French Bare Arguments Are Not Extinct: The Case of Coordinated Bare Nouns

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The study of bare arguments mainly concentrates on the distribution of bare plurals (BPs) while little attention is paid to coordinated bare nouns (CBNs). The contribution of Heycock and Zamparelli (2003) is a serious attempt to fill this gap, but the details of their analysis lead to predictions that are not correct for French. I show that CBNs exhibit surprisingly uniform behavior across languages, unlike BPs, which are subject to crosslinguistic variation, as sketched by Longobardi (2001). To account for these facts, I propose a modification of Heycock and Zamparelli’s analysis of CBNs.

Keywords: coordinated bare nouns, number, indefiniteness

1 Introduction

In proposing their analysis of so-called coordinated bare nouns (CBNs) in English and Italian, Heycock and Zamparelli (2003) (hereafter, H&Z) claim that these behave the same in both languages, unlike noncoordinated bare nouns (i.e., bare plurals). CBNs have the form \( N \) and \( N \) and contain either two singular nouns (1) or two plural nouns (2). They can be used both in subject and in object position.

(1) . . . I have to give key and letter to the tenant, and read the instructions myself.  
(H&Z 2003:443)

(2) . . . Forks and knives were equally dirty.  
(H&Z 2003:448)

H&Z claim that all CBNs have the structure given in (3) and that they are endowed with a quantificational feature [+qu]. The quantificational feature licenses the empty \( D^0 (D^e) \) by moving to Spec,DP at LF.

(3) \[ \text{DP } D^e [\text{Num}^e [\pm pl]] [\text{Coord}[\text{NP } N] & [+qu] [\text{NP } N]]]] \]

CBNs containing singular count nouns and those containing plural nouns are distinguished by a different specification of NumP: when the conjuncts are singular count nouns as in (1), NumP is [−pl]; when the CBN contains plurals as in (2), NumP is [+pl].

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H&Z claim that this difference is the basis of an interpretational difference between (1) and (2). H&Z show that CBNs containing singulars are obligatorily “definite,” in the sense that *key and letter* refer back to an earlier mentioned key and an earlier mentioned letter. So, (1) can be used only in a context like the one in (4).

(4) He gave me a key, a letter for the landlord, and some instructions. I have to give *key and letter* to the tenant, and read the instructions myself.
(H&Z 2003:443)

Furthermore, H&Z show that CBNs containing plurals are systematically ambiguous. First, as shown in (5), they allow the same “definite” reading that is available for CBNs containing singulars.

(5) We had to set the table for the queen. We arranged one crystal goblet\(_h\), one silver spoon\(_i\), two antique gold forks\(_j\), and two platinum knives\(_k\). *Forks\(_j\) and knives\(_k\) were equally dirty.*
(H&Z 2003:448)

But CBNs containing plurals also allow an existential reading, which is not available for CBNs containing singulars. This is shown by the contrast between (6a) and (6b).

(6) a. *There were fork and knife on the table.*
   b. There were *forks and knives on the table.*
   (H&Z 2003:447)

H&Z claim that the ambiguity between the “definite” and the existential readings is the result of two different derivations.

I. A “definite” reading is obtained when the CoordP is pied-piped to Spec,DP along with the [ + qu] feature.
II. An existential reading is obtained when the CoordP stays in its base position.

Derivation II is subject to a constraint: only if the individual conjuncts can function as predicate nominals—that is, if they are [ + pl] (see below)—can the CoordP stay in its base position; otherwise, it is blocked.

Although H&Z 2003 certainly fills an important gap in the study of bare arguments, some of its predictions are called into serious question by data from French. Within the space available here, I will discuss the following three points:

- By claiming that derivation II can only converge when NumP contains a [ + pl] feature, H&Z predict that the existential reading is only available when the conjuncts are appropriate predicate nominals. This correlation turns out to be problematic with respect to the CBNs of French.
- By adopting the view that the interpretation of determiner phrases is directly read off from syntactic structure, H&Z predict that CBNs allow exactly two readings: a “definite” one and an existential one. However, this distinction, and especially the notion of “definite,”
turns out to be unsatisfying; new light is shed on this problem once the existential reading of CBNs is confronted with the weak/strong ambiguity characterizing nouns introduced by a weak determiner.

