
The well-defined kind restriction: experimental evidence from Greek, German and Catalan

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Background. At least since the late '70s (Carlson 1977) it has been observed that nouns must express a “well-established kind” in order to form acceptable generic sentences (contrast *The Coke bottle has a narrow neck* vs. *?The green bottle has a narrow neck*). However, it has been notoriously difficult to pin down what “well-established” is supposed to be. On top of that, different languages employ different grammatical devices to express genericity (Chierchia, 1998; Longobardi, 1994). In this paper, we present results from the same experiment conducted in Greek, German and Catalan (extending Ionin et al.’s 2011 cross-linguistic experiment). The results question the universality of the restriction (which we will call the Well-Defined Kind restriction from now on) for definite singular kind terms (in Greek) and point out to the need for further experimental work on the topic that will refine the contextual manipulations employed (see Dayal 2004; Driemel et al. 2023).

The studies. Participants 40 Greek, 40 German and 40 Catalan native speakers were recruited via prolific. **Task** Acceptability Judgment Task with contexts. Each item was a paragraph-long story followed by five different target sentences differing in the nominal used (animal and artefact kinds): (a) bare plural, (b) bare singular, (c) definite plural, (d) definite singular and (e) indefinite singular. The test items tested two distinct sources of genericity: (a) NP-level genericity with kind-level predicates like *be extinct* and WDK kinds and (b) sentence-level genericity with non-WDK kinds. **Results** We tested sensitivity to the WDK restriction on definite singulars. In German the majority of the participants showed the expected sensitivity, whereas in Greek only half of them did. **Conclusion** The experimental results presented here provide a potential way out of the impasse of how to address “well-establishedness”, which could be related to the specific way each language expresses genericity or could be attributed to the suggested pragmatic nature of the phenomenon. Methodological considerations, data from Catalan, as well as new experimental designs in progress will be discussed.

References: • Ionin, T., Montrul, S., and Santos, H. (2011). An experimental investigation of the expression of genericity in English, Spanish and Brazilian Portuguese. *Lingua* 121, 963-985. • Lazaridou-Chatzigoga, D. and Alexiadou, A. (2019). Genericity in Greek: an experimental investigation. In Gattnar, A., Hörnig, R., Störzer, M. & Featherston, S. (Eds.) *Proceedings of Linguistic Evidence 2018: Experimental Data Drives Linguistic Theory*. Tübingen: University of Tübingen, 245-260.