PLURAL INDEFINITE DPS
AS PLURAL-POLARITY ITEMS

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1. Introduction

In what follows, I try to account in a principled way for the interpretation of French DPs introduced by the so-called ‘partitive article’ des (hereafter, ‘des-DPs’). Unlike other Romance languages, French does not generally license bare plurals, except in predicative structures, coordinated NPs (NPpl et NPpl), and enumerations. Des-DPs are often said to be the French counterparts of Romance bare plurals, because they must generally take narrow-scope with respect to all types of operators. It turns out, however, that des-DPs are sometimes able to take wider scope than would be expected if they were exactly equivalent to, say, Spanish bare plurals:

(1) Je veux acheter des chemises qui sont en vente dans ce magasin.
    I want to buy des shirts that are-IND sold in this shop.
    “I want to buy some shirts which are sold in this shop.”

According to prescriptive grammar, the indicative mood indeed forces des chemises to take wide-scope, and des chemises must be interpreted ‘de re’, e.g., takes scope over the intensional verb. The Spanish counterpart of (1) requires the introduction of una and some Italian speakers report they need to use della/lei in order to get the same reading (though this does not seem to be true in standard Italian). In spoken French, narrow-scope readings are allowed in contexts like (1), but it remains true that wide-scope readings require the indicative mood.

It also turns out that des-DPs are allowed to take scope as far as singular indefinites can in certain contexts:

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1 In this paper, ‘plural indefinites’ is meant to refer only to bare plurals and des-DPs, not to other plural indefinites. I depart from the usual terminology.
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(2) Si des cousins à moi meurent, je serai riche.
if des relatives of mine die, I will be rich
"If some relatives of mine die, I will be rich."

(2) has a reading according to which there are relatives of mine such that, if they die, I will be rich. Des-DPs are therefore able to take scope over an if-clause to which they belong, e.g. to escape a scopal island, just like singular indefinites (see Reinhart 1997).

But des-DPs are nevertheless forced to take wide-scope in a lot of contexts:

(3) Tous les garçons ont lu des livres.
all the boys have read des books
"All the boys have read books."

(3) can never be interpreted as meaning that there are certain specific books that all the boys have read.

Given the fact that wide-scope readings seem quite constrained for des-DPs, the question arises how to account for this variability (e.g. des-DPs are in most contexts equivalent to, say, Spanish bare plurals, but are not always). In what follows, I will connect the scopal behaviour of des-DPs to another aspect of their interpretation: although morphologically plural, des-DPs are very often interpreted as number-neutral:

(4) - Avez-vous des enfants? - Oui, j'en ai un.
"Do you have children? Yes, I have one child."

(3) Tous les garçons ont lu des livres.

(4) shows that a des-DP can receive an 'at-least one' interpretation, even though it is morphologically plural. And for (3) to be true, it is sufficient that each of the boys has read one book. Des livres is therefore interpreted as a dependent plural, just like wheels in (5):

(5) Monocycles have wheels

There are contexts, however, in which des-DPs must receive a genuine plural interpretation:

(6) Il y a une heure, Pierre a vu des filles.
"One hour ago, Pierre saw some girls."

(6) would be a false sentence if Pierre saw only one girl one hour ago.

The hypothesis I am going to present in this paper is basically the following: des-DPs are forced to be interpreted as dependent plurals whenever they can, e.g. whenever there is an item (the 'licenser') on which they can depend; the class of licensers will include not only plural DPs, but also intensional verbs (plural quantifiers over possible worlds) and some abstract aspectual operators. Only when no dependent reading is possible will des-DPs get a genuine plural interpretation, and be free to take wide-scope.

The paper is organised as follows: in section 2, I present and criticize a pragmatic account of the plural/number-neutral contrast. In section 3, I present my proposal and show how it can predict some basic facts about the interpretation of des-DPs. In section 4, I will show that my proposal sheds light on the interpretation of des-DPs in habitual and iterative sentences. In section 5, I will tentatively extend my hypothesis in order to deal with the differences between French des-DPs and Spanish Bare Plurals. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. A pragmatic account of the number-neutral/plural contrast

A very intuitive account of the contrast between (4) (repeated as (7)) and (8) would be to argue that the 'at-least two' interpretation of des enfants in (8) arises as an implicature of what is in fact an 'at least one' interpretation:

(7) - Avez-vous des enfants? - Non, j'en ai un.
"Do you have children? No, I have one child."

