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# Number, (In)definiteness and Norwegian Nouns<sup>\*</sup>

Madeleine Halmøy  
CASTL, University of Tromsø

madeleine.halmoy@hum.uit.no

## Abstract

The Norwegian bare plural may help clarify the distinction between subjects of generic and true kind predicates since it may be used as the former, but not as the latter. Its interpretational and distributional properties are furthermore outnumbered by the truly bare Norwegian N which may be subject of both kinds and generics in addition to functioning as a nominal predicate. I cement the fact that the Norwegian bare plural is inherently indefinite, and propose that the properties of the truly bare N may be given a unified account if analysed as marked for general number rather than as an indefinite singular.

## 1 Introduction

Norwegian displays the cross-linguistically rare distinction between true kind and generic predicates since its bare, or indefinite, plural may function as the subject of the latter, but crucially not of the former. That a language makes this distinction is unexpected in most recent analyses which derive generics directly from kinds. Also the truly bare Norwegian noun deserves attention. It has a wider distribution than the bare plural – including the possibility of taking both generic and true kind predicates. The two Norwegian N-forms seen in (1) and (2) are thus highly interesting for the 30 year old debate (Carlson, 1977) on the meaning and interpretation of bare nouns, and the different possible expressions of kind reference and genericity.

- (1) *Elger/elg har fire bein.*  
Elks/elk have four legs.

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<sup>\*</sup>Tore Nessel and Denis Bouchard have given valuable comments at several stages of this project. Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the 12th SCL in Trondheim, and at the Universities of Toronto, Ottawa and Western Ontario – I thank the audiences there, as well as the one at SuB 12 in Oslo, for their interest, questions and comments. All shortcomings are of course solely my own responsibility.

- (2) \**Elger/elg er ikke utrydningstruet (i Norge).*  
Elks/elk are not threatened (in Norway).

In order to give a unified understanding of the distribution, meaning and interpretation of these two (so called) bare or non-definite Norwegian N-forms, I present two major proposals: (i) instead of being an indefinite singular, the truly bare noun bears general number (Corbett 2000), and is undefined with regard to definiteness, and (ii) that the Norwegian bare plural, contrarily to the English one, really is a true indefinite, and not just unmarked with regard to definiteness. The investigation is part of a bigger project on the relationship between form and meaning in the Norwegian nominal system.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 is an introduction to the neo-saussurean framework in which the investigation is set. Section 3 presents the analysis. 3.1 gives a short crash-course in the Norwegian nominal system, while 3.2 and 3.3 presents the two n-forms that are subject of the paper. Section 4 gives a short conclusion.

## 2 Framework – neo-saussurean grammar

Section 2.1 discusses saussurean arbitrariness and 2.2 the relationship between form, meaning and interpretation from a neo-saussurean view-point. Section 2.3 presents Bouchards (2002) analysis of number and variation in English and French with a special focus on the three interpretations of the English bare plural, an analysis that will be adapted in the search for the grammar semantics of the two non-definite Norwegian nouns.

### 2.1 Arbitrariness

In neo-saussurean grammar, arbitrariness as an omnipresent and fundamental property of language, is seen as responsible both for the relationship between meaning and form and the possibilities of linguistic variation, and is restricted only by limitations arising from the fact that language is set in human brains and bodies. Furthermore, arbitrariness is pervasive and holds both for all parts of the sign, and for all kinds of signs. Saussurean arbitrariness is thus not only limited by the fact that there are no determined sounds waiting to be matched with meanings i.e. to the *signifiant*, but also to the fact that there are no predetermined meanings waiting to be matched with a sound, i.e. there are (in principle) no universally established *signifiés*. Exceptions to this are the *signifié* of relations between signs, which I, following Bouchard (2007, ms UQAM), univocally take to be predication (in the widest sense possible of the term) and the list of universal semantic primitives elaborated by Anna Wierzbicka and her followers (e.g. Wierzbicka, 1972; 1996; 2006). The first is a consequence of human categorization, while the latter is grounded not in human biology, but in sociology.