- H&Z claim that every CBN contains a [+qu] feature, needed to license it as an argument.
  I will argue, on the contrary, that [+qu] plays a different role in the licensing process of CBNs. Moreover, it need not be present in every CBN.

The article is structured as follows. In section 2, I will bring new data from French to bear on H&Z’s account of the existential reading. I will also discuss the [+pl] feature, which turns out to play a more prominent role than H&Z propose. In section 3, I will reconsider the interpretational ambiguity of CBNs. Finally, in section 4, I will come back to the role of the [+qu] feature and propose a revised structure.

2 The Existential Reading and Derivation II

2.1 Counterevidence from French

H&Z claim that CBNs in Italian have the same interpretations as those in English: a “definite” reading (in which the referents of the conjuncts are preidentified) is available for every CBN, no matter whether it contains singulars as in (7) or plurals as in (8).

(7) a. A black cat and a brown dog were fighting in the street. *Cat and dog were equally filthy.*
   (H&Z 2003:443)
   b. Un gatto nero ed un cane scuro si azzuffavano per strada. *Cane e gatto erano ugualmente luridi.*
   (H&Z 2003:444)

(8) a. We had to set the table for the queen. We arranged one crystal goblet, one silver spoon, two antique gold forks and two platinum knives. *Forks and knives were equally dirty.*
   (H&Z 2003:448)
   b. *Cani e gatti erano ugualmente luridi.* ‘Dogs and cats were equally filthy.’
   (after H&Z 2003:445)

1 H&Z eventually call this reading quasi-definite, because CBNs with this reading do not behave entirely like nouns introduced by the definite determiner. In section 3, I will give further arguments showing that definiteness is not a satisfying term to describe this reading, and that there is a more appropriate way to account for it. Until then, I will use the term definite.

2 However, as pointed out by an anonymous LI reviewer, the distribution of CBSs in Italian seems to be slightly more constrained. For example, (5b) becomes ungrammatical if embedded.

(i) *Mi pare che cane e gatto fossero stati ugualmente luridi.* ‘It seems to me that dog and cat had been equally dirty.’
An existential reading (in which the referents of the conjuncts are new) is available only when the CBN contains plurals (9), and not with singulars (10).

(9) a. Market day in town. Customers and onlookers walked about the stands.  
    (H&Z 2003:447)  
    b. Giornata di mercato in città. Clienti e curiosi gironzolavano per i banchi.  
    (H&Z 2003:447)

(10) *There were goblet and spoon on the table.  
    (H&Z 2003:446)

So, Italian CBNs containing singulars are unambiguously “definite,” while CBNs containing plurals are systematically ambiguous.

To explain this contrast, H&Z propose that it is related to the fact that a plural noun can be used as a predicate nominal while a singular noun typically cannot. This is shown by the contrast between the infelicitous (11a–b), containing singulars, and the well-formed (12a–b), containing plurals. (See also Dobrovie-Sorin and Laca, to appear, on this contrast.)

(11) a. *This is table.  
    (H&Z 2003:459)  
    b. *Bobby è gatto.  
    ‘Bobby is cat.’

(12) a. These are tables.  
    b. Sono scarpe piccole.  
    (they) are shoes small  
    ‘They are small shoes.’  
    (H&Z 2003:460)

Assuming the derivation II mentioned above, H&Z claim that the CoordP may stay in its base position only when the individual conjuncts of the CBN are able to function as predicate nominals. This hypothesis would explain why the CBNs of (7) containing singulars allow only a preidentified “definite” reading: they allow only derivation I.

Although H&Z mainly concentrate on data from Italian and English, they extend their analysis to French as well. They make a strong claim about this language: according to them, French CBNs may have only a “definite” reading, and do not allow an existential one; in other words, derivation II would always be blocked in French.

H&Z claim that this prediction follows from their proposed correlation between derivation II and predicate nominals. They show that French is an example of a language in which a plural noun cannot be a predicate nominal. I should note immediately that this contrast does not appear with nouns expressing functions, like doctor and professor, which can be used without a determiner when they are plural in French.