(8) Pierre a des enfants.
"Pierre has children."

(8) is felt as true only if Pierre has at least two children. Suppose, however, that des-DPs always convey an 'at least one' interpretation. Then what has to be explained is not the interpretation of (7), but that of (8): (8) could then be argued to implicate, rather than to entail, that Pierre has more than one child, because of the availability of (9):

(9) Pierre a un enfant.
"Pierre has a child."

The pragmatic reasoning giving rise to the implicature would be the following (roughly): if there had been exactly one child, (9) would have been uttered instead of (8); hence, (9) is false.

As is well known, questions tend to cancel implicatures. This is why the number-neutral interpretation of des enfants in (7) is so obvious.
Such a pragmatic account could be extended to dependent plurals in the following way: plural operators should also be able to cancel the ‘at least two’ implicature which is associated with des-DPs, given the following reasoning:

(4) Tous les garçons ont lu des livres.
   “All the boys have read books.”

What kind of interpretation is the availability of (4’) below able to block?

(4’) Tous les garçons ont lu un livre.
   “All the boys have read a book.”

In a situation in which each boy read exactly one book, it is reasonable to assume that (4’) would be chosen instead of (4). Hence, a possible implicature of (4) is that (4’) is false:

(4”) It is not the case that all the boys read exactly one book each.

In other words, (4) should have the implicature that at least one of the boys read at least two books, but should not implicate that all the boys did so. Therefore, the ‘at least two’ implicature associated with des should indeed disappear in sentences like (4), and be replaced with a much weaker implicature, namely, (4”).

There are reasons, however, to doubt that such a pragmatic treatment is really able to explain the number-neutral reading of des-DPs as arising from the cancellation of the usual ‘at least two’ implicature.

First, the reasoning which has just been developed regarding (4) should also be valid for (10):

(10) Chacun des garçons a lu des livres.
   “Each of the boys has read some books.”

Yet it turns out that (10) entails that each of the boys read more than one book; I conclude that in (10), the ‘at least two’ interpretation of des livres cannot be itself an implicature, since such an implicature should be cancelled in this very context. One has therefore to assume that, at least in some cases, the ‘at least two’ interpretation is really part of the meaning of des-DPs, and is not simply implicated.

Second, assuming that des has a number-neutral interpretation, it is not that clear that the singular indefinite determiner un/une should count as logically stronger than des, given the fact that un/une itself does not have an exactly-one interpretation. Rather, the exactly-one interpretation associated with un/une arises itself as an implicature, and un/une is generally compatible with an ‘at least one’ reading:

(11) - Avez-vous une cigarette? - Oui, j’en ai encore trois.
   “- Do you have a cigarette? -Yes, I do. I still have three of them.”

The pragmatic account is therefore not straightforward, and would require a better understanding of the way implicatures triggered by determiners are computed.2

3. Des-DPs as PLURAL-polarity items

In order to capture the fact that bare plurals and des-DPs generally force narrow-scope readings, most theoreticians have assumed that they are not standard indefinites (which, on the contrary, can take ‘long distance’ scope). For instance, it has been suggested that they are names of kinds (Carlson 1978; Chierchia 1998) or that they denote properties (Dobrovie-Sorin & Laca 2000). In both cases, their ‘semantic type’ is different from that of standard quantified DPs: <e> if they name kinds, <s,t> if they denote properties. But we know at least another class of expressions which are also restricted to narrow-scope readings, namely, (negative) polarity items. It is tempting, then, to see whether bare plurals and des-DPs could be treated as some kind of polarity items. Their distribution should then be sensitive to the presence of certain licensing elements. And just as negative polarity items can be thought of as ‘semantically deficient’, so that they need to be licensed under the scope of some operator, they would also be ‘deficient’ in a sense; I will suggest that the discrepancy between plural morphology and non-plural readings is a reflex of such a deficiency.

When we look at contexts in which des-DPs can be interpreted as number-neutral, we find, among others, certain where-clauses.

