Bangla Associative Plural -ra: A Cross-linguistic Comparison with Chinese men and Japanese -tachi

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1. Introduction

Typologically, associative plurals have been reported to be ‘exceptional’ plural markers that attribute to their nominals a ‘group’ reading, instead of a ‘sum’ reading pertaining to the regular plurals (Moravcsik 1994, Corbett 2000). For example, in Hungarian, a proper noun with the associative plural marker -ék denotes a group comprised of the referent of the proper noun and associated members (friends, family, etc.), whereas, the same proper noun marked with the plural marker -ok refers to a sum of referents who have the same name (Corbett 2000). Crosslinguistically, associative plurals are found to be restricted to pronouns, proper names and human nouns, with the focal referent interpreted as definite (Vassilieva 2005). Mandarin Chinese men and Japanese -tachi/tati have been analyzed as associative plural markers (Li 1999, Ishii 2000, Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Hosoi 2005, Kurafuji 2004, Nakanishi & Ritter 2008, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008, Ochi 2012 a.o.). Similarly, Bangla1 -ra has been argued to be an associative plural marker (Chacón 2011, Dasgupta 2013, Dayal to appear). It shares several properties with Mandarin men and Japanese -tachi. I discuss the associative plurals of Bangla in comparison to Mandarin and Japanese, with a particular focus on their compatibility with generic predicates and their (in)definite interpretations, two issues that have remained not well understood. I offer novel data that suggests that associative plurals in Bangla can also be interpreted as definite descriptions. Additionally, I show that the availability of the (in)definite interpretation of the associative plural-marked nouns in these languages regulate their compatibility with generic predicates. Finally, I suggest a new analysis of the structure of associative plurals that accounts for the data presented in the literature and the new data in this paper.

In Section 2, I discuss the associative plurals in Bangla in comparison to Mandarin men and Japanese -tachi. I present data in Bangla that shows that the associative plural-marked noun phrases are not necessarily indefinite in Bangla. Section 3 discusses the compatibility of associative plural-marked noun phrases with generic predicates. I present the analysis in section 4. I explain the relation between (in)definiteness and compatibility with generic predicates. Section 5 concludes with questions for future research.

2. Associative plurals and (in)definite interpretations


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1 Bangla is spoken in parts of India and Bangladesh. Data in this paper represent a variety spoken near Kolkata, India.
Mandarin *men* and Japanese *-tachi*\(^2\) (Li 1999, Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008, a.o.). As typologically attested for an associative plural, a proper noun with *men* (Mandarin), *-tachi* (Japanese) or *-ra* (Bangla) is interpreted as a group represented by the referent of the proper noun. A similar interpretation obtains when these markers combine with pronouns. However, when associative plurals co-occur with human\(^3\) common nouns, the resulting interpretation is similar to that of regular plural markers. Relevant examples are in (1)-(3), Mandarin and Japanese ex. from Ueda & Haraguchi (2008).

(1) a. rito-ra (Bangla) b. xiaoqiang-men (Mandarin) c. taro-tachi (Japanese) 
   Rito-nam-RA XiaoQiang-MEN Taroo-TACHI
   ‘Rito and others’ ‘XiaoQiang and others’ ‘Taro and others’

(2) a. am-ra (Bangla) b. wo-men (Mandarin) c. watashi-tachi (Japanese) 
   I-RA I-MEN I-TACHI
   ‘we’ ‘we’ ‘we’

(3) a. chatro-ra (Bangla) b. xuesheng-men (Mandarin) c. gakusei-tachi (Japanese) 
   student-RA student-MEN student-TACHI
   ‘(the) students’ ‘(the) students’ ‘(the) students’

Common nouns co-occurring with associative plurals have been argued to be definite in Mandarin (Li 1999, Cheng & Sybesma 2005, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008, a.o.), whereas in Japanese, they can be either indefinite or definite depending on the context (Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008 a.o.). Bangla *-ra*-marked nouns have been reported to be indefinite (Dasgupta 1983, Chacón 2011, Dayal 2012, to appear). I present data that shows that Bangla *-ra*-marked common nouns can also have a definite interpretation. Consider the following examples.

