

THE GENERIC NOUN PHRASE IN ENGLISH AND POLISH

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I

This study is an attempt at a contrastive analysis of generic noun phrases in English and Polish. Such an analysis requires, first of all, a consistent description of generic noun phrases in English. This is not an easy task, in view of the diversity of descriptions to be found in the existing literature on the subject.

Comprehensive grammars of English, both old and new, speak of the so-called *generic article*, and all of them treat it in more or less the same way. They usually distinguish the following three types of generic NP's:

- 1) Def Art + N_{sg}
- 2) Indef Art + N_{sg}
- 3) \emptyset Art + N_{Pl}

The presentation given by Jespersen and, fifty years later, that given by Quirk et al. may be regarded as representative for the traditional approach to the problem of the generic NP in English.

In vol. II of Jespersen's *Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles* (1954 : 131) we find the following statement:

"An assertion about a whole species or class — equally applicable to each member of the class — may be made in various ways:

- (1) the sg without any article: man is mortal;
- (2) the sg with the indefinite article: a cat is not as vigilant as a dog;
- (3) the sg with definite article: the dog is vigilant;

- (4) the pl without any article: dogs are vigilant;
 (5) the pl with the definite article: the English are a nation of shopkeepers”.

Jespersen then points out that (1) is restricted to the two nouns *man* and *woman*, while (5) is restricted to “adjectives without a substantive”.

In vol. VII, however, (most of which was written by Niels Haislund from Jespersen’s notes) it is suggested that perhaps we should reserve the term *generic* for the use of a sg. noun with the definite article and a pl. noun with zero article. “With *a* the sb refers to all members (or any member) of the class or species it denotes, but only as a representative of the members. It does not denote the class or species in itself”. (page 424). Further on (page 491) we read: “The commonest way of expressing a generic sense is by means of (3), the singular with the definite article, and this is perhaps in a strict sense the only way”.

No suggestion that the label “generic” be restricted in the above way is to be found in the writings of other scholars. In the most recent comprehensive grammar of English, namely that of Quirk et al. (1972), we find the following presentation of “generic reference”.

“Singular or plural, definite or indefinite can sometimes be used without change in the generic meaning:

The German } is a good musician.
 A German }

The Germans } are good musicians.
 Germans }

At least the following three forms of *tiger* can be used generically:

The tiger } is a dangerous animal.
 A tiger }

Tigers are dangerous animals.”

We are not told, however, whether the above forms can be used interchangeably, and, if not, what determines the speaker’s choice.

Evidence of restrictions on the interchangeability of the three “generic” forms presented by Quirk et al. (1972), namely Def Art+N_{sg}, Indef Art+N_{sg}, and Zero Art+N_{pl}, can be found in the writings of many other authors. We shall now give a brief review of the more prominent publications on the subject of generic NP’s, arranged chronologically.

Hill (1966 : 229) writes: “I lump generic uses of nouns, whether like *man*, or like *the horse*, with names. The justification is that names are (as many scholars have said) in some sense unique — classes of one member. When we

speak of *a man* or *a horse* we are specifying single members of large classes. When we speak of *man* and *the horse* we are specifying the abstract notion of the species, which is necessarily a single member class”.

The most significant statement here seems to us to be the last sentence, in which Hill regards the generic NP of the type Def Art+N_{sg} as specifying the *abstract notion* of the species.

In Vendler (1967), of particular relevance for the present paper is the example he uses to show irreplaceability of the generic Def NP’s in certain contexts:

There are two kinds of large cat living in Paraguay, the jaguar and the puma.

Deriving *the jaguar* and *the puma* from *the [(kind of) large cat that is a] jaguars* and *the [(kind of) large cat that is a] puma*. Vendler points out that neither *a jaguar and a puma* nor *jaguars and pumas* will do to replace *the jaguar and the puma*, and concludes:

“Thus the generic *the* is not a mere variant of other generic forms. It has an origin of its own”. (1967 : 128).

Vendler’s view that the three types of NP’s traditionally regarded as generic are not always interchangeable seems to us crucial. However, we regard Vendler’s example as unconvincing, since several native informants we asked have accepted the variant:

There are two kinds of large cat living in Paraguay, jaguars and pumas.