(13) Jean et Marie sont professeurs.  
    ‘John and Mary are professors.’
These nouns fall outside the correlation proposed by H&Z, because their behavior is special: even when they are singular, they can be used without a determiner, not only in French, but also in Italian.

(14) a. Jean est professeur.
   b. Gianni è professore.
   ‘John is [a] professor.’

However, with all other types of nouns, there is indeed a well-known contrast between French and Italian/English. Whereas Italian and English systematically show a contrast between singular nouns, which cannot be used as predicate nominals, and plural nouns, which can be, no such contrast shows up in French. The French plural noun in (15b) is just as infelicitous as its singular counterpart in (15a).

(15) a. *La baleine est mammifère.
   ‘The whale is mammal.’
   ‘The whales are mammals.’

H&Z illustrate the prediction made by their proposed correlation with the examples in (16): (16a) and (16b) show that French allows ‘definite’ CBNs (both coordinated bare singulars (CBSs) and coordinated bare plurals (CBPs)), while (according to H&Z) (16c) illustrates that existential CBPs are excluded, contrary to the situation in Italian and English.³

(16) a. . . . Chien et chat avaient tous deux l’air sale.
   ‘Dog and cat both looked dirty.’
   b. . . . Chiens et chats avaient tous l’air très sale.
   ‘Dogs and cats all looked very dirty.’
   (H&Z 2003:449)
   c. Jour de marché en ville; ??clients et curieux se promènent autour des étalages.⁴
   ‘Market day in town; customers and onlookers walk about the stands.’
   (H&Z 2003:448)

However, according to native speakers of French, the CBP in (16c) is perfectly all right with an existential reading. Furthermore, this is not due to some confusion about one particular example. On the contrary, the pattern is totally productive. (17) is another example of a CBN containing plurals that allows the existential reading: in the context in which it was used, the referents of the CBN had not been mentioned (i.e., they were not preidentified).

³ With respect to CBSs, French behaves the same as Italian and English: only a ‘‘definite’’ reading is available.
⁴ H&Z’s judgment. Compare (22).
(17) L’inspecteur Williams se rendit dans cette chambre sans avoir aucune idée de ce qu’il allait y découvrir. Il eut un peu de peine à trouver l’interrupteur. Il n’y avait pratiquement aucun meuble dans la pièce, mise à part une table. *Livres et revues* jonchaient le plancher.

‘Inspector Williams went into the room without having a clue as to what he would find there. He had some trouble finding the light switch. There was almost no piece of furniture in the room, except for a table. *Books and journals* were spread all over the floor.’

(after Fabienne Martin, personal communication)

Because French plural nouns cannot be used as predicate nominals, while the CBNs containing them *can* have an existential reading, it must be concluded that H&Z’s correlation is wrong: the existential reading cannot be the result of an operation like derivation II.

Having shown that the correlation between the availability of the existential reading and predicate nominals (the first issue raised in section 1) is problematic with respect to the behavior of French predicate nominals, I will now point out a further problem: namely, the behavior of CBNs in predicate position. I think more light is shed on this problem when number—specifically, [+pl]—is taken into account.

### 2.2 CBNs as [+Pl] Elements

The empirical problem sketched above has consequences for the ingredients that make up the derivation of CBNs. One factor involved concerns H&Z’s hypothesis about the role played by number. So far, we have seen that H&Z make the following claims about number: (a) the [+pl] feature of NumP is specified by the individual conjuncts, and (b) derivation I must apply if NumP is [−pl] in Italian and English, and always in French. In addition to the problem set out in section 2.1, claim (b) has a further consequence: it forces H&Z to assume that [+pl] in French does not have the same status that it has in English. In this section, I will show that this consequence is undesirable. The main problem, I believe, is related to claim (a), and I will show that it needs to be revised.

Besides facing a problem with respect to the French data, H&Z’s proposed correlation raises another question: why should the behavior of a *noncoordinated* N as a predicate nominal be relevant for whether or not the whole CoordP is able to stay in its base position? A more natural strategy would be to first consider the behavior of CBNs themselves in predicate position—behavior that indeed yields interesting information.