(4) a. tin-Te bacca aSbe. *bacca-ra / OKbacca-gulo okhane boSbe
   Three-cla child will-come. child-RA/ child-GULO there will-sit
   ‘Three children will come. The children will sit there.’ (Dayal to appear: ex. (61a))

   b. tin-jon mohila aSben. OKmohila-ra/#mohila-gulo okhane boSben
   three-cla hum lady will-come. lady-RA / lady-GULO there will-sit
   ‘Three ladies will come. The ladies will sit there.’

   c. tin-jon oddhapOk aSben. OKoddhapOk-era/#oddhapOk-gulo okhane boSben
   three-cla hum professor will-come. professor-RA / professor-GULO there will-sit
   ‘Three professors will come. The professors will sit there.’

Based on the judgments in (4a), Dayal concludes that NP-*ra* is interpreted as indefinite. Indeed, with a common noun like *bacca* ‘child’, the plural *-gulo* is preferred in anaphoric contexts. However, minimal adaptation of (4a) shows that *-ra* is compatible with a definite interpretation for common nouns, as shown in (4b-c). In these cases, *-gulo* (also *-Te*, in (4a)) has a pejorative interpretation (Dasgupta 2013) and so *-ra* is preferred. Kinship terms and profession names\(^4\) prefer *-ra* as the plural marker in episodic contexts where *-gulo* has a pejorative interpretation. Crosslinguistically, profession

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\(^2\) Ghosh 2010 and Dayal to appear compare Bangla plural marker *-gulo* with Mandarin *men* and Japanese *-tachi*. Although *-gulo* shares some plural properties with *men* and *-tachi*, it is categorically different from associative plurals. See Biswas to appear and Dayal to appear for details.

\(^3\) Anthropomorphized non-human nouns in Mandarin and Bangla can appear with associative plurals (Katherine Huang, p.c., for Mandarin)

\(^4\) Dayal’s (to appear) judgments in (4a) perhaps reflect a preference for *-gulo* over *-ra*. My informants (5 in number) find both *-gulo* and *-ra* acceptable. In case of high level occupations (e.g., professor, officer etc.) and kinship terms (e.g., uncle, nephew etc.), they prefer *-ra* over *-gulo*. 
names, referred to as ‘capacities’, are shown to behave differently from other common nouns (see de Swart et al. 2007 for details). Additional evidence for a definite reading comes from -ra-marked common nouns co-occurring with numeral-classifier constructions. In (5), the numeral classifier serves as additional information on the referents of the nouns. The numeral specifies the maximal cardinality of the group. The whole noun phrase is interpreted as definite. This environment is found in Mandarin as well (see Jiang 2012). Additionally, note that, for Bangla, only the human classifiers are allowed in these constructions.

(5) thana theke kichu peyada paThalo. peyeda-ra tin-jon elo police-stn from few constable sent. constable-RA three-cla_hum came ‘The police station sent few constables. The constables, three in number, came.’

The (in)definite interpretation of -ra is similar to that of -tachi in Japanese. The above examples suggest that the associative plural markers in Bangla and Japanese are not inherently associated with a strict definite or indefinite interpretation. Only in Mandarin, a common noun with men is always interpreted as definite. But even in Mandarin, in the presence of a group classifier, an indefinite reading is possible (e.g., in Mandarin three Cl_pie=student-men, see Jiang 2012 for examples and details). This shows that definiteness is not an inherent property of associative plurals (unlike claims in Vassilieva 2005). Next, we will explore the compatibility of the associative plurals with generic interpretations.

3. Associative plurals and generic interpretations

Languages without determiners usually have bare nouns as arguments to generic predicates, as attested in Bangla, Chinese and Japanese (Dayal 2004). Nonetheless, the associative plurals in these languages, to some extent, can also be arguments to generic predicates. Consider Bangla for example. The -ra-marked animate common noun is compatible with both types of generic predicates: kind-predicates and characterizing predicates. Nouns that are compatible with kind predicates, such as be extinct, be rare etc. are kind terms, referring to an entity that is related to a species, or a ‘well-defined’ class, e.g., Dodo birds. Characterizing predicates, on the other hand, are generalizations about sets of entities or situations (Krifka 1995). While the generic interpretation comes from the nouns in kind predicates, it is attributed to a sentence level generic operator for the characterizing predicates in the literature. A kind term in English can be represented by a definite singular noun or a bare plural, as shown in (6a), whereas, arguments of characterizing predicates are represented by (in)definite singulars and bare plurals, as in (6b).

