

ARBITRARINESS: A DEFINITE ACCOUNT.

The problem. This paper develops a uniform semantics for a large class of items involving arbitrary interpretation. The semantics of arbitrariness has received much attention in the literature (Jaeggli 1986, Cinque 1988, Condoravdi 1989, Kim 1991, Chierchia 1995, Koenig and Mauner 1999, Alonso-Ovalle 2001, Cabredo-Hofherr 2002, inter alia), yet to-date no adequate uniform semantic analysis has been proposed. Here I concentrate on 3rd-person plural arbitrary pronouns in English, Spanish, and Russian, and implicit agents in short verbal passives in these languages and in Russian sja-passives, and argue that these items are uniformly interpreted as definite descriptions.

Previous accounts. The standard treatments (e.g., Cinque 1988) of the 3rd-person plural arbitrary pronouns (3pl. arbs) translate them uniformly as indefinites (e.g., a free variable). This has the effect of existential quantification over the agent in episodic sentences [1], and of universal-like quantification of the agent in the scope of generic or habitual operators [2]. However, the existence of existential arbs in generic sentences [3], and of generic/universal arbs in episodic sentences [4] suggests that this uniform account is inadequate. In a recent proposal, Cabredo-Hofherr 2002 treats the arbs as ambiguous between a free variable interpretation, which gives rise to the various existential readings [1,3], and a definite-plural interpretation, which is responsible for the quasi-universal [2,4] and “corporate responsibility” [5] readings.

The claim: a uniform definite approach. This account proposes that arbs are translated unambiguously as definite descriptions. First, I show that the existential translation for the arbs is not needed. **Covers:** Examples like [6] provide evidence that arbs behave like definite plurals with respect to distributivity. A predicate distributing over its definite plural subject does not have to go all the way to atoms (Schwarzschild 1991).

Instead, this subject denotation can be broken into intermediate pieces, and then the predicate distributes up to these pieces. For example, [6a,b] are true in a situation [7c], where it's neither the case that each boy individually lifted the piano [7a], nor that all of them collectively did so [7b]. The different distributivity possibilities are achieved by using covers over the domain of discourse [8a-c for scenarios 7a-c respectively].

A (pragmatically determined) variable over covers is an inherent part of each VP denotation, allowing predicates to distribute up to each cover-cell in the NP denotation [9]. Assuming definite denotations for arbs, we can thus account for the different distributivity levels [7a-c] available for [6a].

Teams: The framework developed in Brisson 1998, building on Schwarzschild 1991, allows sentences with plural definites to be compatible with essentially existential scenarios (e.g., [6b] can be true even if only a few of the boys participated as in [10a]). In Brisson 1998, this is achieved by putting the exceptional members of the NP denotation in a cover-cell with non-members (“pragmatic junkpile”). Then, *the boys* in [6a], interpreted with respect to the cover in [10b] will essentially mean “the boys except Bill and Harry”. This is equivalent to assigning team credit to the boys for lifting the piano. Team credit assignment allows existential readings for the definite-plural translation of the arbs, reducing the ambiguity analysis to a uniform treatment of arbs as definite descriptions. **Existential translation undesirable.** It has been noted that

Q-adverbs (e.g. *usually*) with indefinite subjects yield the effect of quantification over the variable introduced by the indefinite (QVE) [11a] (non-QVE readings (i.e., “most situations..”) are ignored throughout). In contrast, QVE over plural definites is achieved with operators like *for the most part* [11b], not with Q-adverbs [11c] (Nakanishi & Romero 2003). The same pattern holds for Russian and Spanish. Notably, QVE readings with 3pl arbs in Russian, Spanish, and English are achieved with *for the most part*, but not with Q-adverbs [12]. As this pattern indicates, 3pl arbs are not interpreted as indefinites, but behave like overt definite plurals.

Consequences: implicit agents. The same semantic analysis can be given to the implicit agents in short verbal passives [13a] (compare [13b]) and in Russian sja-passives [13c] (compare [13d]). While the discourse conditions under which implicit agents and 3pl arbs are used are somewhat different, their truth-conditions are the same: [14a] is compatible with scenarios [14b-e] (14e being preferred). Moreover, the definite translation of implicit agents is in fact required, since definite-like QVE [15] and intermediate distributivity effects [14d] are present only in the agentive verbal passives (and sja-passives), but not in the adjectival ones [16], which involve no agents to quantify or to cover and distribute over.

Conclusion. This proposal supplies a uniform semantics for a class of items with arbitrary interpretation, drawing on a previously unobserved similarities between overt plural definites, 3rd-person plural arbitrary pronouns, and implicit agents in passives and sja-passives.