With respect to their use as predicate nominals, CBNs containing singulars differ in a very interesting way from noncoordinated singular nouns: although a singular noun is not felicitous as a predicate nominal, CBNs containing singulars are perfectly acceptable both in English (18) and in Italian (19), as shown by the contrast between the (a) and (b) examples.\footnote{As before, nouns expressing functions, like *médecin* ‘doctor’ and *professeur* ‘professor’, which have special properties, are excluded from the present discussion.}
(18) a. *He was winner.
   b. He was (both) winner and loser.
      (after H&Z 2003:447, (18b))

(19) a. *Il gatto è mammifero.
      ‘The cat is mammal.’
   b. Il gatto è (al tempo stesso) vertebrato e mammifero.
      ‘The cat is (both) vertebrate and mammal.’

If H&Z are correct in their claim that only [+pl] elements can be used as predicate nominals in Italian/English, the (b) examples above strongly indicate that CBNs containing singulars must be [+pl] as well, rather than being [−pl] as H&Z claim. This is indeed very plausible, because the conjunction is plural from a semantic point of view.6

Even more interesting is the behavior of a French CBN containing singulars, given in (20). It shows that the equivalent of (18) and (19) does exist in French as well.

(20) a. *Le chat est mammifère.
      ‘The cat is mammal.’
   b. Le chat est (à la fois) mammifère et animal domestique.
      ‘The cat is (both) mammal and pet.’

Not only is this situation unexpected from the standpoint of H&Z’s hypothesis that these CBNs are [−pl]—even if we apply the hypothesis just arrived at that CBNs containing singulars are [+pl], H&Z’s idea is problematic. H&Z (2003:461) claim that [+pl] in French would have a different status than in Italian: it would not be able to make a good predication. However, (20b) raises serious problems for this hypothesis: it would be very strange to propose that [+pl] in French could not turn noncoordinated nouns into predicate nominals, but could do so in the case of CBNs.

I believe that the fact that French and English/Italian CBNs behave alike, but French and English/Italian noncoordinated nouns do not, can be explained. I turn to this question in the next section, where I claim that CBNs possess a [+pl] feature, but without claiming that this feature has a different status in French.

To summarize this section: My hypothesis goes against H&Z’s claim that the specification of NumP depends on that of the individual conjuncts. On the contrary, I hypothesize that all CBNs are characterized by the presence of a [+pl] feature in NumP.

2.3 On the Status of [+pl] in French

We have seen that noncoordinated [+pl] nouns in French do not satisfy the plural requirement needed to function as predicate nominals, while French CBNs, also [+pl], do satisfy it.

6 This does not necessarily mean that the conjunction is inherently plural; but it is at least able to spell out a plural feature.
Contrary to H&Z’s proposal, this contrast does not have to do with the status of [+pl] in French, which would differ from its status in Italian and English with respect to noncoordinated nouns, but not with respect to CBNs. The data strongly indicate that the contrast is caused by a further requirement that needs to be satisfied. Not only do noncoordinated nouns need to have a [+pl] feature in order to function as predicate nominals, this feature also needs to be realized by lexical material.

At this point, a well-known contrast between French and English/Italian becomes relevant. As discussed by Delfitto and Schroten (1991) (and see Bouchard 2002), number morphology is not expressed on the noun in French, but on the determiner; the -s on the noun in written French is almost never pronounced. This suggests that it is not the [+pl] feature that differs crosslinguistically, as H&Z claim, but the force of [+pl] morphology: [+pl] in English and Italian is realized on the noun by an affix, but not in French.

This explains how CBNs differ from noncoordinated bare nouns in French: thanks to the overt presence of the conjunction, the [+pl] feature is lexically realized in French. This means that if French has enough lexical evidence in favor of [+pl], as in the case of CBNs, it behaves just like English or Italian. Noncoordinated nouns are excluded in French, because the [+pl] feature cannot be recovered from the [+pl] morphology.8

The data examined so far indicate that French CBNs are ambiguous, but that this cannot be accounted for by H&Z’s contrast between derivations I and II. Furthermore, I have shown that French CBNs have a [+pl] feature that is successfully realized, namely, by the conjunction. We are now in a position to reexamine the second issue mentioned in section 1: H&Z’s claim that CBNs containing plurals are either “definites” or existentials.