(6) a. {The dodo/Dodos} is/are extinct. [Kind]
   b. {The elephant/An elephant/Elephants} is/are an intelligent animal(s). [Characterizing]

Bangla -ra-marked nouns can be arguments to kind and characterizing predicates (Dayal to appear). In kind predicates, -ra is optional, regardless of the type of nouns, as shown below.

(7) a. DoDo-(ra) Obolupto (hoye gEche) [Kind, non-human]
   dodo-RA extinct become ‘Dodos are extinct.’

b. chatro-(ra) Obolupto (hoye gEche) [Kind, common noun]
   student-RA extinct become ‘Students are extinct.’

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5 One speaker (out of 9) found this construction questionable. Some speakers find it ambiguous between a definite reading and a covert partitive reading. For example, in the scenario where three boys from a group of players are selected for a match, chele-ra tin jon khelbe ‘three boys will play’ is interpreted as ‘boys, three of them, will play.’
c. Daktar-(ra) Obolupto (hoye gEche) [Kind, capacity]
doctor-RA extinct become
‘Doctors are extinct.’

Nonetheless, Bangla -ra poses a restriction on the type of human nouns with characterizing predicates. -ra is mandatory with capacity nouns, but is optional with any other common animate noun. Consider (8).

(8) a. hati-(ra) buddhiman (prani) [Characterizing, non-human]
elephant-RA intelligent (animal)
‘Elephants are intelligent (animals).’

b. puruS-(ra) SoktiSali (hOn) [Characterizing, human]
man-RA powerful be
‘Men are powerful’

c. Daktar-*(ra) SOhomorni (hOn) [Characterizing, capacity]
doctor-RA compassionate be
‘Doctors are compassionate.’

It has been claimed that Mandarin NP-men cannot be arguments to generic predicates (Iljic 1994 a.o.). Recently, Jiang (2012) showed that Mandarin NP-men can be arguments to characterizing predicates, but they cannot be arguments to kind predicates. Consider (9).

(9) a. hao nanren(*/??-men) yijing kuai juezhong le. [Kind]
good man-MEN already soon extinct asp
‘Good men are becoming extinct very soon.’

b. haizi-men shi zuguo de weilai. [Characterizing]
child-MEN is nation De future
‘Children (in general) are the future of our nation.’ (ex. from Jiang 2012)

The availability of Japanese -tachi-marked common nouns with generic predicates is also debated. Although Nakanishi & Tomioka (2004) claim that -tachi marked nouns are ‘hardly available’ with generic predicates, data from native speakers (by Hajime Hoji, 7 speakers) confirms that NP-tachi can be arguments to characterizing generic predicates. However, the availability of the same with kind predicates is only possible with modified nouns, not the ‘well-established kinds’.

(10) a. ziipan-o haita bokusi-tachi-wa mezurasii [Kind]
blue-jeans wore priest-TACHI-top rare
‘Priests who wear blue jeans are rare.’ (Hajime Hoji, p.c.)

b. Itariazin-tachi-wa yooki-da [Characterizing]
Italian-TACHI-top cheerful-Cop
‘Italians are cheerful.’

The data from Bangla, Mandarin and Japanese show that the associative plural marked nouns in all these three languages can be arguments to characterizing predicates. Additionally, unlike Mandarin, Bangla -ra-marked nouns are also fully compatible with kind predicates, whereas only modified nouns are compatible in Japanese. Since modified nouns do not refer to the species, but a modified part of it,

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6 Dayal (to appear) shows that both common nouns and capacity nouns cannot appear bare in generic predicates (ex. 67-68). I specify that the restriction only applies to the bare capacity nouns in characterizing predicates.

7 Speakers of Mandarin prefer bare capacity nouns with characterizing predicates (Iris Ouyang, p.c.).
they cannot be kind terms. Thus, Bangla -ra is different from men and -tachi in at least two aspects: (a) NP-ra can denote a kind, while NP-men or NP-tachi do not, (b) -ra is mandatory with capacity noun subjects with characterizing predicates, while no such restriction is evident in Mandarin or Japanese. The next section presents my analysis along with summaries of previous analyses.