All linguistic units are signs, and a sign may thus be as small as the simplest morpheme or as big as the most complex of sentences. Arbitrariness scope over not only the lexical level of meaning, but also over grammatical meanings, the meaning of complex signs, and even the expression of relations between signs – including syntax – the latter being the only area where arbitrariness is limited by ‘relative motivation’. Since signs are arbitrary, we expect language variation not only with regard to the choice of what conceptual categories are grammaticalized and/or lexicalized in a language, but also with regard to how these categories are expressed, and to what the value of their expression is. However, once a choice is set, it has profound consequences.

## **2.2 Form, meaning, interpretation**

With its one-to-one relationship between form and meaning, the use of the sign as the basic linguistic unit requires a sharp distinction between context and background knowledge on the one hand, and what Bouchard (1995) terms Grammar Semantics on the other. The invaried, abstract grammatical meaning of a lexical item - including a sentence – may be strongly distinct from all the various *interpretations* the same item might receive. Most cases of polysemy and homonymy may, thus, be reduced to interpretational differences. The fact that one meaning may yield (highly) different interpretations, and that similar interpretations may arise from different meanings, does not pose parsing or efficiency problems since language users (maximally) exploit the ever-present linguistic and extra-linguistic context. And since no sign is uttered out of context, no sign is ever interpreted in isolation.

## **2.3 Number and variation in English and French, Bouchard (2002)**

Bouchard (2002) explains most important differences in the nominal domain of French and English by exploring the idea that Number is semantically encoded on the determiner in French and on the noun in English. This simple difference is accounted for by the fact that number – if at all grammaticalized in a language, may equally well be marked on the noun as on the determiner, or on a separate number lexeme. These alternative realizations of number is shown to motivate (i) the variation in adjectival modification – preposed in English, both pre- and postposed in French – including the subtle interpretational distinctions found there, (ii) the use of lone argumental determiners (i.e. pronominal clitics) and predicative bare nouns, both impossible in English but fine in French, and (iii) the wider use of bare argumental noun phrases in English.

The lack of bare arguments in French is a consequence of the assumed absence of number marking on the French N altogether – since lack of number marking is seen as entailing non-referentiality.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it is this non-referentiality of the French

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<sup>1</sup>Both Bouchard and myself are of course aware of the fact that bare French Ns may appear in argument positions under specific circumstances – these may nevertheless all be understood as non-referentials, or

N that allows its bare use as a nominal predicate. The unavailability for this use of the English singular is, likewise, explained by the fact that the English N always is referential since it obligatorily marks number, which in turn is what enables it to function as a full argument.

To understand Bouchard's proposal for the three possible readings of the English plural – made famous by Carlson and presented below – a short presentation of his view of the semantic import of the category of number is needed. Example (3) is Bouchard's (77).

- (3) a. Beavers are on the verge of extinction. (kind)  
 b. Cats are mammals. (generic)  
 c. Dogs are barking outside. (weak indefinite, episodic predicate).

For Bouchard (following (Link, 1983) and (Landman, 1991), see also (Chierchia, 1998)), the semantic contribution of number is twofold. Number can atomize the superset defined by the property of the N and provide access to ordinary singular individuals, and Number can indicate that the sort of individual involved is a plural or a singular individual (Bouchard, 2002: 308). The English plural suffix on the N is taken to contribute both 'types' of number, while in e.g. Italian the plural suffix only indicates a *plural individual* without atomisation to particulars, leaving the last part to the determiner. The pluralization of an English N, since involving atomisation, is further understood as giving access to the entire domain of plural interpretation, including both plural individuals and ordinary singular individuals.