For Robbins (1968 : 239) the generic Def NP is equivalent to a plural NP without an article, but not equivalent to an NP preceded by a “primitive-universal quantifier”; e.g.

The cheetah attains great speeds
 is equivalent to

Cheetahs attain great speeds

but neither to

All cheetahs attain great speeds

nor

Any cheetah attains great speeds.

Robbins concludes: “Generic *the* is generalizing in the direction of what is normal or typical for members of a class, which only sometimes coincides with what is true of all the members”.

This formulation seems to us the most adequate of all we have studied. In the second part of the paper, however, we shall adduce examples to show that plural NP’s preceded by zero article may have two readings.

Perlmutter (1970 : 239—242), in an extensive footnote, concentrates on producing evidence that the following three types of “generic statements” are not interchangeable:

- (a) A beaver builds dams.
- (b) The beaver builds dams.
- (c) Beavers build dams.

He shows that while types (b) and (c) can be conjoined by *and*, (a) cannot:

- The beaver and the otter build dams.
- Beavers and otters build dams.
- * A beaver and an otter build dams.

Moreover, (b) and (c) can be passivized, while (a) cannot:

- Dams are built by the beaver.
- Dams are built by beavers.
- * Dams are built by a beaver.

On the other hand, Perlmutter regards as acceptable the sentence

A beaver or an otter builds dams.
and also

Any beaver or any otter builds dams.

He quotes some more examples to show that whenever the “generic” *a* is acceptable, it can be replaced by *any*, and concludes that the “generic” indefinite article should actually be derived from *any*. Clearly, he envisages a different derivation for the “generic definite article” and the “generic zero article” preceding a plural noun, which problem, however, is outside the scope of this paper.

We quite agree with Perlmutter’s view that statements (a), (b), (c) are not interchangeable. In particular, we think that there is sufficient evidence to show that Def Art+NP_{sg} and Indef Art+NP_{sg} require an entirely different treatment. Incidentally, we are a little dubious about the acceptability of sentences with NP’s conjoined by *or*.

Langendoen (1970 : 125—6) is alone in regarding “generic” sentences containing definite singular, indefinite singular, and indefinite plural NP’s as mere stylistic variants; he maintains that the sentences

- The elephant never forgets.
- An elephant never forgets.
- Elephants never forget.

all have the same interpretation, namely:

If something is an elephant, it never forgets.

This view seems to us to defy all available evidence.

For Chafe (1970 : 168, 190—192) the generic meaning of a noun is automatically determined by the generic meaning of the verb to which the noun is attached. Thus, if the verb in

A bird sings

is understood generically (i.e. timelessly), the noun is generic and means ‘any bird’. As regards the difference between

- (a) The elephant likes peanuts.
- (b) An elephant likes peanuts.

and

- (c) Elephants like peanuts.

he explains it in the following way: In (a) the class of elephants is regarded as an undifferentiated whole, in (b) and (c) it is thought of as composed of separate individuals. He introduces the term “aggregate” to denote the type of generic NP occurring in (a) and regards *aggregate* as a subspecification of *generic*.

Chafe’s contribution to the problem of generic NP’s seems very important. He is the only one among the authors quoted here to make it clear that the generic character of the NP depends on the semantics of rest of the sentence. He is also the only one to use a separate label *aggregate* for singular NP’s with the definite article.

Hutchins (1971 : 89) devotes to generic NP’s the following short passage:

“In sentences such as

The horse is an animal.

The cheetah attains great speeds.

The marten is a close relative of the sable.

the referent of *horse*, *cheetah*, etc. is the whole genus, and not one specific member. Constructions with the generic *the* (as Robbins calls this usage) have synonyms with constructions containing unmarked plurals:

Horses are animals.

Cheetahs attain great speeds.

Martens are close relatives of sables.

It is perhaps open to question whether we are fully justified in deriving both

forms from the same, i.e. (horse, pl.)=G/the horse and G/horses; (cheetah, pl.)=G/the cheetah=G/cheetahs".

The solution of the problem posed by Hutchins in this last sentence may probably be found in our treatment of plural NP's as having two readings. This is discussed in the second part of the paper.