3 Coordinated Bare Nouns as Indefinites

Consider the following pair of examples:


b. A refugees’ ship just arrived in Puglia. Sailors *(and passengers) are Albanian; the captain is Italian. (H&Z 2003:448)

(21a), in which the referents introduced by the CBN are not preidentified, is considered existential. The referents of the conjuncts in (21b), on the contrary, are interpreted as sailors and passengers.

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7 The plural marker is pronounced in the case of nouns with an irregular plural mark (cheval ‘horse’ vs. chevaux ‘horses’) and in formal speech in the case of liaison with a postnominal adjective beginning with a vowel (ministre/Ø anglais ‘English minister’ vs. ministre/Ø anglais ‘English ministers’).

8 The fact that (18b) and (20b) are even better after insertion of both and à la fois points in the same direction: although these elements do not directly spell out [+pl], they certainly have to do with number as well. Probably they are elements creating a plural set.
of the ship earlier introduced into the context. This leads H&Z to conclude that this CBN must be “definite.”

However, a closer look at these examples might lead to another conclusion concerning their interpretation: (21a) and (21b) are a nice illustration of the “weak”/“strong” ambiguity, first discussed by Milsark (1977). Indeed, the reading of (21b) clearly corresponds to a strong or partitive reading.

The same pair of examples exists in French.

(22) a. Jour de marché en ville. Clients et curieux se promenaient autour des étalages.
   b. Un bateau transportant des réfugiés vient d’arriver à Puglia. Marins et passagers sont Albanais; le capitaine est Italien.

The availability of a partitive reading is also clear in the case of (23).

(23) En général, les membres de ce département assistent à toutes les réunions. Mais tous ne sont pas toujours là. Ainsi, thésards et Aters ont séché la réunion d’hier.
   ‘In general, members of this department always attend all the meetings. But not everyone is always there. So graduate students and assistant professors stayed away from yesterday’s meeting.’

Here, graduate students and assistant professors represent a part of the previously introduced set of members. In this sense, this CBN is clearly partitive.

So, rather than showing “definiteness,” these examples suggest that the existential reading of CBNs is ambiguous in the same way as the existential reading of nouns introduced by a weak determiner like some. This observation is important, because it undermines H&Z’s hypothesis that CBNs can be “definites”; crucially, Ns showing a weak/strong ambiguity are always “indefinites.”

9 H&Z see a confirmation of this idea in the fact that BPs, which never have a “definite” reading, are impossible in (21b).

10 Work in progress indeed shows that CBNs have more in common with indefinites with respect to a whole series of semantic tests that are considered to characterize indefinites, such as variable scope, the availability of collective readings, and the introduction of a discourse referent.

If the hypothesis that CBNs are ambiguous indefinites rather than allowing for a “definite” reading turns out to be true, the following observation made by H&Z should no longer be considered as a property that could only follow from “definiteness.” According to H&Z, “definite” CBNs require uniqueness. (i) is fine because a company usually has only one president and one vice president: the CBN is unique in the sense that it constitutes the whole set. On the other hand, (ii) is excluded, because companies generally have more than one employee and one inspector; this means that the uniqueness condition is violated.

(i) At the company meeting, president and vice president gave an optimistic speech.
   (H&Z 2003:445)

(ii) ??At the company meeting, employee and inspector talked about their colleagues’ motivation.
   (H&Z 2003:445)

However, at least for some French speakers, these cases are parallel to examples of CBNs analyzed as being strong, such as (22b) and (23). In (iii), an effect comparable to the uniqueness effect in (i) and (ii) is present.
At this point, an important comment needs to be made, because it seems that an important point of H&Z’s analysis has been lost. My proposal does not seem to make any predictions concerning the fact that CBSs differ from CBPs, in the sense that they are not ambiguous: they exclude the weak indefinite reading. However, it can be shown that this problem is only apparent and that there is a way to overcome it.