4. Towards the proposal

4.1. (In)definiteness and associative plurals

Li (1999) analyzes Mandarin men as a plural marker, similar to English -s, proposing that men is situated at D0. Thus, definiteness is a structural consequence. Nakanishi & Tomioka (2004) present a semantic account for Japanese -tachi, according to which it is a non-uniform pluralizer that includes exceptions in the set of referents represented by the NP-tachi. Such NPs cannot be arguments to generic predicates as genericity requires uniformity in the denotation. Den Besten (1997) and Vassilieva (2005) argue for a part-whole relation between the referent and the associates of the associative plural. This account does not satisfactorily explain the cases of generic interpretations, and also predicts a necessary definite interpretation of the associative plurals. Dayal (to appear) presents a detailed analysis of Bangla -ra. With the standard assumption of the neo-Carlsonian framework that bare nouns are kind terms, Dayal argues that -ra is an identity function on animate kind terms. This allows -ra-marked NPs to be arguments to generic or kind predicates. The function from kind to kind renders the NP to be of type e and rules out any further covert type shifting for a definite, predicting that NP-ra is interpreted as indefinite. Although the generalization explains how -ra-marked nouns can be arguments to generic and kind predicates, it would fail short of cross-linguistic facts. If Mandarin men and Japanese -tachi were identity functions, similar to -ra; they would be incorrectly predicted to appear as subjects to kind predicates. Adopting Nakanishi & Tomioka’s (2004) approach to Japanese -tachi, Jiang (2012) analyses Mandarin men as an associative plural. It is defined as a function from kinds to salient groups. Both definite and generic readings in this account are ascribed to the iota operator. When the iota operator ranges over a particular situation, NP-men is interpreted as definite, whereas ranging over all situations results in the generic interpretation. This account predicts that the common noun with men always will be interpreted as definite, and so it cannot be extended to Japanese or Bangla because the associative plural marked nouns in these languages can receive indefinite interpretations.

Let us now take a closer look at NP-ra, in comparison to NP-tachi and NP men. A common noun with -ra cannot occur in the predicative position8, neither can it co-occur with possessive ‘have’. This is also the case for men and -tachi, as exemplified in (11). This is possibly because they all can be definite expressions or, NP-ra and NP-tachi can be specific indefinites (Dayal to appear). Thus, none of NP-ra/men/-tachi can be property-denoting expressions.

(11) a. ram-er {bacca/ *bacca-ra} ache [Bangla]
Ram-gen child child-RA have
‘Ram has children.’

b. you { ren/*ren-men } have [Mandarin]
person/ person-MEN
‘There is/are some person(s)’ (Iljic 1994: 94, ex. (8))

c. *?Inoue-san-ni-wa kodomo-tachi-ga {iru / aru} [Japanese]
Inoue-Mrs-Dat-Top child-TACHI-Nom {existiru / existaru}
‘Mrs. Inoue has children’ (Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004: 116)

Furthermore, as Dayal (to appear) points out, although NP-ra is similar to the bare plurals in English, the generalization does not hold with respect to negation. English bare plurals have narrow

8 In predicative position, only the bare noun is allowed, e.g., Ram ar SEm {SikkhOk/*SikkhOk-ra} ‘Ram and Shyam are (the) teachers.’
scope in the presence of a negative operator; whereas, -ra-marked nouns have wide scope, as in (12). Similar facts are seen in Japanese (Hosoi 2005) and Mandarin (Li 1999). Again, the definiteness or the specific indefinite reading of NP-ra, NP-men and NP-tachi might be at work here.

(12) a. ekhane bacca nei here child be-neg ‘There isn’t any child here.’
    b. ekhane bacca-ra nei here child-RA be-neg ‘The children aren’t here.’

Definiteness in Bangla is extensively argued relating to the syntax of NP-fronting across the numeral classifier (Dasgupta 1983, Chacón 2010, Simpson 2011, Biswas 2012, Dayal 2012, to appear). The literature follows Bhattacharya (1999 et seq) who first attributed the NP-fronting to specificity. Spec, DP is the landing site of the NP when the D⁰ has a strong definite feature. Regardless of the status of -gulo as a classifier (Dayal to appear) or a number marker (Biswas 2013), NP-fronting is the only way to achieve definiteness. The NP-movement for the definite description chele-gulo ‘the boys’ in a layered DP structure is shown in (13). Apparently, similar NP-fronting also applies to -ra, given that it can be associated with a definite interpretation for a common noun.

