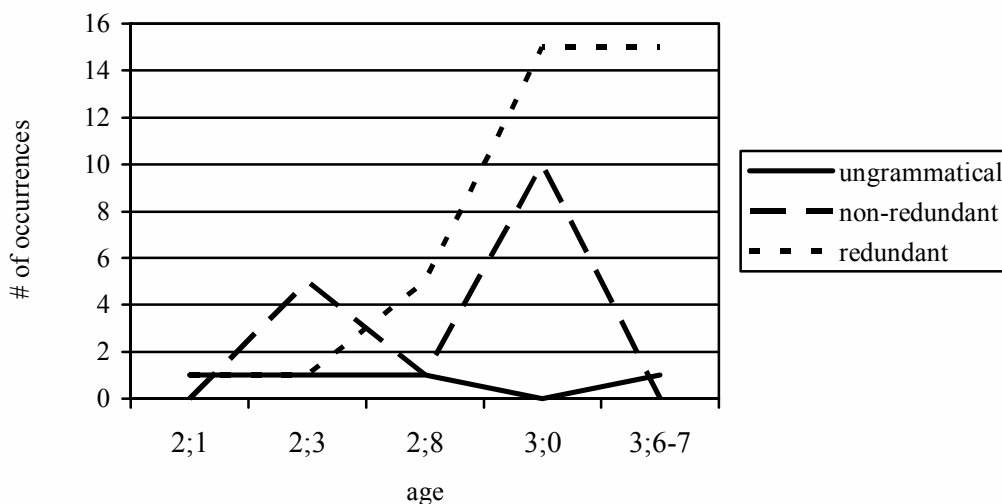
ungrammatical forms (Figures 1 and 2); although, statistically, the relevant differences occur from age 2;8 on ($\chi^2 = 4.29$, $df = 1$).¹⁴ We could claim that the first stage proposed is corroborated, given the high percentages of singular DPs found.

We should recall that the second stage was predicted to involve visible morphological number distinction when plural forms were attested in the children's production, supposedly around 2;1-2;3 years of age, according to Figure 3. However, looking at the data more closely, what we see is that the four children start out by marking the plural morpheme on the noun only – the ungrammatical form not found in the input – a strategy that survives until the last age examined:

- (15) a hienas (C. 2;4)
'the-sg hyena-pl'
- (16) Meu chinelinhos (C. 2;6)
'my-sg slipper_little-pl' (*my small slippers*)¹⁵
- (17) Ela tem um cabelos comp(r)idos (G. 3;7)
'She has a hair-pl long-pl' (*She's got long hairs*)

The next question, thus, was whether or not this was a previous stage to the adult-like forms or whether it co-occurred with the redundant and non-redundant morphological markings within the DP, as presented in the input. The latter option is the pattern for both children. In other words, at age 2;1, they start producing both the ungrammatical and redundant agreement; the non-redundant forms are verified at age 2;3. Slowly, the ungrammatical forms give way to the redundant and non-redundant patterns, but are still found in the last age examined (3;7):

Figure 4: Patterns of plural agreement (# of occurrences)



Corrêa, Name & Ferrari-Neto (2003) applied a picture selection task to 11 children from 1;8 to 2;4 years of age, testing number agreement in three conditions: ungrammatical, non-redundant and redundant. Although the results approximate one another, children fared better in the ungrammatical condition (53%), than in the non-redundant (48%) and redundant pattern (43%). Examining production and comprehension data with similar results leads us to consider that children are still having trouble with their grammar representation. Nevertheless, what poses a problem for language acquisition theories is how to explain the optionality found in their grammar output.

¹⁴ Ages 2;1, 2;3 and 2;8 do not exhibit significant differences amongst each other; therefore we have grouped them together against ages 3;0 and 3;6-7, obtaining $\chi^2 = 17.18$, $df = 1$.

¹⁵ The child is referring to three different pairs of slippers lined side by side on the floor.

A plausible explanation for the non-target like forms has to do with the fact that children seem to mark the plural morpheme in the category where it is interpretable, i.e., in the noun.¹⁶ However, this still does not explain why such forms appear together with the expected ones. Under the assumption that the number feature on D and Num is unspecified at first, they could get valued or not, but if not, one should expect the DP to be spelled-out as singular, according to our predictions, which is not the case at hand. Unfortunately, we will leave the matter open here and turn back to our results on BNs.

Our prediction that existential BNs would emerge prior to generic ones is borne out:

	Existential	Generics	Total
1;8	2	0	2
1;10	4	2	6
2;1	5	4	9
2;3	36	7	45
2;8	23	21	44
3;0	38	23	61
3;6-7	19	3	22
Total	127	60	187

Table 4: Existential and generic forms across ages for both children (# of occurrences)

Existential readings are found from the first file examined, although they become consistent at age 2;3 on. Generics, on the other hand, become consistent only at age 2;8, coincidentally when plural forms start to increase (see Figure 3). In fact, 73.3% of all the generic instances are concentrated in the age groups 2;8 and 3;0.