The kind-interpretation is obtained from the idealized superset – denoting all occurrences as a whole. The availability of this is due to the fact that reference tends to be as wide as possible (see Kleiber, 1981), which, when no (contextual) restrictions are available, translates into maximality for plurals and uniqueness for singulars. Reference to the superset is also often achieved by a definite singular form – and in some languages, including Norwegian and French, also with an explicit definite plural. As for generics, while stating a fact of a kind may be interpreted as a generalization, the generic readings may also be obtained independently of the direct kind reference, namely by applying the predication distributively to the singular entities of which the kind is made up. The weak indefinite reading of the bare English plural arises, again according to Bouchard, when the plural-suffix provides access to individuals that are pluralities rather than to a plurality of singular individuals. That Italian bare plurals only allow the weak indefinite reading therefore follows naturally, since the Italian plural suffix only contributes this latter semantics. The same line of reasoning is used to account for mass readings of the English singular, which are described as unatomized singularities “presented as an object having the property of the N, but not instantiated in an individual, i.e., as non-individuated mass.” (2002: 305). The lack of most of these

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shown to get their referentiality set otherwise. For a thorough presentation on the conditions allowing determiners to be absent in French see (Curat, 1999).

readings for bare French Ns is accounted for by the absence of semantic number marking altogether.

For Bouchard, the nominalization effect (Chierchia, 1998) found with English nouns is a direct consequence of its number marking, and there is thus no need to make recourse to any kind of abstract operator. Bouchard's analysis is neo-Carlsonian: it preserves the main findings of Carlson's original proposal, such as the unified understanding of the English plural, and the idea that the choice between its three readings is made inferentially and determined by context. Since Bouchard assumes quite a different framework, his analysis nevertheless diverges from this tradition on several fundamental points like the view of language universals, the relationship between form, meaning and interpretation and thus also on the extent of language variation. For more information on the neo-saussurean framework readers are referred to the two saussurean canon (Saussure et al., 2002) and (Saussure et al., 1916 (1968)), and to recent works of Denis Bouchard (2002; 2005), see also (Shaumyan, 2006). For more specific discussions of the differences between neo-saussurean and other current linguistic theories see the *Lingua* debate with Bouchard (2005; 2006a; 2006b), Newmeyer (2005), Breheny and Adger (2005), Crain and Pietroski (2006) and Boeckx (2005).

### 3 Norwegian Nouns

Section 3.1 gives some background on the Norwegian nominal system. 3.2 deals with the NIP. 3.2.1 presents its distributional and interpretational range, before its properties as a diagnostic for kind reference are given in 3.2.2. Section 3.2.3 proposes to regard this NIP as truly indefinite, and presents some further support for such an analysis. The NBN is discussed in 3.3. Section 3.3.1 presents its distributional and interpretational range in contrast with both French and English bare nouns. 3.3.2 presents the analysis of the NBN as bearing general number and as being undefined with regard to definiteness, an idea that gets both intra- and cross-linguistical support from its agreement properties in 3.3.3.

#### 3.1 Norwegian crash course

Norwegian is a rigid word order, head first, SVO, V2 language with a very limited verbal morphology. There are only 3 finite forms (pres, past, imp), and no nominal agreement or inflections (i.e. person, gender, number, (in)definiteness) in the verbal system. The language further has no pure articles – i.e. except for the suffixes, all determiners are pronominal. Adjectives are normally preposed, but post-modified adjectives group with other NP-modifiers like PPs, rel-clauses and infinitivals in being postposed in accordance with the head-first setting. There is no (overt) Case (except for personal pronouns). Gender- m, f, n - is covert on the bare N, but surfaces as (inter-phrasal) agreement on adjectives and articles/pronouns.

Norwegian Ns mark, by the means of suffixes, for the categories of number – with a singular/plural distinction – and (in)definiteness, and most lexical nouns thus have four morphological forms. An example of each of these forms used in a sentence is given below:<sup>2</sup>

- (4) a. *Alle i Norge har (en) **elg** i hagen.* (gle)  
all in Norway have (an-M,SG) elk-M in the garden  
'Everybody in Norway has an elk in their garden.'
- b. *Jeg vet at det fins **elger** her.* (eld 9)  
I know that there exist elk-PL,INDEF here.  
'I know there are elks here.'
- c. ***Elgen** er det største pattedyret i Norge.* (gle)  
elk-M,SG,DEF is the biggest mammal in Norway  
'The elk is the biggest mammal in Norway.'
- d. ***Elgene** var så tamme at vi kunne klappe dem.* (gle)  
elk-PL,DEF were so tame that we could clap them  
'The elks were so tame that we could pat them.'