(12) Quand des Italiens vont à Paris, ils vont visiter le Louvre.
   “When Italian people go to Paris, they visit the Louvre.”

(12) has a reading according to which when one or more Italian people go to Paris, he or they visit(s) the Louvre. This is exactly what a number-neutral reading for des Italiens amounts to.

2 Some recent works show that implicatures are actually not computed simply on the basis of the global meaning of a given sentence, and that an adequate theory of implicatures is much more complex than one could have thought. See Chierchia (2001).
A closer look at conditional contexts makes clear that des-NPs in if-or-when-clauses can be number-neutral only if the conditional clause somehow involves a plurality of events or situations:

(13) Quand des gens sont venus l’an dernier, je les ai rencontrés.
    “When people came last year, I met them.”

In (13), the when-clause can be understood as pointing to a presupposed single event of SEVERAL people coming. It can also be read as referring to several events of people coming, in which case there may be only one person for each event. But it is not possible to understand the when-clause as denoting a single event of only one person coming: the number-neutral reading of the des-DP requires there to be several events.

In view of these facts, it seems quite intuitive to think that number-neutral readings of des-NPs are licensed, in particular, by contexts which include some kind of plural quantification on which des-DPs can be dependent. I now formulate the proposal itself: des-DPs are morphologically plural but semantically number-neutral, and they must be interpreted under the scope of some suitable operator, such as plural DPs, intensional verbs and some ‘plural’ aspectual-temporal operators. Only if there is no licensor will they be interpreted as genuine plurals, and then may be specific. More formally, des-DPs are marked as [+pl] (morphological plural), and [+pl] is licensed within the scope of any element marked as [+PL] (typically, plural quantified NPs or ‘plural’ aspectual markers). [+PL] expresses semantic plural, it can, and even must, be introduced into the des-DP itself only when there is no other [+PL] which could license the [+pl] feature. In the latter case, a des-DP is not interpreted as number-neutral, but as a genuine plural.

My proposal makes the following prediction, among others: if a des-DP takes maximal scope, then it cannot be number-neutral. As far as I know, this prediction is correct. Consider (1) again:

(1) Je veux acheter des chemises qui sont en vente dans ce magasin.
    “I want to buy des shirts that are-IND sold in this shop.”

Indicative mood in the relative clause forces [des chemises qui ...] to take scope over the intensional verb, which therefore cannot count as a licensor for [+pl]. Consequently, [+PL] must occur within the des-DP itself, which prevents it from being interpreted as number-neutral. This yields the following interpretation:
    “There are at least two shirts which are sold in this shop and which I want to buy”. Consider now (6):

(6) Il y a une heure. Pierre a vu des filles.
    “One hour ago, Pierre saw some girls.”

Des filles is interpreted as a genuine plural, e.g. (6) is false if Pierre saw exactly one girl. This is again predicted: since there is no licensor in the sentence, des filles must contain a [+PL] feature. In (4) (repeated below), the fact that the des-DP can be licensed by the subject rules out the possibility of interpreting it as a genuine plural ([+PL] can be introduced only ‘at last resort’), which in turn forbids a wide-scope reading:

(4) Tous les garçons ont lu des livres.
    “All the boys have read books.”

Note that chaque and chacun do not allow des-DPs to be number-neutral, as shown by (10):

(10) Chacun des garçons a lu des livres.
    “Each of the boys has read some books.”

Therefore, DPs headed by chaque or chacun must not be marked as [+PL], which is consistent with the fact that chaque-DPs are morphologically singular and that, contrary to DPs headed by tous les, chaque-DPs are not compatible with collective predicates, as (14) illustrates:

(14) *Chaque membre de l’équipe s’est réuni.
    “Each member of the team gathered.”

In this case, the necessary narrow-scope reading of the object cannot be explained in terms of plural polarity. I will assume that it is simply a consequence of the distributive nature of each.
The fact that, contrary to tous les, chaque and chacun are not marked as [+PL], is also able to account for the following contrast:

(15) a. Tous les garçons étaient en train d’embrasser des filles lorsque je suis entré.
   “All the boys were kissing girls when I came in.”

b. ??Chaque garçon était en train d’embrasser des filles lorsque je suis entré.
   “Each boy was kissing des girls when I came in.”