- [1] Korabl' vchera Ø potopili. (Rus.)(they≈someone) Ship yesterday Ø sank-3pl.
They sank the ship yesterday
- [2] V Amerike Ø govor'at po-anglijski.(Rus.)(they≈all Americans) In America Ø speak-3pl in-English.
Ø hablan inglés en América (Span.)
Ø speak-3pl English in America
They speak English in America.
- [3] Zdes' Ø igrajut v karty na urokah.(Rus.) Here Ø play-3pl in cards on classes.
They play cards here during classes.
- [4] Vchera v Amerike Ø otprazdnovali Den' Blagodarenija poedaniem indejki (Rus.) Yesterday in America, Ø celebrated-3pl Day of-Thanksgiving by-eating of-turkey
In America yesterday, they celebrated Thanksgiving by eating turkey.
- [5] a. They raised the taxes again (they≈government) b. In this cafe they bake good pies (they≈bakers)
- [6] a. On the fourth floor, they lifted the piano. b. The boys lifted the piano
- [7] Residents of the fourth floor are the boys Ed, John, Bill, and Harry.
Scenario a: Ed, John, Bill, and Harry each lifted the piano
Scenario b: Ed, John, Bill, and Harry together lifted the piano
Scenario c: Ed and John lifted the piano together, then Bill and Harry did
- [8] a. Cover = {{ed},{john},{bill},{harry}}
b. Cover = {{ed, john, bill, harry}}
c. Cover = {{ed, john},{bill, harry}}
- [9] (Part(Cov_i)(lifted-the-piano))(the boys) = $\forall x [x \in [[Cov_i]] \& x \subseteq [[the\ boys]] \rightarrow x \in [[lifted-the-piano]]]$
- [10] a. Scenario: only Ed and John lifted the piano. b. Cover={{ed,john},{bill,harry}, some non-boys from the universe}}
- [11] a. Students at Penn are usually smart. Availability of QVE: ✓ Most students=QVE on students
b. The students sitting over there now are for the most part smart. ✓ Most students=QVE on students
c. The students sitting over there now are usually smart. ✗ Most students=no QVE on students
- [12] a. V etom klasse bol'shej chast'ju Ø gord'ats'a Mashej (Rus) Availability of QVE:
In this class with-most part Ø pride-self-3pl with-Masha ✓ Most students=QVE on students
En esta clase en su major parte Ø estan orgullosos de Isabel (Span)
In this class for the most part they are proud of Isabel
- b. V etom klasse pochti vseгда Ø gord'ats'a Mashej (Rus) Availability of QVE:
In this class almost always Ø pride-self-3pl with-Masha ✗ Most students=no QVE on students
En esta clase casi siempre Ø estan orgullosos de Isabel (Span)
In this class almost always they are proud of Isabel
- [13] a. (V Ispanii) Rozhdestvo bylo otmecheno pirom.(Rus) c. (V Ispanii) Rozhdestvo otmechaetsja pirom
(En España) La Navidad fue celebrada comiendo. (Span) (In Spain) Christmas celebrates-sja by feast
(In Spain) (The) Christmas was celebrated by eating/feast. (In Spain) Christmas is celebrated by a feast
b. (In Spain) They celebrated Christmas by eating /by a feast. d. (In Spain) they celebrate Christmas by a feast.
- [14] a. V Gruzii byl obvinen v korrupsii prezident. b. Scenario: Every Georgian accused the president of corruption.
In Georgia was accused in corruption president. c. Scenario: All the Georgians together accused the president.
In Georgia, the president was accused of corruption d. Scenario: The Georgians accused the leader in groups.
e. Team credit assigned to each group in the cover over Georgians, so representatives did the actual accusing.
- [15] a. En España, Bush es casi siempre odiado.(Span) Availability of QVE: ✗ Most Spaniards=no QVE over Spaniards
In Spain, Bush is almost always hated.
b. En España, en su major parte, Bush es odiado.(Span) ✓ Most Spaniards=QVE over Spaniards
In Spain, for the most part, Bush is hated.
c. V Rossii "Pravda" pochti vseгда preziraets'a. (Rus) ✗ Most Russians=no QVE over Russians
In Russia "Pravda" almost always despises-sja.
In Russia, "Pravda" is almost always despised.
d. V Rossii "Pravda" bol'shej chast'ju preziraets'a. (Rus) ✓ Most Russians=QVE over Russians
In Russia "Pravda" with-most part despises-sja.
In Russia, "Pravda" is for the most part despised.
- [16] In Spain, Michael Jackson was almost always/for the most part (un)admired. ✗ Most Spaniards = no QVE

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