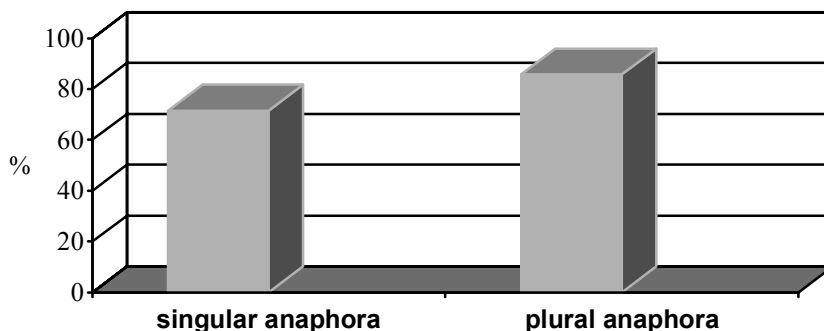
Regarding the use of count or mass nouns in BN constructions, there is a fair balance between the uses of both of them with existential BNs (56/127 for count nouns against 71/127 for mass nouns). As for generics, most of them are cases of count nouns (47, versus 13 cases of mass nouns in 60 generic BNs). It does not seem to be the case that young children go around making statements about *how good milk is for one's health* or *how rice is fattening*. As for number, there are only 6 cases of plural BNs (6/187). This is expected, since adults tend to rate plural bare forms as extremely formal, thus they are unlikely to be robust in the input.

Finally, we are left with the third stage predicted: Number as an optional head in the language. In order to test how children interpret number in generic sentences and whether or not they comprehend a generic reading, a Truth-value judgment task was applied (see 4.1.).

Out of the seven children who responded adequately to the experiment, 6 of them accepted both the singular and the plural anaphora. Only the oldest child (3;11) rejected the singular anaphora in all answers. All of them, though, showed the expected generic understanding of the target sentence (see 11) – what was assessed on the follow up questioning of the experiment, when children had to tell “what happened in the stories”.

¹⁶ As one reviewer has pointed out, the ungrammatical forms in Brazilian child language are the adult forms in languages like English and could thus be considered a *default* option. We will not explore this here. The same reviewer has also observed that if the DP contains a numeral (> 1), the interpretable feature has to be in the numeral. In fact, such cases are found in the last two files where an increase in the redundant forms is observed.

Figure 5: % of acceptable answers for the tested conditions



These results seem to support the hypothesis that this last stage poses a problem for the acquisition of languages like BP. There is a conflict between syntactic information mapped into a morphologically singular DP and the semantic interpretation, which requires type shifting, turning a singular count noun into a kind. However, it could be that most children tested behave like some adults by accepting both the singular and the plural discourse anaphora (see ft. 5). A control test with adults would allow us to consider such a possibility.¹⁷

5. Summary

We have shown that children go through three different stages during the acquisition process:

(1) There is a high production of singular DPs (definite and indefinite), together with the production of bare nouns bearing an existential reading. During this stage, all the ungrammatical D-dropping cases are found; despite the fact that they do not constitute a prior stage where the production of determiners could be attested;

(2) The morphologically plural DPs are not produced from the onset. However, one has to bear in mind that the distinction between *n* or *n+n* seems to be a linguistic matter only, probably involving complex syntactic and semantic operations that delay the process. Surprisingly, though, children produce plural forms not found in their input – which could plausibly be explained by their morphologically spelling-out a feature on the category where it is interpretable. Yet, there is no clear-cut transition period between producing such a pattern and the target-like patterns. On the contrary, they coexist. There is not even an absolute pattern among the four children examined. Only one of them, C., exhibited a previous “ungrammatical-only” stage before starting to produce the other patterns, while the ungrammatical cases could still be found. And only one child, S., grew out of the ungrammatical stage into the target-like forms through an across-the-board strategy;

(3) The fact that BP licenses generic sentences with bare singular count nouns to be taken to constitute a delay factor for the acquisition of number within the DP, considering, at least, total convergence to the adult grammar. To support this claim, comparative results of the acquisition process of languages that bear different properties would have to be considered. An issue that will remain open here. In any event, our results show a very instigating relation between the onset of production of generic sentences as a posterior event to the production of overt plural marking on DPs. On the other hand, our experiment showed that, although children interpret generic sentences as such, they still oscillate between a singular and a plural anaphora as options for the recoverability of the generic BN. One has to further consider that generic sentences are quite constrained by aspectual issues that are quite fine-grained. More investigation is needed on that.

Finally, the fact that the children examined here do not produce existential BNs and indefinites simultaneously deserves a note. This indicates a possible differentiation children make between the

¹⁷ This last point was brought to our attention by one of the reviewers, who has also pointed out that it could be the case that young children still do not clearly tease apart the existential from the generic reading. Further testing would be necessary for this possibility to be evaluated.

two phenomena. Experimental studies in BP are necessary to confirm their comprehension of the two constructions. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider that language acquisition descriptions such as these can be decisive for grammatical theories, since they allow us to confront conflicting theories on the matter.

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