In (15b), des filles cannot be interpreted as number-neutral. Therefore, each boy must have been kissing several girls at the same time for the sentence to be true. Assuming that it is physically close to impossible to kiss several people at the same time, (15b) is expected to be odd for pragmatic reasons. On the other hand, (15a) is fine because des filles can and must be interpreted as number-neutral, since its [+pl] feature is c-commanded by the [+PL] feature of the universally quantified plural subject.

It has to be noticed, however, that such ‘dependent plurals’ could of course be analyzed differently. Consider (4) again:

(4) Tous les garçons ont lu des livres.
   “All the boys have read books.”

(4) could be argued to receive a cumulative interpretation: (4) would assert the existence of a set $Y$ of several books such that the set of all the boys - call it $X$ - and $Y$ stand in the following relation: each member of $X$ has read at least one member of $Y$, and each member of $Y$ has been read by at least one member of $X$.\footnote{I am using the definition of cumulativity that can be found in Szabolcsi 1997: 64: Two quantifiers stand in the cumulative relation if they introduce two sets (witness sets of the quantifiers) $X$ and $Y$ such that “every element of $X$ (is) connected to some element of $Y$, and … every element of $Y$ (is) connected to some element of $X”.}$

It is easy to see that such an interpretation is very close, in terms of truth conditions to a narrow-scoped number-neutral interpretation for des livres. In fact, if it is added that the boys cannot have read exactly the same book each, then the number-neutral narrow-scoped interpretation is exactly equivalent to the cumulative reading: assume that each boy has read at least one book, and that they have not read the same book each. Take the set $Y$ of all the books read by at least one boy; this set includes more than one book, and every book is connected to a member of $Y$, while, by definition, each member of $Y$ has been read by a boy. Therefore the number-neutral narrow-scoped reading entails the cumulative reading. And it is easy to see that the entailment also holds in the other direction.

If the cumulative analysis were correct, there would then be no scopal asymmetry between the subject and the object. But one could expect, then, that the passivization of (4) would preserve its truth-conditions:

(4’’) Des livres ont été lus par tous les garçons.
   “Books have been read by all the boys.”

As a matter of fact, this prediction is not borne out: for (4’’) to be true, there must be several books such that each of them has been read by all the boys (distributive reading). I conclude that the subject and the object, in (4), cannot be scopally independent, and that the subject takes scope over the object.

4. Event-dependent plurals

In the previous sections, it has been shown that plural DPs count as licensors for the [+pl] feature. I will now argue that it is also possible to license [+pl] in a des-DP by interpreting it under the scope of some aspect-temporal ‘plural’ operator. Des-DPs can indeed be dependent not only on other plural DPs, but also on expressions which denote pluralities of events (an idea which was already illustrated by (12)).

4.1 Differentiated scope

(16) Le chasseur a tué des lapins à plusieurs reprises.
   “The hunter has killed rabbits repeatedly.”

(15) means that what the hunter did was kill a different rabbit at different times. Des lapins is therefore interpreted as a number-neutral narrow-scoped indefinite. Consider now (17):

(17) ??Le chasseur a tué un lapin à plusieurs reprises.
   “The hunter killed a rabbit repeatedly.”

What is odd in (17) is that it suggests that the hunter repeatedly killed the same rabbit. Un lapin must take scope over à plusieurs reprises. The peculiar scopal behaviour of plural indefinites is the reason why such constructions are said to exhibit a phenomenon of ‘differentiated scope’.

It is quite natural to treat the indefinite plural as ‘dependent’ on the adverbal phrase, in the same way as a plural indefinite can be dependent on
another plural DP. I will therefore assume that [+PL] can mark not only DPs, but also all sorts of categories, including adverbials and aspectual/verbal projections. In order to force un lapin to take wide scope in (17), I will assume that some contexts not only allow but also FORCE scope-dependent readings to be expressed by means of dependent plurals, e.g. anti-license, among others, singular indefinites.\(^6\)

Of course, not all licensing contexts are also anti-licensing contexts for singular indefinites:

(18) Tous les professeurs portent des cravates.
   “All the professors wear ties.”
(19) Tous les professeurs portent une cravate.
   “All the professors wear a tie.”