(13) [DP chele [NumP [-gulo][ClP ∅ [NP chele-]]]] (structure for -gulo, as in Biswas 2013)

The fronting is also evident in Mandarin. In both languages, whenever the associative plural marked pronoun or proper noun co-occurs with a numeral classifier, the NP-ra/ men must precede the numeral-classifier, as in (14). Since Japanese is a floating quantifier language fronting is not obvious.

(14) {rito-ra/ o-ra} tin-jon maTh-e khelche [Bangla]
    Rito-RA/ he-RA three-clα num field-loc playing
    ‘Rito & others, three in number, are playing in the field.’
    ‘They, three in number, are playing in the field.’

On the basis of the uniformity of the -ra-marked common nouns with the proper nouns and pronouns with respect to the numeral classifier constructions and their interpretations regarding the associative and the definite readings, I argue that Bangla -ra, and essentially all associative plurals, are merged higher in the DP structure. Following Chacón (2011), I propose that -ra is situated above the DP. -ra takes a DP complement in a functional projection, namely the -raP. The DP moves to the Spec, -raP for phonological reasons. It has been claimed in the literature that Bangla -ra has clitic-like properties and requires a lexical item to its left (Ghosh 2010, Dayal 2012, to appear). The two structures, Figure 1 and Figure 2, account for the fact that NP-ra could be definite or indefinite. For the definite reading of NP-ra, as has been discussed earlier, the NP moves to the Spec, DP in the presence of a strong definite feature [+def] in the D⁰. The DP then moves to the Spec, -raP to satisfy the phonological requirement. If the D⁰ is not specified with a strong definite feature, the NP does not move to Spec, DP. The whole DP still moves to Spec, -raP. The indefinite interpretation comes from existential closure.

Figure 1: Definite NP-ra

Figure 2: Indefinite NP-ra
In support of my proposal, note the following. First, the fact that pluralization of pronouns involves associative plurals cross-linguistically (Corbett 2000, Moravcsik 2003), or, in other words, the fact that plural pronouns are inherently associative (e.g., *we* = ‘I and you/others’), similarly to the proper nouns, suggests that associative plurals are different than regular number marking. This also hints that the associative plural is not situated at the level of NumP, rather higher in the structure. Secondly, as Chacón (2011) points out for Bangla -*ra*, pronouns and proper nouns conjoin with -*ra*. Pronouns and proper nouns are considered D-elements (Longobardi 1994). Third, the universal determiners (e.g., *prottek* ‘each’ and *SOb* ‘all’) also co-occur with the NP-*ra*, likewise the numerals. However, they co-occur only when the determiners have incorporated an agentive marker, as in (15a). In the fronted word order, NP-*ra* can co-occur with weak determiners (e.g., some, few), however, the determiners must be marked with human features (e.g., attaching to a human classifier etc.), as in (15b). The base order is for all determiners with the bare noun is Num/Q NP, e.g., *SOb chele* ‘all boy’, *prottek chele* ‘each boy’, *kichu chele* ‘few boys’, *kOyek-jon chele* ‘a few boys’ etc.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(15) a. & chatro-ra \{prottek-e/SOb-ai\} paS koreche} & & \text{[Universal quantifier]} \\
& \text{student-RA \{each-agt/ all-agt\} pass did} & & \text{‘Each of the students passed (the test).’} \\
& \text{‘All of the students passed (the test).’} \\
\text{b. & chatro-ra \{kOyek-jon / *kichu\} paS koreche} & & \text{[Weak quantifier]} \\
& \text{student-RA few-C\text{human} / some pass did} & & \text{‘The students, few in number, passed (the test).’} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Consider the morphological forms of the universal determiners in the following. The ‘standalone’ form, i.e., *SOb-ai* ‘all’, which also co-occurs with NP-*ra*, incorporates an agentive marker in Bangla.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(16) & \{prottek-e/SOb-ai\} / *\{prottek/SOb\} paS koreche} & & \\
& \text{each-agt/ all-agt each/all-agt pass did} & & \text{‘All passed (the test).’} \\
& \text{‘Each (of them) passed (the test).’} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Similar phenomenon of changing morphological forms of the determiner due to syntactic movement is seen in Hebrew. The morphological form of the Hebrew universal determiner changes when it moves and incorporates an agreement clitic, as exemplified in (17a,b) (originally, due to Shlonsky 1991 for Hebrew, cf. Sportiche 1988 for French).