Throughout the rest of the paper these forms will be referred to as the Norwegian bare noun (NBN), the Norwegian indefinite plural (NIP) *-er*, the Norwegian definite singular (NDS) *-en*, and the Norwegian definite plural (NDP) *-ene* respectively

### 3.2 Norwegian indefinite plurals

#### 3.2.1 Properties of NIPs – distribution and interpretation

Like the English bare plural, the NIP may occupy all major syntactic functions and always takes narrow scope. (5) give examples of the NIP as a subject, a direct object, an indirect object and as a prepositional complement.

- (5) a. *Jeg trodde **elger** var mer selvstendige.* (eld 18)  
I thought elks were more independent.
- b. *Det er forbudt å kaste **elger** ut fra et fly.* (gle)  
It is forbidden to throw elks out from a plane.
- c. *Det er forbudt å servere **elger** alkoholholdige drikker.* (gle)  
It is forbidden to serve elks alcoholic drinks.
- d. *Det fins grenser for hva jeg gidder å ta imot fra **elger**.* (eld12)  
There are limits on how much crap I can stand from elks.

The NIP may further receive both weak indefinite (6) and generic interpretations (7):

<sup>2</sup>Examples are either google-matches – marked (gle) – or taken from diverse novels (eld), (ell) and (hub) standing for Erlend Loe's *Doppler* (2004) and *Volvo lastvagnar* (2006) and Helene Uri's *De beste blant oss* (2006) respectively. Examples where no source is indicated are my own creations.

- (6) a. *Det er elger i hagen.*  
There are elks in the garden.  
b. *Kjøpte du lyspærer/poteter?*  
Did you buy light bulbs/potatoes?
- (7) a. *Elger er pattedyr/har fire bein.*  
Elks are mammals/have four legs.  
b. *Lyspærer avgir mye varme. (gle)*  
Light bulbs produce much heat.

but unlike the English plural, the NIP is unable to combine with true kind-predicates:

- (8) a. *#Elger står ikke i fare for å bli utryddet.*  
Elks are not in danger of extinction  
b. *#Edison oppfant Lyspærer.*  
Edison invented light bulbs.  
c. *#Poteter kom til Norge først på 1600-tallet.*  
Potatoes were introduced in Norway in the 17th century.

Note that the examples in (8) are not strictly ungrammatical, just inappropriate for the intended kind reading.<sup>3</sup> The (b) version may receive a generic reading with an interpretation stating that Edison had the habit of inventing light-bulbs (a new one twice a week), while (8a) might get a taxonomic kind-reading. Like in French, true kinds are definite – either singular or plural.

- (9) a. *Elgen/Elgene er utrydningstruet.*  
The elk/elks is/are in danger of extinction.  
c. *Lyspæra/ Lyspærene ble oppfunnet av Edison.*  
The light-bulb/light-bulbs was/were invented by Edison.

While the NIP is fine both with a weak indefinite and a generic reading, it is unable to obtain a true kind-reading. The distinction between these three readings for the English bare plural has remained undisputed for 30 years (Carlson 77). Nevertheless, no real agreement seems to have been reached exactly on what constitutes a true kind predicate or where to draw the lines between kind and generic readings – even though an honourable effort was provided by Krifka et al. (1995). For instance, even if everybody seems to agree that predicates like *be extinct/invented* require a kind reading of the subject and e.g. *are magnificent animals* a generic one, predicates of the type *are mammals* may in the literature sometimes be understood as belonging to either of the two groups. In the following section, the distribution of the NIP is used to help clarify this distinction.