As shown by (18) and (19), tous les professeurs is able to license a number-neutral des-DP without anti-licensing singular DPs, since (19) does not mean that all the professors wear the same tie. But the fact that the anti-licensing contexts are only a subset of the licensing contexts is not a problem in itself, since that is exactly what we observe with other polarity phenomena:

(20) If Peter saw anyone yesterday, I will know it.
(21) If Peter saw someone yesterday, I will know it.

(20) shows that anyone can be licensed by being under the scope of a conditional, while (21) shows that someone is not anti-licensed by this very context which licenses anyone. That someone is not anti-licensed is clear from the fact that (21) need not be interpreted as: “there is someone such that if Peter saw him yesterday, I will know it”.

4.2 Another event-dependency

(22) Dans ma vie, j’ai déjà vu des soldats tuer un prisonnier.
   “In my life, I have already seen soldiers killing a prisoner.”

(22) can be taken as true if I have been a witness of several events in which only one soldier killed a prisoner. Des soldats is interpreted as dependent on some aspectual plural operator, and this operator, on the other hand, distributes over un prisonnier. An account in terms of cumulativity would have to assume that, on the one hand, events and soldiers are in a cumulative relation, while, on the other hand, des soldats distributes over un prisonnier. But this distributive relation would be quite a mystery, since it is not licensed in simple sentences:

(23) Des soldats ont tué un prisonnier > only one prisoner
   “Some soldiers killed a prisoner.”

Another possible analysis would be to assume that the subject of the infinitive clause is a genuine plural which takes scope over the matrix verb, yielding the following reading: “there is a set of soldiers such that for each of its members, I have seen him killing a prisoner”. In that case, the fact that each of the killing-events may involve only one soldier would not be derived from a number-neutral semantics for the des-DP, but rather from the fact that des-DPs are able to take maximal scope and then to distribute over the whole sentence. Such a mechanism is certainly at play in the following example:

(24) J’ai déjà vu trois soldats tuer un prisonnier.
   “I have already seen three soldiers killing a prisoner.”

(24) can mean something like “there are three soldiers such that I have seen each of them killing a prisoner (possibly on three different occasions)”. However, it can be shown that such a ‘wide-scope’ analysis is not the right one for (22): if it were, then the apparent number-neutral reading would imply that the des-DP scopes over anything intervening between the matrix verb and the infinitival clause. If such a wide-scope reading turns out to be impossible, an apparent number-neutral reading should be impossible too. For instance, (25) below would be predicted to have at most the two following readings:

(25) J’ai vu à plusieurs reprises des soldats tuer un prisonnier.
   “I have seen repeatedly soldiers killing a prisoner.”

(a) wide-scope reading: “There are several soldiers such that, for each of them, I have repeatedly seen him killing a prisoner”.
(b) narrow-scope reading: “I have repeatedly seen events in which several soldiers killed a prisoner”.

As a matter of fact, the (a) reading is impossible, while a narrow-scope number-neutral reading turns out to be available: “I have repeatedly seen events in which one or more than one soldier killed a prisoner”. This provides support for an analysis according to which des-DPs can be interpreted as number neutral

\(^6\) This idea simply exploits the parallel with negative polarity items. For instance, while any, in English, is licensed by certain environments, such as negation, some is anti-licensed by negation.
if they occur under the scope of a plural aspectual operator quantifying over events.

4.3 Habitual and iterative sentences

Habitual sentences can be divided into two types, depending on whether they are generalizations about situations or simply assert the existence of a certain habit (sentences belonging to the second type will be referred to as ‘simple habitual sentences’ in what follows). These two types are illustrated below:

(26) Quand Paul est nerveux, il fume des cigarettes.
    “When Paul is nervous, he smokes cigarettes.”
(27) Paul fume des cigarettes.
    “Paul smokes cigarettes.”

One of the differences between the two types is that the first one allows the direct object to be a singular DP, while the second one does not:

(28) Quand Paul est nerveux, il fume une cigarette.
    “When Paul is nervous, he smokes a cigarette.”
(29) Paul fume une cigarette.
    “Paul smokes a cigarette.”

(29) can only be episodic, and its English counterpart is simply deviant.