Jackendoff (1972 : 309) in his discussion of the term "generic" deals with sentences of the types

A rhinoceros eats small snakes.

and

Any beaver can build a dam.

He regards them as semantically equivalent to sentences with a universal quantifier, and suggests the following paraphrases for them:

Every rhinoceros eats small snakes.

All beavers can build a dam.

This seems to contradict what Jackendoff says earlier (op. cit., p. 16) about "genericity" being a semantic property of the species as such. The use of *any*, *every*, *all* suggests referring to *individuals*, regarded singly or collectively as members of a class, rather than to the class as such.

Strangely enough, sentences with the Def. Sg. NP's, such as

The rhinoceros eats small snakes

are not included in Jackendoff's discussion of the term "generic".

Leech and Svartvik's *Grammar* (1975) closely follows Quirk et al. (1972) in its presentation of the generic NP. Briefly, in sentences like

The tiger is a beautiful animal

the is said to refer to what is general or typical for a whole class of objects. *The tiger* in the sentence above indicates the class of tigers and not one individual member of the class, and thus the sentence expresses essentially the same meaning as

Tigers are beautiful animals.

A tiger is a beautiful animal.

The tiger, however, refers to the species as a whole, while *a tiger* refers to any member of the species. That is why we can say

The tiger is in danger of becoming extinct.

but not

A tiger is in danger of becoming extinct.

As can be seen, Leech and Svartvik do not go beyond Quirk et al. (1972), and leave the question of interchangeability unresolved.

Burton-Roberts (1976) takes a unique stand in that he regards the "generic indefinite article" as the only true mark of genericness in an NP. He derives *a whale* in

A whale is a mammal

from the subjectless predicate *to be a whale*. He maintains that *a whale* in the above sentence stands not for an *individual*, not for an *object*, but for a *concept* ("whaleness"). He sees a fundamental semantic difference between the "generic" *the* and the "generic" *a* in sentences like

The whale is a mammal

A whale is a mammal,

regarding *the whale* as referring to the objective class of whales itself and *a whale* as denoting "membership of that class (whaleness)". He defines a generic sentence as one that has an underlying structure

to be NP is to be VP (where VP can contain a copula).

This, for him, excludes the possibility of regarding

Whales are mammals

as a paraphrase of

A whale is a mammal

since, as he says, nothing can be predicated of "* to be whales".

Thus the Generic Indefinite Article is not related either to the Generic Definite Article or to the Generic Zero Article. Burton-Roberts regards the "plural indefinite generic" as not generic at all but as "plural non-specific". Thus in the sentence

In Canada beavers are hunted by professionals.

In Canada professionals hunt beavers.

both "beavers" and "professionals" are "non-specific indefinite", and not "generic".

This is a highly idiosyncratic treatment, and hard to accept. In particular, there seems to be no convincing reason for regarding *a whale* as more abstract than *the whale*; we presume that this is what the author means when he makes *the whale* refer to "the objective class of whales" and *a whale* to "whaleness".

Lyons (1977 : 194—196) assumes that each of the sentences in sets such as

The lion is a friendly beast.

A lion is a friendly beast.

Lions are friendly beasts.

can be used to assert a generic proposition, which might be formalized within the framework of the predicate calculus as

(x) (L x → F x),

i.e. "For all values of x , if x is a lion, then x is friendly". He points out, however, that universal quantification seems too strong in cases like the above. It would be falsified by a single x for which $F x$ did not hold, e.g. a single unfriendly lion. Actually we do not take the above statements about lions to mean that all lions are friendly beasts. All that we do mean is that lions are "generally", or "typically", or "normally" friendly. It is arguable, says Lyons, that there are several different kinds of generic propositions, merging into one another and difficult to distinguish, and only one kind, which he proposes to call essential propositions, should be interpreted as saying that such and such a property is a necessary attribute of the class referred to.