<sup>3</sup>The use of “#” instead of “\*” is meant to indicate this. For strictly ungrammatical sequences the conventional “\*” will be used.

### 3.2.2 NIPs as a diagnostic for kind reference

As already mentioned, the NIP is fine with predicates denoting taxonomic subkinds. A clear example is given in (10):

- (10) *Elger kommer i flere underarter, blant annet alces alces alces, alces alces americanus og alces alces andersoni.* (gle)  
Elks come in several sub-species, among other alces alces etc.

More surprising maybe, is the fact that they also go well with predicates like *be rare* or *common* as in (11), since the ability of functioning as subjects of such quantificational properties often has been taken as proof of kind-reference.

- (11) *Her er hunder veldig vanlige og ulver er sjeldne.* (gle)  
Here dogs are very common and wolves are rare.

Other predicates that sometimes have been taken as evidence of kind-reference, but are ok with bare NIPs include Norwegian translations of *originate from* and *be protected (by law)*.

- (12) *Poteter kommer opprinnelig fra Peru.* (gle)  
Potatoes originate from Peru.
- (13) *Fugler, herunder deres reir og egg, er fredet mot enhver form for skade, ødeleggelse osv.* (gle)  
Birds, including their nests and eggs, are protected against any kind of damage.

A clear distinction is thus made between subjects of predicates that are true of a kind as a whole, but not of its individuals (kinds), and the subjects of predicates that (also) apply to each individual one by one (generics) – the latter, but not the former, may be referred to by a bare NIP. Individual potatoes all originate from Peru – just like individual birds are protected by law – but they were not all introduced to Norwegians in the 17th century.

A last fact, regarding the modification of NIPs, deserves our attention before closing this section. Consider (14):

- (14) a. *\*Tigere står på randen av utryddelse.*  
Tigers are on the verge of extinction.  
b. *Hvite tigere står på randen av utryddelse.*  
White tigers are on the verge of extinction.

While the combination of a bare NIP with a true kind-predicate is ungrammatical, a

similar construction where the NIP is modified by an adjective is fine.

### 3.2.3 Meaning of NIPs

The interpretational properties of the NIP follows naturally, if the NIP marks number just like English, but diverge in that it also is inherently marked as indefinite. With a definition of definiteness based on speaker intentions, indefinites are incompatible with maximality, uniqueness and familiarity and thus with kind-reference. The distributive generic reading is still available, since it does not rely on the kind viewed as a whole. Also, if *tigere* alone refers to an indefinite plurality, the combination with the modifying adjective restricts the referent to a now specific sub-group of these first indefinite tigers. For this reason, (14b) is acceptable.

The idea that the NIP is indefinite, and not just neutral with regard to definiteness is in no way new – in fact indefinite plural is the label used for this sign in the Norwegian reference grammar (Faarlund et al., 1997). The theoretical and interpretational implications of this, and the contrast it gives with English, are nevertheless to my knowledge hitherto undescribed. Also, current works on Norwegian noun phrases tend to neglect or reject the idea that there is anything more indefinite to the Norwegian than to the English N: “(...) it seems clear to me that (...) the noun is indefinite only in the sense that there is no definiteness marker morphologically attached to it” (Julien, 2005: 36). I therefore provide some further support for the idea that the NIP is inherently indefinite.

Firstly, in contrast to the English bare plural, the NIP cannot function as a title accompanying proper names.

- (15) *Forslag fra stortingsrepresentantene/\*stortingsrepresentanter Laila Dåvøy, Åse Gunhild Woie Duesund og Ola Lånke.* (Dagbladet, 16/08-06)  
 Proposal from parlament-member-PL, DEF/\*PL, INDEF Laila Dåvøy, Åse Gunhild Woie Duesund og Ola Lånke.

Secondly, when a Norwegian definite noun combines with a modifying adjective, the combination is, normally, preceded by a demonstrative, and definiteness is thus marked twice. No preposed determiner is required with indefinites. Constructions like (16d) are often termed *double definiteness constructions*.