This peculiar behaviour of simple habitual sentences is reminiscent of the phenomenon of differentiated scope. If the comparison between simple habitual sentences and those which show differentiated scope is sound, then habitual predicates should not really disallow singular objects; rather, singular objects should be allowed but should always take scope over the habitual predicate:

(30) Jean conduit une voiture.
    “Jean drives a car.”

Unless the previous discourse or the general context provides a contextual restriction, (30) can only be interpreted as meaning that that there is a truck that John drives. If I want to say that Jean is a car-driver, I have to utter (31):

(31) Jean conduit des voitures.
    “Jean drives cars.”

The reason why (29) cannot be an habitual sentence is then simply that its meaning would be something like “there is a certain cigarette that Paul has the habit to smoke”, which is strongly deviant because “smoking a certain cigarette” is a once-only predicate.

I therefore suggest the following mechanism: simple habitual predicates are associated with an aspectual [+PL] operator. As such, they are able to license des-DPs objects, which in turn are interpreted as number-neutral. Singular DPs, on the other hand, are anti-licensed by [+PL], and therefore must take scope over it.

It is interesting to note that numerical DPs must also take scope over habitual predicates:

(32) J’enseigne à deux étudiants.
    “I teach two students.”

If there is no contextual restriction, (32) can only mean that there are two students whom I teach, and not that I have the habit of teaching pairs of students, even though there would be nothing unrealistic in having such a habit.

Numerical DPs display a similar behaviour in constructions which illustrate differentiated scope:

(33) ??Le chasseur a tué deux lapins à plusieurs reprises.
    “The hunter killed two rabbits repeatedly.”

(33) is deviant because it entails that there are two rabbits that the hunter killed several times. I am then led to assume that numerical DPs, and maybe other types of DPs, are also anti-licensed by [+PL] in some contexts.

Concerning the semantics of simple habitual sentences, I will simply assume that habitual predicates contain an habituality (Hab) operator which asserts the existence of a plurality of events instantiating the predicate. A more explicit semantic characterization would be required in order to account for the dispositional flavour of habitual sentences. What is important is that there is a similarity between the Hab operator and plural existential DPs. The Hab operator can be naturally understood as marked as [+PL]. This analysis is actually not restricted to habitual sentences and differentiated scope, but can be extended to other types of iterative sentences. In all of them, we find plural objects which are

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actually interpreted as number-neutral, while singular indefinite objects are antilicensed:

(34) J’ai passé la journée à fumer des cigarettes.
    “I spent the whole day smoking cigarettes.”
(35) *? J’ai passé la journée à fumer une cigarette.
    “I spent the whole day smoking a cigarette.”

(35) entails that there is a single cigarette that I have been smoking during the whole day.

Habitual and iterative predicates can also license [+pl] subjects and antilicense singular indefinites subjects, if these subjects are postverbal, as in locative inversion constructions:

(36) a. Dans ce restaurant mangent des gens célèbres.
    “In this restaurant eat famous people.”
b. Dans ce restaurant mange un homme célèbre.
    “In this restaurant eats a famous man.”

While (36a), if read as an habitual sentence, means that the restaurant is such that events in which one or more famous people eat in that restaurant are usual, (36b) can be habitual, but it then entails that there is a certain man who happens to eat quite regularly in the restaurant. Post-verbal subjects thus turn out to behave exactly like objects of habitual sentences.

My proposal also sheds light on the following contrast:

(37) ?? Des romans américains se lisent généralement avec plaisir.
    “American novels are read generally with pleasure.
(38) On lit généralement des romans américains avec plaisir.
    “When one reads American novels, it is with pleasure.”

A des-DP cannot easily be the subject of an habitual sentence. To the extent to which (37) is acceptable, the subject is interpreted as generic. But it can be shown that for a des-DP to be felicitously interpreted as generic, it must be the case either that the generalisation is over groups of several individuals (which motivates the use of a plural subject), as in (39), or that, for whatever reason, plural morphology is ‘neutralized’, e.g., the des-DP is number-neutral (see, among others, Dobrovie-Sorin 2002):

(39) Des enfants ensemble font beaucoup de bruit.
    “Children who are playing together are noisy.”