Lyons considers the non-substitutability of the definite noun phrase and the indefinite noun phrase in certain kinds of generic propositions, such as for instance

The lion is extinct.

vs. * A lion is extinct.

and The lion is no longer to be seen roaming the hills of Scotland.

vs. * A lion can no longer be seen roaming the hills of Scotland.

but the comment he makes upon this fact is somewhat baffling. This is what he writes:

"One obvious difference between definite and indefinite noun phrases, used generically, is that, with definite noun phrases both a collective and a distributive interpretation is possible, but with indefinite noun phrases in the singular the collective interpretation is excluded". This fact, according to Lyons, accounts for the unacceptability of "a lion" in the examples above.

However, if we understand the term "distributive" here as "ascribing a certain property to each member of a class" and the term "collective" as "ascribing a certain property to all members of a class" (and how else are we to understand these terms?), it seems more than doubtful whether we should so interpret a statement like

The lion is extinct.

Is every lion extinct? Are all lions extinct? The sentence does not seem to mean either of these things (cf. Robbins (1968 : 239)).

II

We shall now outline our own proposals concerning the interpretation of genericity of NP's. We shall confine our attention to: 1) count nouns, and 2) NP's other than predicate nominals, since the latter seem to us to constitute a highly complicated problem, both syntactically and semantically, and therefore require separate treatment.

Let us begin by discussing singular NP's only. Now, it is a fact which has not been questioned by any of the authors we have quoted so far that there exist sentences in which *the*+N_{sg} is not replaceable by *a*+N_{sg}. Compare again:

The whale is becoming extinct.

* A whale is becoming extinct.

The tiger is an interesting species.

* A tiger is an interesting species.

Edison invented the gramophone.

* Edison invented a gramophone.

What is more, it appears that the opposite also holds true, namely that in certain apparently generic statements *a*+N_{sg} cannot be replaced by *the*+N_{sg}. To our knowledge, this fact has not been investigated. Compare:

A tiger, even a young one, is a dangerous animal.

* The tiger, even a young one, is a dangerous animal.

The phenomenon of non-interchangeability illustrated above seems to us to provide sufficient grounds for recognizing two different classes among singular NP's traditionally placed under the single label "generic". We propose that as regards singular NP's the term "generic" be retained only for NP's with the definite article. In agreement with Jespersen (1954), Hill (1966), Robbins (1968) and Hutchins (1971), we think it is this type of NP that the speaker chooses when he wants to refer to a class regarded as a whole and not to its members, taken either singly or collectively.

Support for this interpretation is found in the fact that whenever an NP of the type Def Art+N_{sg} is not replaceable by one containing the indefinite article, it is not replaceable by *any*+N_{sg} or *all*+N_{pl}, either. Compare:

The whale is becoming extinct.

*A whale is becoming extinct.

*Any whale is becoming extinct.

*All whales are becoming extinct.

(cf. Robbins (1968)).

The so-called "generic" *a*, on the other hand, seems to admit replacement

by *any* and *all* without restrictions. Compare:

A bull can be dangerous.
Any bull can be dangerous.
All bulls can be dangerous.

Following Hill (1966), we are inclined to say that in making a truly generic statement the speaker has in mind the abstract notion of the class in question, and not the physical objects which are understood to belong to it. If what he wants to say about that class can only apply to the class as such, and not to its individual members, either singly (*any*) or collectively (*all*), he is forced to choose the generic NP, i.e. Def Art+N_{sg}. On the other hand, if what the speaker wants to say can refer equally well to the class as a whole and to its individual members, he is free to choose either Def+N_{sg} or Indef Art+N_{sg}. Hence the large number of instances where *the* and *a* are felt to be interchangeable. Compare:

The horse is a mammal.
A horse is a mammal.
The horse is a beautiful animal.
A horse is a beautiful animal.

The choice which the speaker makes reflects the interpretation he imposes upon the noun *horse* at the moment of making his statement.

Thus, in stating

The horse is a mammal

the speaker may be said to mean something like "the class 'horse' has, among its various features, the feature of mammality". By saying

A horse is a mammal

the speaker simply states that every horse is a mammal.

Thus we claim that in pairs like the above, the two statements do not mean exactly the same, although for practical purposes they seem to be fully interchangeable.

The validity of this claim can be checked by what we propose to call the embedding test. To begin with let us take the following two statements:

The horse was domesticated thousands of years ago.
The whale is an interesting species.