- (16) a. *Store elger*  
 big-PL elk-INDEF, PL → big elks  
 b. *#Store elgene*  
 big-PL elk-DEF, PL  
 c. *#De store elger*  
 the big-PL elk-INDEF, PL

- d. *De store elgene*  
the big-e elk DEF, PL → the big elks

Similarly, strong determiners (generally) combine with definite plural nouns, weak ones only with indefinites:

- (17) a. *Disse/de (store) elgene*  
these/the big PL elk DEF, PL  
These/those/the (big) elks  
b. *#Disse/de (store) elger*  
these/the big PL elkINDEF, PL  
c. *Noen (store) elger*  
some big PL elkINDEF, PL  
Some (big) elks  
d. *\*Noen (store) elgene*  
some big PL elk DEF, PL

Thirdly, support is provided from variation in the mainland Scandinavian languages. While Danish, Norwegian and Swedish all have three noun suffixes, Danish stands out in disallowing the double definiteness requirement which is compulsory in Norwegian and Swedish. Availability of kind reading from the Danish bare noun, supports the idea that indefiniteness is what disallows the same in Swedish and Norwegian.

- (18) a. *Elge er truet av udryddelse.* (Danish)  
b. *#Elger er truet av utryddelse.* (Norwegian)  
Elks are threatened by extinction.

It seems fair to conclude that the NIP is in fact inherently indefinite, and thus different from its English and Danish counterparts which are neutral with regard to definiteness. The difference has few consequences in every day language – we don't often (enough) speak of endangered species – but is important enough to help clarify a 30-year old discussion.

### 3.3 Norwegian bare nouns (traditionally indefinite singulars)

The most thorough presentation of the NBN is Kaja Borthen's *Norwegian Bare Singulars* (2003). Borthen says NBNs typically emphasize type rather than token, and delimits her object of investigation with the following: "A bare singular is a nominal constituent that is countable, singular, and indefinite, and that doesn't have a phonetically realized determiner" (Borthen, 2003: 10). The following presentation will focus just as much on those occurrences that fall outside of her scope.

### 3.3.1 Distribution and interpretation of bare (non-plural) nouns – Norwegian compared and contrasted with English and French

Like the French bare noun, the bare NBN may function as a nominal predicate expressing a categorization of the subject into the class/kind that makes up the extension of the noun. Such constructions are, as seen below (see also Halmøy 2001) not limited to a certain class of words, only by contextual restrictions.

- (19) a. *Jeg er **lingvist**.*  
I am linguist.  
b. *Dersom man er **elg** og blir kjørt på av et tog, blir man som oftest drept.* (gle)  
If you are elk and get hit by a train, you normally get killed.  
c. *Det (...) gamle postbygget midt i Bergen sentrum blir **kjøpesenter**.* (gle)  
The old post building in Bergen becomes mall.

In both Norwegian and French, the classifying reading of bare predicative nouns is opposed to that of referential nominal predicates introduced by articles or other referential items. The latter are ambiguous between an identifying and a characterizing reading.

- (20) a. *Han er **slakter**.* (classifying)  
b. *Han/det er en **slakter**.* (identifying/characterizing)  
He is butcher/a butcher

In English, nominal predicates introduced by the indefinite article are ambiguous between the classifying, identifying and characterizing reading.

- (21) He is a butcher. (3 ways ambiguous)

Both in Norwegian and English, bare argumental (count) nouns may be interpreted as mass (22ab). Unlike English, Norwegian nevertheless use the singular definite for mass-kinds (c).

- (22) a. *Vi har **elg** i fryseren.* (gle)  
We have elk in the freezer.  
b. *Vi skal ha **elg** til middag (...).* (gle)  
We're having elk for dinner.  
c. *siden før mennesket oppfant **stålet**.* (gle)  
since before man invented the steel.

Quite idiosyncratically in this company, the NBN often receives the 'type reading' illustrated below, where focus is on the type, not on the occurrences.

