

These nouns are one-of-a-kind: uniqueness and the Indonesian definite determiner *-nya*

I account for the distributional properties of Indonesian *-nya* with unique nouns by demonstrating that bare unique nouns can be used generically.

Definiteness marking. Indonesian has a definite determiner *-nya* (not to be confused with the homophonous 3SG possession marker), but its distribution is different from, e.g., English *the*. Indonesian permits bare nominal arguments (Chung (2000) analyzes it as [+arg, –pred] according to the typology developed by Chierchia (1998)). In some contexts, bare nominals can have definite interpretations, and in a subset of those, *-nya* is prohibited. Additionally, *-nya* cannot be used to form kind terms (1).

(1) Sapi-(**nya*) termasuk mamalia.

COW-NYA included mammal

‘The cow is a mammal.’

(Kaufman et al. to appear:22-23)

Some nouns are unique, i.e., they are only satisfied by one individual. In English, such nouns generally occur with *the* (2).

(2) {The/#a/#this/#that/#one/#some} sun shines.

In Indonesian, **the permissibility (and necessity) of *-nya* depends on the interval on which the relevant predicate holds**. When used with a predicate that holds over a limited temporal interval, one must use *-nya*

(3a). However, with a predicate that is temporally invariant, the noun must be bare (3b).

(3) a. Matahari-#(nya) terang hari ini.

SUN-NYA bright day this

‘The sun is bright today.’

b. Matahari-#(nya) ber-sinar.

SUN-NYA AV-shine

‘The sun shines.’ (Kaufman et al. to appear:5)

This phenomenon disappears in a science-fiction context where the speaker is asked to imagine there are three suns, and *matahari* acts like a regular non-unique noun. Empirically, the generalization appears to be that *-nya* is used when the (individual, time) pair is non-maximal, which is possible either when the nouns holds of individuals other than the one referenced, or when the predicate is not asserted to hold all the time. However, this is challenging to encode in the semantics of *-nya* in a conventional type-theoretic framework, where we expect time to be introduced substantially higher in the tree than the DP. Additionally, a pure non-maximality analysis does not account for the fact that the incompatibility of *-nya* with kind terms does not disappear if the kind predicate is temporally constrained (4).

(4) *Context: It’s the year 2045, and someone cloned a dinosaur in 2030.*

Dinosaur-#(nya) telah punah dari 65 juta BC sampai tahun 2030 AD.

dinosaur-NYA already extinct from 65 million BC until year 2030 AD

‘Dinosaurs were extinct from 65 million BC until 2030 AD.’

That incompatibility is not simply the result of there being more than one dinosaur; plural marking is optional in Indonesian and in general, *P-nya* can refer to something larger than an atomic individual satisfying *P*.

Analysis. I propose that in Indonesian, **temporally-invariant claims about an individual referenced with a unique noun**, like (3b), **are actually generics**, in the sense of Carlson (1989). The boundaries of genericity are fuzzy when it comes to, e.g., deciding what percentage of dogs must bark for $\text{GEN}^{\cup}_{\text{DOG}}(\text{BARK})$ to be true, but when dealing with a kind like that of the sun, it seems pretty clear that a property holds generically iff it holds of the one sun. Thus, in practice, (i) $\text{GEN}^{\cup}_{\text{SUN}}(\text{SHINE})$ is equivalent to (ii) $\text{SHINE}(\text{!X.SUN}(x))$.

Why, then, can’t we formulate generics about unique nouns (5) in languages like English?

(5) #Suns shine.

I claim the culprit is **Maximize Presupposition (MP!)** (Heim 1991). It is in the common ground in ~every conversation that there is exactly one sun, and given that information, (i) and (ii) might be equivalent, except only (ii) actually presupposes this common-ground fact, so MP! prefers (ii). Examples (5) and (2) are interpreted as (i) and (ii) respectively, and are likely “competitors” in the MP! sense (each has exactly one overt morpheme pertaining to the noun’s number/definiteness), so MP! selects (2) because it presupposes more information that is in the common ground.