The contrast between (37) and (38) is therefore expected: in (37), the use of a plural DP is not motivated, since the sentence clearly expresses a generalisation about individual novels, not over groups of novels, while in (38), the des-DP object occurs inside an habitual predicate, which makes it number-neutral. Since plural morphology does not correspond anymore to semantic plural, and therefore does not need to be semantically motivated, the sentence can then be interpreted as: “When one reads an American novel, it is generally with pleasure”.

5. Bare Plurals in Spanish

Let us assume that Spanish Bare Plurals are just like French des-DPs, except that the [+PL] feature cannot be introduced in a bare plural, not even as a last resort. Namely, Bare Plurals would be marked as [+pl] (morphological plural), which must be licensed by a c-commanding [+PL], but no [+PL] can be introduced in a bare plural, not even as a saving device. While French allows a [+PL] feature to mark a des-DP, Spanish has to resort to an overt determiner (unos/unas). It is thus expected that whenever a French des-DP receives a genuine plural interpretation and takes wide-scope (which means that [+PL] has been introduced as a last resort), then no bare plural can occur in the corresponding Spanish sentence. This could explain why a de re interpretation is impossible for Spanish bare plurals which are c-commanded by an intensional verb: while indicative mood forces, in (1), the introduction of [+PL] within the des-DP, such a move is just impossible for Spanish Bare Plurals. Another prediction is that predicates which denote single events should disallow bare plural objects, except if there is a plural subject; this turns out to be the case:

(40) a. A las tres en punto, todos los policías estaban interrogando sospechosos/unos sospechosos.
    “At three o’clock exactly, all the policemen were questioning suspects/some suspects.”

b. A las tres en punto, cada policía estaba interrogando sospechosos/unos sospechosos.
    “At three o’clock exactly, each policeman was questioning suspects/some suspects.”

In (40a), the subject is marked as [+PL], and is therefore able to license a bare plural object. In (40b), the subject is not marked as [+PL], and, since the predicate itself denotes a single event, no bare plural object is licensed.
Consider now the following contrast:

(41) a.  
\[ \text{Ya he visto policías/a unos policías.} \]
\[ \text{“I have already seen policemen/some policemen.”} \]

b.  
\[ \text{A las tres en punto vi **a policías/**policías/unos policías.} \]
\[ \text{“At three o’clock exactly, I saw policemen/some policemen.”} \]

The fact that the past simple can only refer to a single event explains why no bare plural object is licensed in (41b). The composed past tense in (41a) is compatible with a plurality of events, and the predicate licenses a bare plural object.

Another argument showing that Spanish Bare Plurals are, in some respect, plural polarity items, comes from the following contrast:

(42) Unos soldados quemaron unas casas*/casas.
\[ \text{“Some soldiers burnt some houses/houses.”} \]

(43) Unos soldados quemaron casas, otros quemaron pisos.
\[ \text{“Some soldiers burnt houses, others burnt apartments.”} \]

An unos-subject cannot easily be distributive, unless it is ‘contrastive’, as in (43). Only if it is able to distribute will it count as a licenser for a bare plural object, since otherwise it cannot be said to take scope over it. The contrast between (42) and (43) is therefore expected. In (43), casas is interpreted as number-neutral. On the other hand, it is expected that DPs headed by unos/unas cannot be number-neutral. This prediction seems to be realised. Consider for instance (44) and (45):

(44) Yo he visto (a) soldados matar a un prisionero.
\[ \text{“I have already seen soldiers killing a prisoner.”} \]

(45) Yo he visto (a) unos soldados matar a un prisionero.
\[ \text{“I have already seen some soldiers killing a prisoner.”} \]

For (44) to be true, I must have seen several events in which one or more than one soldier kills a prisoner, while (45) entails that what I have seen are events in which a group of soldiers kill a prisoner.