In neither of them can the definite NP be replaced by an indefinite one; this, as we argue above, is the true mark of genericity. Let us now try to embed these statements as postmodifiers of nouns in other statements of the

kind we have just been discussing; for example:

{ The horse a useful animal.
The horse was domesticated thousands of years ago.
The horse, which was domesticated thousands of years ago, is a useful animal.
A horse is a useful animal.
The horse was domesticated thousands of years ago.
*A horse, which was domesticated thousands of years ago, is a useful animal.
The whale is a mammal and not a fish.
The whale is an interesting species.
The whale, which is an interesting species, is a mammal and not a fish.
A whale is a mammal and not a fish.
The whale is an interesting species.
*A whale, which is an interesting species, is a mammal and not a fish.

Thus it would seem that the possibility of embedding in an NP a relative clause of an unquestionably generic character is a sure indication that the speaker interprets the NP in question as generic. It is only NP's of the Def Art+N_{sg} type that admit of this kind of embedding.

Incidentally, it should be observed that a pair of examples such as

The horse } is a beautiful animal.
A horse }

illustrates a point that was made by Robbins (1968) and Lyons (1977), namely that a generic statement does not have to assert something that is literally true of all the members of a class, but may generalize features that are normal or typical for them. As regards the second sentence of the pair, we can defend our interpretation of *a horse* as *any (every) horse* by saying that this version rather than the truly generic one would probably be chosen by a genuine horse-lover, who either really believes that every horse is beautiful, or simply exaggerates.

It would be interesting to find out what clues can be found in the sentence to explain why the speaker chose to use a generic NP. It seems to us that such clues are essentially semantic, and not grammatical. To quote just one example, in *Edison invented the gramophone* the object of the verb *invent* cannot refer to a physical entity, or even a collection of physical entities: the inventor invents a formula for a new thing and not the material thing itself. A similar

been the subject of several studies, notably Szwedek (1975), the recent grammar by Fisiak, Grzegorek-Lipińska and Zabrocki (1978), and the forthcoming grammar by Krzeszowki. The *generic* use of the articles, however, has not been discussed in detail. In order to establish whether native speakers of Polish distinguish between generic and non-generic NP's we have applied to Polish an equivalent of the *any/all* test mentioned above. 70 native speakers of Polish were presented with a list of 25 sentences, each containing an NP in the singular (see Appendix to this paper). They were asked to perform the following three operations:

1. Pluralize the underlined nouns, making all the necessary changes in the structure of the sentences.
2. Add the word *każdy* (*każda, każde, każdego, etc.*) to the nouns in the singular wherever this seems appropriate.
3. Add the word *wszyscy* (*wszystkie, wszystkich, etc.*) to the nouns in the plural wherever this seems appropriate.

The subjects were told to use their linguistic intuition: to ask themselves in each case the question "Would I be likely to say such a sentence?"

In six cases there was virtual unanimity among the respondents as to the inapplicability of either *każdy* in the singular or *wszystkie* in the plural. The sentences concerned were the following:

- (6) Statystyczną analizę mowy umożliwił dopiero *magnetofon*. (The statistical analysis of speech was only made possible by the tape-recorder).
- (13) *Laser* jest ważnym wynalazkiem.
(The laser is an important invention).
- (14) *Telefon* wynaleziono sto lat temu.
(The telephone was invented a hundred years ago).
- (20) *Nietoperz* jest ciekawym okazem ssaka.
(The bat is an interesting species of mammal).
- (21) Będziemy się teraz uczyć o *stoniu*.
(We shall now study the elephant).
- (22) Jest to problem dla *psychologa* raczej niż *socjologa*.
(This is a problem for the psychologist rather than the sociologist).

In two more instances the overwhelming majority of respondents rejected *każdy* and *wszystkie*:

- (8) *Telewizor* niszczy życie towarzyskie.
(The television set is destroying social life.)
- (23) *Dziobak* jest rzadkim gatunkiem zwierzęcia.
(The platypus is a rare species of animal.)