In the first place, it is important to note that two processes are kept separate in my proposal: (a) formal licensing of the CBN, and (b) identification of the interpretation of the CBN. While I suggested in section 2.3 that in (a) the spell-out of [ + pl] plays a role, the way in which (b) is satisfied has become less clear as a result of my remarks on H&Z’s distinction between derivations I and II. In particular, if the two interpretations I reanalyzed as strong and weak indefinite readings are not the result of two different syntactic derivations as proposed by H&Z, one wonders how these interpretations are obtained and, more importantly, what prevents CBSs from being weak indefinites.

An important observation in this regard, illustrated by the behavior of CBPs in French, is that the coordination does not impose a definite interpretation, but rather allows it.11 As suggested by Giuseppe Longobardi (personal communication), this is the clue for an alternative explanation of the contrast between CBSs and CBPs. More precisely, it turns out that the fact that CBSs are compatible only with a definite reading is expected given independent work by Crisma (1997) and the interaction she proposes between a [ ± definite] and a [ ± count] feature. Although I cannot go into the details here for reasons of space, this makes it understandable why CBSs containing count nouns cannot be interpreted with an indefinite reading.

If it is true that the zero determiner is unspecified for [ ± definite] (i.e., that it is in principle compatible with both a [ + definite] and a [ − definite] setting), and if it is true that [ − definite] is not able to license [ ± count], unlike [ + definite]—which is systematically ambiguous between [ + count] (the lionanimal) and [ − count] (the lionmeat)—it is predicted that only the default option, [ − count], can be chosen with [ − definite].

This prediction seems to be correct. Not only are CBPs, which are [ − count] by definition, compatible with the indefinite reading, CBSs containing mass nouns turn out to behave exactly like CBPs: as confirmed by my informants and as illustrated in (24), these cases allow a weak indefinite reading.

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(iii) La fête annuelle de l’immeuble a lieu traditionnellement le 1er juin. Bretons et Italiens se réunissent dans la cour autour d’un barbecue.

‘The annual party of the building is traditionally held June 1. Bretons and Italians come together on the patio for a barbecue.’

(Anne Zribi-Hertz, personal communication)

For those French speakers, (iii) has a special interpretation in the sense that it implies that the Bretons and Italians constitute the whole set of inhabitants introduced by the first sentence. This extra dimension is comparable to H&Z’s uniqueness interpretation. What H&Z call ‘uniqueness’ seems to correspond to the extra dimension that shows up with strong readings.

11 Perhaps one could say that the coordination always moves to Spec.DP, where it formally licenses the empty D, but that this does not have the consequence that a definite interpretation is automatically triggered (but see section 4).
On servait bière et vin jusqu'à tard dans la nuit.
‘They served beer and wine until late in the evening.’

Now the reason for the behavior of CBSs containing count nouns becomes clear. Because the [− definite] feature is not able to license the [± count] feature, a [− definite] CBS containing singular count nouns would be forced into a default mass reading. It is to avoid such an undesirable result that a CBS containing singular count nouns like chien et chat ‘dog and cat’ in (16a) can only be interpreted with a ‘“definite”’ reading.

In this section, I argued that CBNs can be treated as indefinites, which are ambiguous in a familiar way between a weak and a strong reading. In the next section, I will show that this hypothesis makes it possible to propose an account for CBNs that also encompasses the data from French. This brings us to the discussion of the third, and last, issue raised in section 1.

4 The [+ Qu] Feature and the Structure of Coordinated Bare Nouns

If the hypothesis is true that CBNs are to be considered as indefinites, one expects that CBNs must be analyzed as structurally ambiguous elements in the same way as the nouns introduced by weak determiners, namely, (a) as cardinality predicates on their weak reading, and (b) as having a quantificational structure on their strong reading. In what follows, I will claim that this ambiguity is expressed by two different syntactic structures.

It is indeed possible to propose that CBNs are structurally ambiguous as well, but it requires reconsidering H&Z’s idea about the role of the [+ qu] feature as a quantificational operator. This does not turn out to be a dramatic move, though, because a closer examination of H&Z’s proposals reveals that they themselves do not treat [+ qu] as a quantificational operator in all cases. This becomes clear once their analysis of nouns introduced by numerals is taken into account.