Moreover, unos/unas-DPs are anti-licensed by the [+PL]-feature in the very contexts which anti-license singular indefinites: this is why habitual and iterative predicates disallow unos/unas-DPs:

(46) Fumo unos cigarillos.
\[ \text{“I smoke some cigarettes.”} \]

As expected, (46) only has an episodic reading, unless the object is understood as taxonomic, in which case it must take wide-scope: “there are kinds of cigarettes that I smoke”. It is interesting to note that while Italian bare plurals do not seem to obey the same restrictions as Spanish bare plurals (at least for most speakers), dei/delle-DPs behave just like unos/unas-DPs, as shown by (47):

(47) Fumo delle sigarette.
\[ \text{“I smoke some cigarettes.”} \]

(47), if read as an habitual sentence, could only get a taxonomic wide-scope interpretation: “there are kinds of cigarettes that I smoke”. Unos/unas-DPs also take wide-scope in differentiated-scope sentences:

(48) ?? Ese soldado ha matado repetidamente unos enemigos.
\[ \text{“This soldier has killed some enemies repeatedly.”} \]

(48) only yields the ‘absurd’ reading according to which some enemies got killed repeatedly.

I conclude that viewing Spanish bare plurals as PLURAL-polarity items sheds light on some aspects of their interpretation and distribution. Moreover, the differences between them and French des-DPs can be attributed to the fact that French has the last resort option of introducing a [+PL]-feature in a des-DF if necessary, while this is impossible for Spanish Bare Plurals. It cannot be said, however, that this view explains everything about the distribution of Spanish Bare Plurals. For instance, it cannot explain why the following sentence, among others, is grammatical:

(49) Conoce lingüistas.
\[ \text{“He knows linguists.”} \]

My proposal is therefore only tentative, and needs to be supplemented with a more comprehensive account. Yet, it at least captures certain similarities and differences between French des-DPs and Spanish Bare Plurals, some of which, to the best of my knowledge, had not been noticed - in particular, the fact that plural DPs and predicates which denote pluralities of events take part in the licensing of bare plural objects, is, as far as I know, a new observation.

\[ ^8 \text{Recall that I am only considering habitual sentences of the second type, ‘simple habitual sentences’, not those which express generalizations over situations. The following discourse is of course perfectly acceptable:} \]

(i)  
\[ \text{“What do you generally do after dinner? I smoke some cigarettes.”} \]
Its Spanish counterpart is acceptable too.
6. Conclusion

My proposal is based on the following insight: there is an essential link between the fact that des-NPs and Romance bare plurals can be interpreted as number-neutral and their tendency to take narrow-scope with respect to all types of operators. I have suggested that while des-DPs can be interpreted as true plurals only at last resort, Spanish Bare Plurals never can (which certainly needs to be qualified, especially when a relative clause is adjoined to a bare plural). I have also emphasized that the licensing of number-neutral des-DPs and Spanish Bare Plurals crucially involves plural quantifiers, intensional verbs and ‘plural’ aspect-temporal operators. But it is clear that I have not captured all the contexts which license Bare Plurals in Spanish.

My proposal may turn out to be fully compatible with another line of research which proved successful, and according to which Bare Plurals denote properties (e.g. are expressions of type <e, t>), so that they always need to be ‘incorporated’ into some other expression. What needs to be known is what exactly the ‘incorporating’ contexts are. Besides those which have already been identified (such as predicates which contain spatio-temporal variables), I have shown that quantified plural objects and predicates which denote pluralities of events also play a role in the definition of ‘incorporating’ contexts (in my terms, ‘licensing’ contexts). An hypothesis which needs to be made, then, is that semantic incorporation of properties entails number-neutralization, as has been suggested, for instance, by Dobrovie-Sorin (2002).

If these speculations are correct, my ‘last resort’ theory concerning French could be derived from the following assumptions:

(a) Des-DPs are expressions of type <e, t>.

(b) Type-shifting at last resort: a type-shifting operation can affect a certain expression only if it is the only way to fix a type-mismatch problem. For instance, des-DPs are turned into standard plural indefinites only when they cannot be incorporated.

In Spanish, the availability of an overt determiner which is able to turn a plural DP into an indefinite expression of type <e, t>, t> simply blocks the possibility of a covert type-shifting operation for Bare Plurals. This last idea needs to be more carefully developed, and is inspired by Chierchia 1998, who proposes a general principle according to which ‘overt’ type-shifters always block ‘covert’ type-shifting operations.

References
Laca, B. 1990. “Generic objects: some more pieces to the puzzle”, Lingua 81,25-46.