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On the non-unified interpretation of bare plurals in existential sentences

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It has long been observed that bare plural associate NPs in an existential sentence such as (1) receive an 'existential' or 'cardinal' interpretation (cf. Milsark 1974):

(1)   There are <u>men</u> in the garden.

It is also well-known that these same NPs may have a kind-referring interpretation in other environments, such as (2) (cf. Carlson 1977):

(2)   <u>Wombats</u> are marsupials.

In order to account for these data, many authors have suggested that the predicate determines which of these interpretations the bare plural receives (cf. Carlson 1977; Kratzer 1995; Chierchia 1995). Predicates corresponding to the kind interpretation are individual-level and those corresponding to the existential interpretation are stage-level. Since individual-level predicates are barred from the coda position in existential sentences, as evidenced in (4), only the existential reading of bare NPs emerges there.

(3)   There are firemen available.
(4)   * There are firemen altruistic.

Sentences like (5-6) below, however, show that this cannot be all there is to say on this topic with respect to existential sentences. In particular, it must be explained how the NP in (5) gets the interpretation it does, and why this interpretation is different from that of the same NP in (6).

(5)   There are <u>even prime numbers</u>.
(6)   There are <u>even prime numbers</u> between zero and three.

Superficially, (5) and (6) differ in that (5) lacks a predicate expression in coda position. These sentences' interpretations also differ: The truth conditions of (5) require the existence of an instance of the kind *even prime number*. The truth conditions of (6) require the existence of *more than one even prime number between one and three*. Importantly, (5) requires only one instance to satisfy its truth conditions (and is true given the existence of the number 2), whereas (6) requires more than one (and for this reason is false). If the interpretation of a bare plural in an existential sentence is

determined by the coda predicate, which may only be a stage-level predicate, it is unclear why differing interpretations should obtain here, even in the absence of an expression in that position. The only way to account for the facts seems to be by assuming the existence of more than one existential construction. Though the exact implementation remains to be worked out, the idea would be that the kind interpretation of bare plurals plays a role in only one of these constructions, the construction without a coda.

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