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(17) a. & kol ha-yeladim halxu la-yam} & & \\
& \text{ALL the-child.masc.pl went to-the-sea} & & \text{‘All the children went to the sea.’} \\
\text{b. & ha-yeladim (kul-am) halxu (kul-am) la-yam} & & \\
& \text{the-child.masc.pl ALL.3.masc.pl went ALL.3.masc.pl to-the-sea} & & \text{‘The children all went to the sea.’} & & \text{(Spector 2009: 521, ex (2))} \\
\end{align*}
\]

I suggest similar movement for Bangla. Bhattacharya et al. (2006) suggests that a DP is projected with universal/strong quantifiers, rather than a NumP. Thus, *SOb* ‘all’ and *prottek* ‘each’ are situated higher than a DP and select the DP as a complement. The DP moves to a functional projects for incorporating the agreement clitic, similarly to Hebrew. Eventually, it moves to the Spec, -*ra*P. Note that the co-occurrence of the NP-*ra* with the numeral classifiers and weak determiners follows a pattern. In both cases, the determiners are compatible only when they are marked with human properties. For example, the human classifier -*jon* is mandatory with the numerals and determiners.

\[\text{Note that the co-occurrence of the NP-*ra* with the numeral classifiers and weak determiners follows a pattern. In both cases, the determiners are compatible only when they are marked with human properties. For example, the human classifier -*jon* is mandatory with the numerals and determiners.}\]
when they co-occur with NP-ra. I suggest that weak determiners are adjoined structures, similar to what has been reported for Mandarin men with numeral classifier constructions (Jiang 2012). The numeral and the determiners provide additional information about the associative plural marked nominals. The matching of the human properties is a prerequisite for external merge.

Bangla -ra has been argued to be a plural classifier, similarly to -gulo (Dayal to appear). -gulo itself has been analyzed as an exclusive plural classifier (Dayal 2012, to appear) or an exclusive plural marker (Biswas 2012). Nonetheless, regardless of the category of -gulo, there is evidence that -gulo and -ra are categorically different. Crosslinguistically, associative plurals are distinct from regular number marking. In several languages, the associative plural co-occurs with the regular plural and the associative plural precedes the regular plural in such cases (see Corbett & Mithun 1996, Vassilieva 2005 for details). As mentioned earlier, usually the associative plurals pluralize the pronouns and proper nouns, obtaining an associative reading and optionally a plural/sum reading, as observed in Li (1999) for Mandarin, whereas, the regular plural always results in a sum reading. The same is the case for Bangla -ra and -gulo. Moreover, NP-gulo is always interpreted as definite, whereas, NP-ra can have both definite and indefinite readings. Structural asymmetry between -ra and -gulo arises in the nominal ellipsis and gapping constructions. This also provides evidence for the distinction between -ra and -gulo. As originally observed in Dasgupta (2013), nominal ellipsis is allowed with -gulo but not with -ra, as in (18). I show that nominal gapping construction also follows the same pattern, as in (19).

(18) a. amar bEg-gulo SOktopokto. amar-Δ-gulo chiMrbe na.
   I-gen bag-GULO sturdy. I-gen-GULO rip-fut neg
   ‘My bags are sturdy. My (bags) would not rip.’

b. *amar bondhu-ra SoktiSali. amar-Δ-ra harbe na
   I-gen friend-RA strong I-gen-RA defeat-fut neg
   Intended: ‘My friends are strong. My (friends) would not be defeated.’

(19) a. maya-r ganer boi-gulo ar robi-r kobita-r boi-gulo nao
   Maya-gen song-gen book-GULO and Robi-gen poem-gen book-GULO take
   ‘Take Maya’s books of songs and Robi’s books of poems.’

b. *maya-r kOlej-er bondhu-ra ar robi-r paRa-r bondhu-ra aSbe
   Maya-gen college-gen friend-RA and Robi-gen area-gen friend-RA come-fut
   ‘Maya’s college friends and Robi’s neighborhood friends will come.’

According to Yoshida (2012), the ellipsis in nominal gapping constructions targets a segment of the category (e.g., NP, NumP, or any functional projection in DP) to which the remnant phrase adjoins. Thus, in the case of -gulo, the NP moves to the Spec, DP and then the NP gets elided, whereas, the whole DP moves to Spec, -raP in the case of -ra. The NP is deleted in case of -gulo whereas, the DP is deleted in case of -ra. The ellipsis is precludes when the elided element is the DP. Thus, this is evidence that -ra attaches to a DP.