- (23) a. *Det er første gang at ei dame har skutt **elg** for Halvøya jaktlag.* (gle)  
That is the first time that a woman has shot elk for Halvøya hunting-team.  
b. *Og så er jeg flink til å tegne **elg**, smiler 10-åringen.* (gle)  
I'm also good at drawing elks, smiles the ten year old.  
c. *Enten ser man **elg**, eller så får man pengene tilbake.* (elvl 77)  
Either you see elk or you get your money back.

And, as already mentioned, both weak indefinite, generic and true kind readings are available.

- (24) a. *Vi så **elg** i skogen.* (gle)  
We saw elk in the forest  
b. *Det er **elg** i skogen.*  
There is elk in the forest
- (25) a. ***Elg** har fire bein.*  
Elk has four legs.  
b. ***Elg** er pattedyr.*  
Elk is mammal.
- (26) a. ***Elg** er ikke utrydningstruet i Norge.* (gle)  
Elk is not threatened by extinction in Norway.  
b. ***Banan** ble først importert til Norge i 1905.* (gle)  
Bananas were first imported to Norway in 1905.

The equivalents of (23)-(26) are, of course, unavailable in both English and French. The distributional and interpretational properties of the NBN do, thus, not only out-rank the bare English and French nouns, but also the NIP. In fact it exceeds the three of them taken together.

### 3.3.2 Meaning of NBNs – numberable

To account for all this, I propose that the NBN do not obligatory carry neither a number nor a definiteness value but may receive one from context, either intra- or extralinguistic. The data in (27)-(30) clearly indicate that both singularity and indefiniteness are unfit for describing the NBN. Prior indications that indefiniteness is non-inherent in the NBN was given by the fact that it, contrarily to the NIP, may combine with a true kind predicate. Also the second function distinguishing the NIP from the English plural, that of titles accompanying proper names, is, as seen in (27) available to the NBN.

- (27) **Kosmetikkdronning** *Celina Middelfart*, **nyhetsanker** *Christian Borch*, **skuespiller** *Aksel Henie*, **biskop** *Ole Christian Kvarme* (...) er på lista over kjendiser i nabokonflikter. (Dagbladet 16/8-06)  
Cosmetics queen *Celina Middelfart*, news anchor *Christian Borch*, actor *Aksel Henie*, bishop *Ole Christian Kvarme* (...) are on the list of celebrities in neighbour conflicts.

Another examples indicating lack of indefiniteness in the NBN is given in (28):

- (28) *Nanna er så liten av vekst at han, når han skal kysse henne, på **panne** eller **munnn**, må bøye seg kraftig.* (hubbo 334)  
Nanna is so small that he, when he wants to kiss her, on forehead or mouth, must bend down heavily.

Even clearer examples indicate that singularity wrongly has been taken as part of the grammatical meaning of the NBN:

- (29) a. *Det finnes **elg** i Europa, Asia og Nordamerika.* (gle)  
There are elks in Europe, Asia and North-America  
b. *Jeg har sett **elg** tusenvis av ganger, og jeg har tatt noe sånt som 20.000 elgbilder.* (gle)  
I have seen elks thousands of times, and I've taken around 20.000 elk pictures.

The NBN may even, as seen below, be used as an antecedent of a plural pronoun:

- (30) *Er det **elg** her ute i skogen, så garanterer Maj Britt at Gregus finner **dem**.* (elvl 78)  
If there is elk in the forest, Maj Britt guarantees that Gregus will find **them**.

Because of its capacity to both receive the non-referential reading required for a nominal predicate and all the referential readings found with English bare nouns, the NBN would – in order to preserve Bouchard's analysis of French and English – have to be able both to receive and to avoid number interpretations at will – i.e. depending on context – which is exactly what I propose. This understanding of the NBN is both inspired by and corroborated by Corbett's (2000) notion of General Number. In languages with General Number, number is, according to Corbett, expressed only when it matters; otherwise the general form is used. This is exactly what we find in Norwegian; when number and/or (in)definiteness values are important or relevant, the bare noun combines with one of its suffixes or with the indefinite article. When on the other hand these values are irrelevant or unambiguously given by context the general form may be used.