Nouns introduced by numerals are indefinites and are ambiguous between a weak and a strong reading. On their weak reading, nouns introduced by numerals are typically not quantificational at all. So, if [+ qu] is a quantificational operator, one would not expect it to be present in this case. However, H&Z propose that nouns introduced by numerals are always endowed with a [+ qu] feature and have the following structure: the numeral is within NumP, while DP contains an empty D0.

\[
\text{(25) } \left[ \text{DP } D_{[+\text{qu}]}^e \left[ \text{NumP three}_{[+\text{qu}]} \left[ \text{NP gold forks} \right] \right] \right]
\]

(H&Z 2003:458)

Furthermore, H&Z claim that the [+ qu] feature moves to the D projection in order to license the empty D0, just as it does with CBNs (see (8)). So, it seems as if, in the case of a weak reading, [+ qu] is needed only to make the construction legitimate. In other words, it is present merely to let the nominal group in question function as an argument. This means that [+ qu] does not function as a quantificational operator at all.

If allowing the nominal group to serve as an argument is the only function of [+ qu] in the case of weak readings, it would be more natural to propose that it is totally absent in that case. This is indeed possible: the syntactic structure of weak indefinites, which are analyzed as cardinality
predicates, simply corresponds to a NumP. Only strong indefinites, which are quantificational, have the structure in (25): a quantificational operator-variable structure is created in which [+qu] is treated as a quantificational operator, while D⁰ corresponds to a variable.

In summary, H&Z tacitly assume that [+qu] can fulfill two different roles: (a) that of a formal licenser, or (b) that of an operator binding a variable. On the contrary, I claim that [+qu] can only be a quantificational operator and that it is absent in nonquantificational structures.

CBNs can be treated in exactly the same way: weak CBNs can be considered to be just NumPs, as shown in (26).

(26) \[\text{NumP} \text{ Num}^e_{[+pl]} \text{ CoordP} \{\text{NP N} \&_{[+pl]} \text{ [NP N]}\}\]

This is possible thanks to the status of [+pl] within CBNs as put forward in section 2.3: [+pl] is checked or “recovered” by movement of the CoordP, which I claimed is [+pl] from a semantic point of view, into Spec,NumP, allowing the conjunction to check [+pl]. This movement is necessary to license the CBN as an argument.

The syntactic structure of strong CBNs corresponds to a DP. The structure in (27) corresponds to that of a strong CBN and is identical to the structure H&Z propose.

(27) \[\text{DP} \text{ D}^e \{\text{NumP} \text{ Num}^e_{[+pl]} \text{ CoordP} \{\text{NP N} \&_{[+qu]} \text{ [NP N]}\}\}\]

The hypothesis that strong CBNs have a quantificational structure is expressed by the fact that there is a variable in D⁰ and a [+qu] feature functioning as a quantificational operator that licenses D⁰.

The D projection is legitimate in the case of strong CBNs, because the presence of [+qu], a quantificational operator, makes it possible to bind the variable introduced in the head of D; the variable in D⁰ is licensed by moving the material present in Spec,NumP, which contains [+qu], to Spec,DP.¹²

5 Concluding Remarks

I have shown that French does have bare arguments, but in the form of coordinated bare nouns, and that these have the same properties as those in English and Italian. I have tried to account for them with the following modifications to H&Z’s proposals:

- All CBNs are [+pl].
- CBNs are indefinites that allow a weak and a strong reading.
- CBNs are structurally ambiguous. Weak CBNs are NumPs, which are turned into proper arguments thanks to the [+pl] feature. Strong CBNs are DPs with a quantificational structure in which the empty D⁰ is made legitimate thanks to the [+qu] feature.

¹² This proposal conforms to some suggestions made by Longobardi (1994) about CBNs. He suggests that CBNs involve a quantificational structure, in which the conjunction functions as a quasi operator. Although I do not think such a structure is necessary to let the CBN function as an argument, which is assured by the [+pl] feature, I do think this structure characterizes the strong reading.
References


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