4.2. Generic interpretations of the associative plurals

Recall that bare nouns (without the associative plural) are preferred as arguments to both types of generic predicates in Bangla, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, all three associative plural marked noun phrases can be arguments to characterizing predicates, but not all can be arguments to kind predicates. Only Bangla -ra-marked noun is compatible with a kind predicate, Mandarin NP-men is incompatible with kind predicates, whereas, in Japanese, only modified nouns can appear as subjects to kind predicates. Since kind terms denote ‘well-defined’ kinds or species, modified nouns cannot be considered kind terms semantically. Crosslinguistic comparison on the basis of compatibility with different types of generic predicates shows that Bangla NP-ra is similar to definite generics in Romance languages; whereas, NP-men/-tachi are similar to Romance indefinite generics (cf. Longobardi 2001). However, the data from these languages showed that the kind terms do not
necessarily associate with definiteness. It is the function of -ra that allows Bangla NP-ra to be subjects to kind predicates, whereas, the meaning of -tachi and men preclude it. An NP-ra always denotes in the taxonomic domain, which allows it to be subjects to both kind and characterizing predicates, although the latter does not require it to be a taxonomic one for achieving generic reading.

The fact that Bangla -ra is mandatory with capacity nouns in characterizing predicates is unusual as capacity nouns typically appear bare in languages. This is in parallel with the distribution of bare common nouns in Bangla, as shown in Dayal (to appear). -ra is mandatory with bare common nouns in Bangla episodic sentences, similarly to the mandatory appearance of -ra in capacity nouns with characterizing predicates. If Bangla -ra is an identity function on kind terms, as proposed in Dayal (to appear), the optional appearance of -ra with kind predicates is explained. But, the questions why -ra is mandatory only with capacity nouns with characterizing predicates, whereas optional otherwise, still require further probing. In the following paragraphs, first I summarize the basic assumptions, and then I present an outline of the proposal.

According to Longobardi (2001), the generic reading in the kind predicates is obtained through due to the referential nature of the kind terms, whereas, it is the object-level quantification in characterizing predicates that induces the generic reading. The kind terms are referential, i.e., they are like proper names, whereas, the subjects of characterizing predicates (i.e., the object denoting generics) are quantificational arguments. Either a generic or an existential reading is obtained for the latter in the presence of an external operator, (e.g., GEN for generic or Ex for existential). For example, Italian definite generics denotes in the kind domain, whereas, the indefinite generics denotes in the object domain. Thus, in the presence of an external operator GEN, only the latter can be arguments to characterizing predicates. They cannot be arguments to kind predicates, as the generic interpretation needs to be obtained from the denotation of the noun. If the bare common noun denotes both in the taxonomic domain and the individual domain (Dayal 2004), they can be compatible in both types of generic predicates.

The capacity nouns in Bangla, I suggest, are atomic individuals. Capacity nouns are similar to the bare singulars in Czech, Russian and Hindi in its distribution. They have uniqueness presupposition. They are incompatible with quantificational adverbs like everywhere (e.g., there is dog everywhere, ex. from Dayal 2004). The singular kinds are infelicitous with the quantificational adverbs because it implies that a single entity is simultaneously everywhere. Similar evidence comes from Bangla bare capacity nouns in the subject position, as given below.

(20) #Daktar carpaSe ghoraphera korche
Doctor around roam doing
Intended meaning: ‘Doctors are roaming around.’

A bare capacity noun denoting an atomic individual is incompatible in characterizing predicates, as the predicate expresses generalizations about a group. Hence, -ra maps to a predicate of plural individuals which can be quantified by the GEN operator to achieve a generic interpretation.

5. Conclusions

I revisited data concerning the associative plurals in Bangla, Mandarin and Japanese, and added new observations to the existing ones. Careful consideration of the data led me to conclude that, contrary to previous reports, the associative plurals in these three languages are similar structurally. I argued that associative plurals are situated higher than the DPs. This proposal highlights some previously unnoticed parallels in the interpretation of the associative plurals. Furthermore, I added new data with respect to generic predicates and capacity nouns. I discussed the semantic functions of Bangla -ra and provided a novel line of analysis. I leave the details of the semantic analysis for future work.

References