

Bare Plurals and Specificity

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In his dissertation, Greg Carlson (1977: 9) pointed out a surprising asymmetry between singular indefinites and bare plurals: unlike the former, the latter appear to lack specific readings when used as objects to opaque verbs:

- (1a) Max is looking for a book on Danish cooking.
- (b) Max is looking for books on Danish cooking.

The observation has been taken to indicate that bare plurals denote, rather than quantify over, pluralities. In my talk I will try to reconcile Carlson's observation with the more traditional view that bare plurals are the plural analogues of singular indefinites and both are existential quantifiers. The key to the analysis will lie in a hybrid approach to opacity (to be defended elsewhere), according to which the argument structure of an opaque verb forces the indefinite object to be re-interpreted as a quantifier over unspecific objects.

I will also address apparent counter-examples to Carlson's generalization, such as Angelika Kratzer's (1980: 48) [German equivalent of] (2), where the plural indefinite appears to refer to a specific plurality:

- (2) Hans wanted to put belladonnas into the fruit salad, because he mistook them for [real] cherries.

References

- Carlson, G. N.: *Reference to Kinds in English*. University of Massachusetts dissertation 1977.
Kratzer, A.: Die Analyse des bloßen Plurals bei Gregory Carlson. *Linguistische Berichte* 70 (1980), 47—50.