Let us consider the first six sentences. It can be observed that what is being said about the referent of the noun phrase underlined is characterized in each case by a high degree of abstractness. This is indicated by noun phrases such as *analiza mowy* (analysis of speech), *wynalazek* (invention), *ssak* (mammal), *problem* (problem), and by verbs such as *wynaleziono* (was invented) and *będziemy się uczyć* (we shall study). In the remaining instances we have noun phrases *życie towarzyskie* (social life) and *gatunek* (species). Lack of unanimity in (23) was probably due to the fact that pluralization was here awkward for syntactic reasons, while in (8) some respondents apparently hesitated between the abstract interpretation of *telewizor* (i.e. 'telewizja') and the concrete interpretation.

Thus it seems that in (6), (8), (13), (14), (20), (21), (22), (23) we have instances of truly generic noun phrases. They were interpreted as such by the respondents on the basis of the semantic clues in the context. Thus, for example, they refused to add *każdy* and *wszystkie* to (14) or (21) because the context makes it quite clear that it is concepts and not objects that the statements are about. As we said before, what the inventor invents is formulas for new things, and not the things themselves. The subject of *study* may be either a specific object (eg. *ten słon* 'this elephant') or a class or category of objects (eg. *słon* 'the elephant').

At the other end of the spectrum we have the following sentences:

- (2) *Turysta* powinien ochraniać zabytki.
(Tourists ought to protect historical monuments).
- (5) *Studenta* obowiązuje dyscyplina studiów.
(Students are bound by university regulations).
- (12) *Człowiek* musi umrzeć.
(All men must die).
- (15) *Psa* trzeba szczepić przeciw wściekliznie.
(Dogs out to be vaccinated against rabies).
- (17) *Nauczyciel* powinien być bezstronny.
(A teacher ought to be impartial).
- (24) *Lekarza* obowiązuje tajemnica lekarska.
(Doctors are bound by an oath of secrecy).

As regards these sentences, we have either complete or almost complete agreement of the respondents as to the applicability of the quantifiers *każdy*, *wszystkie*. It is interesting to note that in all these instances there is an element of modality in the sentence: namely obligation. This seems to have an influence upon the interpretation of the NP in the sentence. The problem, however, requires investigation.

Sentence (12) is an interesting case. It would appear that in this sentence

it is the verb that excludes the generic interpretation of the NP: *umrzeć* (die), unlike *wymrzeć* (die out), can only be predicated of individuals, treated singly or collectively, but not of classes.

Let us now consider the following two sentences:

- (7) *Dziecko może zachorować na odrę.*
(Children are liable to catch measles).
(16) *Lekarz może się mylić.*
(A doctor can make mistakes).

In these two instances the respondents were virtually unanimous in adding *każdy* to the NP's in the singular, but only about two thirds added *wszyscy* (*wszystkie*) to the NP's in the plural. A possible explanation of this fact is that the Polish quantifier *wszyscy* (*wszystkie*) in conjunction with the modal *może*/*moga* may be taken to mean either 'all together at a given time', (which, obviously, does not fit the sentences in question), or 'each separately at different times'. Those respondents who construed the quantifier in the former sense refrained therefore from using *wszyscy*/*wszystkie*.

We now pass to the following group of sentences:

- (25) *Dziecko jest wrażliwe na zarazki odry.*
(Children are susceptible to measles bacteria).
(4) *Koń jest czworonogiem.*
(The horse is a quadruped).
(3) *Człowiek jest istotą rozumną.*
(Man is a rational being.)
(10) *Samochód jest groźbą dla środowiska naturalnego.*
(The car is a threat to the environment.)
(9) *Bocian odlatuje na zimę do ciepłych krajów.*
(In winter the stork flies off to warmer countries.)

In these sentences non-generic interpretation varied from 75 per cent down to 30 per cent. This reflects the fact, which we commented upon in Part II of the paper, that in a large number of cases both generic and non-generic interpretation is possible.

The last group consists of four sentences:

- (18) *Koń jest pięknym zwierzęciem.*
(The horse is a beautiful animal.)
(1) *Kangur żyje w Australii.*
(The kangaroo lives in Australia.)
(11) *Piosenka jest dobra na wszystko.*

- (A song is a remedy for everything.)
(19) *Wielorybowi grozi wymarcie.*
(The whale is threatened with extinction.)