Conversely, in Indonesian, kind-denoting *matahari* and individual-denoting *matahari-nya* are not competitors, because the former has a strict subset of the latter’s morphemes. Thus, MP! does not apply. Instead, using *-nya* gives rise to the quantitative implicature (Grice 1975) that the generic version of the sentence

would not be true. This explains why *-nya* is not used in (3b), as it would suggest that either the sun does not generally shine, or there are other suns that do not shine.

The copula *itu* (not to be confused with the homophonous demonstrative determiner) is used with generic or kind-level adjectival predicates (6a,6b), and generally cannot occur with an individual-denoting subject.

- (6) a. Ganja itu terlarang. b. Burung itu menarik. c. Bulan itu bulat.
 marijuana COP forbidden bird COP interesting moon COP round
 ‘Marijuana is illegal.’ ‘Birds are interesting.’ ‘The moon is round.’

However, it can be used with a bare unique noun subject and a temporally invariant predicate (6c), demonstrating another way in which unique nouns pattern like generics. We know the *itu* here is not the demonstrative *itu*, because unique nouns are incompatible with demonstratives in all other contexts in Indonesian, which is typical of how demonstratives behave cross-linguistically (Dayal to appear).

Temporally unique nouns. There is only one pope, but we often still need to use *-nya* when talking about him with a temporally invariant predicate (7a). This is because the pope is only *temporally* unique. There is necessarily only one pope at a time, but there have been many popes over the course of history, and they haven’t generally been Argentinian. With a temporally invariant predicate that holds true of all popes by virtue of their office, *-nya* is prohibited (7b).

- (7) a. Paus-#(nya) dari Argentina. b. Paus-(#nya) adalah pimpinan gereja katolik.
 pope-NYA from Argentina pope-NYA COP leader church Catholic
 ‘The pope is Argentinian.’ ‘The pope is the leader of the Catholic Church.’

This is expected. The pope kind contains many individuals, even if most of them are not alive right now, and so it follows that kind-level and generic statements about popes should be relevant to all (or at least most) of them, not just Francis. Since using the generic version of (7a) would entail that popes are generally Argentinian, which is false, using *paus-nya* does not implicate that there was a time when Francis was not Argentinian. Rather, it implicates that popes are not generically Argentinian. However, using *-nya* in (7b) would result in the reading that Francis (or another contextually salient Pope) is/was the leader of the Catholic Church, potentially implicating that other popes were not.

When a temporally unique noun subject combines with a predicate that is time-bounded, but over a long period of time (long enough that the subject noun applied to multiple individuals over the relevant period), *-nya* is optional (8).

- (8) Pada Jaman pertengahan, paus-(nya) tinggal di Avignon.
 in era middle pope-NYA live in Avignon
 ‘In the Middle Ages, the pope lived in Avignon.’

I propose that the versions with and without *-nya* produce two de facto equivalent readings. Without *-nya*, we get a generic statement, but with *-nya*, the subject is individual-denoting, with the referent being the plural individual containing every pope from the Middle Ages.

Coordination as a test for genericity. In general, we expect it to be difficult to coordinate an individual-denoting subject with a kind-denoting one, in such a way that they share a predicate that applies directly to the individual and generically to the kind. Indeed, this is at best awkward in English (9a). This replicates in Indonesian (9b). However, bare *matahari* can be coordinated with a generic subject (10). This strongly suggests that *matahari* here is indeed kind-denoting.

- (9) Context: John is a weird guy who eats worms. (10) Matahari dan lampu xenon ber-sinar terang.
 a. ??John and birds eat worms. sun and light xenon AV-shine bright
 b. #John dan burung makan cacing. ‘The sun and xenon lights shine brightly.’
 John and bird eat worm
 Int.: ‘John eats worms and birds eat worms.’

Conclusion. Treating temporally-invariant claims about unique nouns in Indonesian as generic statements allows us to better account for the distribution of the determiner *-nya* and the copula *itu*. Because generic statements about a unique noun are de facto equivalent to claims about the individual satisfying the noun, this possibility is broadly relevant to the study of languages that do not clearly distinguish kind-denoting nominals.