### 3.3.3 NBNs and agreement

The interpretation of the number (or definiteness) value of the NBN is highly context sensitive. This has consequences for the interpretational range of NBNs in agreement environments. Many neuter nouns never combine with an indefinite plural suffix, and are thus always ambiguous between a singular and a plural interpretation – even if the context might be very suggestive:

- (31) a. *Flyktingehjelpen bygger hus i Sør-Libanon.* (gle)  
The refugee-help builds houseN in South-Libanon.  
b. *Her har jeg bygd meg hus, og her bor jeg med min lille chihuahua.* (gle)  
Here, I have built myself house, and here I live with my little chihuahua.

Norwegian adjectives are nevertheless always singular (indefinite) or not, and the ambiguity from (31) thus disappears once *hus* is modified.

- (32) a. *Vi har nettopp bygd stort hus, men allikevel ...* (gle)  
We have just built big-N, SG house, but still...  
'We've just built a big house...'  
b. *De bygger store hus og anskaffer store inntekter...* (gle)  
they build big-PL house and acquire big incomes.  
'They build big houses and acquire large incomes.'

Normally, only adjectives combining with a suffixed n-form take the e- suffix. NBNs that *do* combine with an indefinite plural-affix, can not combine with an -e suffixed adjective.

- (33) a. *Vi har hest.*  
'We have one or several horses'  
b. *Vi har brun hest/\*brune hest.*  
we have brown horse M/brown-e horse M  
'We have a brown horse'  
c. *Vi har brune hester/\*brun hester.*  
we have brown-e horse-INDEF, PL/brown horse-INDEF, PL  
'We have brown horses'

The data in (33) strongly suggest that it is the bare adjective, not the bare noun, that carries the features singular, indefinite.

Interestingly, also the agreement properties of the NBN have relevance for the discussion on kind-reference and genericity. In combination with a singular (indefinite) adjective, the NBN may no longer combine with a true kind predicate.

- (34) a. *Tiger står på randen av utryddelse.*  
 b. \**Hvit tiger står på randen av utryddelse.*  
 Tiger/White tiger stand on the verge of extinction.

This indicates that the NBNs ability of being the subject of both kind and generic predicates relies on its capacity of receiving plural (non-indefinite) interpretations, and further that this ability would be lost had Norwegian still required subject verb agreement.

Further support for this analysis of the NBN as being marked for general number is given by Albanian, which like Norwegian marks both number and definiteness on the noun. The Albanian bare noun may like the NBN function bare as a predicate, and receive both mass and type readings in argument positions (Halmøy and Vocaj, 2006, Vocaj in prep). Even if it may receive plural interpretations as weak indefinites in object position, subject verb agreement requirements in Albanian blocks – as expected – the bare noun from being the subject of both kind and generic predicates. See Halmøy (forthcoming) for data and discussion.

## 4 Conclusion

The present account of the NIP as being truly indefinite, and of the NBN as bearing general number and being neutral with regard to definiteness rather than encoding singular indefiniteness, satisfactorily describes the otherwise so intriguing properties of both these two signs in a unified way, thereby supporting not only Bouchard's (2002) analysis of number in French and English, but also the whole idea of saussurean arbitrariness requiring a strict one-to-one relationship between form and meaning. A language making a grammatical distinction between kinds and generics like the one displayed by the Norwegian indefinite plural, has never been properly described. A scrutiny of the Norwegian data reveals that true kind-predicates are even rarer than previously assumed. Even if the Norwegian data indicate that generics not necessarily are derived from kinds, the present proposal still confirms the main findings of the carlsonian approach (Carlson 1977, Chierchia 1998), like the affinity between kind-reference and definiteness, and the unified understanding of the English bare plural.

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