As regards the first three, there is a high degree of agreement (85 to 90 per cent) on the generic interpretation. The fact that 10 to 15 per cent of the respondents did select *każdy* and *wszystkie* is rather baffling. A possible explanation is that some of the respondents yielded to the pressure of the instructions to the test: their use of the quantifier *każdy* and *wszyscy* did not coincide with what they might have said spontaneously.

Sentence (19) is particularly baffling, because 9 respondents added *każdy* and as many as 26 added *wszystkie*, although we had expected results close to zero. We are at a loss how to explain this anomaly.

It is very significant that several respondents stated that they found some of the pluralizations awkward and definitely preferred the singular versions. In the case of sentences (20) and (23) the reason seems purely stylistic: they would not have aroused doubt if they were formulated as follows: *Nietoperz to ciekawy okaz ssaka* and *Dziobak to rzadki gatunek zwierzęcia*. Much more significant were the doubts expressed by many respondents as to the acceptability of the plural version of (8), (13), and (14). Thus it turns out that evidence of the existence of non-pluralizable generic NP's can be found in Polish as well.

The next step in our investigation was to ask two native speakers of English with a very good knowledge of Polish to translate our twenty-five Polish sentences into English. There was complete agreement as to sentences (2), (5), (12), (15), (17), (24): they were all rendered with the definite article plus noun in the singular, thus supporting the generic interpretation. The interesting fact is that where the non-generic interpretation of NP's dominated among the Polish informants, the native speakers of English not only adopted the non-generic interpretation, but also showed clear preference for the plural form of the noun phrases: they put the sentences into the plural without this possibility having been suggested to them.

We do not know whether native speakers of Polish would also spontaneously use the plural form in such cases; the problem requires further investigation.

IV

We shall now try and formulate very tentative conclusions resulting from our investigations so far.

The first thing to be stated is that the category *generic* is psychologically real in Polish, even though there are no overt grammatical signals of it, such as the definite article followed by a noun in the singular.

Genericity of NP's is determined by semantic factors; both in English and in Polish similar semantic factors influence the speaker's choice of the generic NP, and similar semantic clues enable the listener to interpret it as such. A convenient rule of thumb for distinguishing generic NP's in English and Polish is the *any/all* (*każdy/wszystkie*) test: namely *any/all* (*każdy/wszystkie*) are inapplicable in generic NP's. Incidentally, this test could probably be used quite effectively in teaching Polish students to use the definite article in singular generic NP's. The choice between singular generic and plural generic NP's (where both are possible) is probably stylistic. The question when pluralization of a singular NP is possible remains open.

APPENDIX

- (1) *Kangur żyje w Australii.*
- (2) *Turysta powinien ochraniać zabytki.*
- (3) *Człowiek jest istotą rozumną.*
- (4) *Koń jest czworonogiem.*
- (5) *Studenta obowiązuje dyscyplina studiów.*
- (6) *Statystyczną analizę mowy umożliwił dopiero magnetofon.*
- (7) *Dziecko może zachorować na odrę.*
- (8) *Telewizor niszczy życie towarzyskie.*
- (9) *Bocian odlatuje na zimę do ciepłych krajów.*
- (10) *Samochód jest groźbą dla środowiska naturalnego.*
- (11) *Piosenka jest dobra na wszystko.*
- (12) *Człowiek musi umrzeć.*
- (13) *Laser jest ważnym wynalazkiem.*
- (14) *Telefon wynaleziono sto lat temu.*
- (15) *Psa trzeba szczepić przeciw wściekliznie.*
- (16) *Lekarz może się mylić.*
- (17) *Nauczyciel powinien być bezstronny.*
- (18) *Koń jest pięknym zwierzęciem.*
- (19) *Wielorybowi grozi wymarcie.*
- (20) *Nietoperz jest ciekawym okazem ssaka.*
- (21) *Będziemy się teraz uczyć o słoniu.*
- (22) *Jest to problem dla psychologa raczej niż socjologa.*
- (23) *Dziobak jest rzadkim gatunkiem zwierzęcia.*
- (24) *Lekarza obowiązuje tajemnica lekarska.*
- (25) *Dziecko jest wrażliwe na zarazki odry.*

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