Number, (in)definiteness and Norwegian nouns.

Norwegian nouns generally come in four forms, one bare and three suffixed ones - *elg* (elk), *elger* (elks), *elgen* (the elk), *elgene* (the elks) - often labelled indefinite (or bare) singular, indefinite (or bare) plural, definite singular and definite plural, respectively. This talk presents the results of a search for the grammar semantics (Bouchard 1995) - the abstract, and invariant meaning - of the first two of these signs. I make two major claims; (i) that the truly bare noun, instead of being an indefinite singular, bears general number (Corbett 2000) and is undefined with regard to definiteness, and (ii) that the Norwegian bare plural, contrarily to the English (and Danish) one, really is a true indefinite, and not just unmarked with regard to definiteness.

Concerning the first claim, I show that both the number and (in)definiteness values of the bare noun always are determined contextually, either extra-linguistically or by means of agreement requirements imposed by determiners or adjectives. The proposal is supported by examples (1-3) where singular (1, 2) and indefinite (3) interpretations are clearly unavailable. I further show how this versatility of the bare noun explain its wide interpretational and distributional range; it may function as a nominal predicate (4) and, in argument positions, receive both mass (5) and type focusing (6) (Borthen 2003) interpretations, in addition to functioning as subjects of both true kind (7) and generic (8) predicates, as well as as a weak indefinite (9):

(1)  *Det finnes elg i Europa, Asia og Nordamerika.* (google)
     There are elks in Europe, Asia and North-America

(2)  *Er det elg her (...), garanterer Maj Britt at Gregus finner dem.* (Loe, E. volvo lastvagnar p 78)
     'If there are elks here, Maj Britt guarantees that Gregus will find them.'

(3)  *Nanna er så liten av vekst at han, når han skal kysse henne, på panne eller munn, må bøye seg kraftig.*
     (Uri, H. de beste blant oss, p 334)
     Nanna is so small that he, when he wants to kiss her, on (her) forehead or mouth, must bend down heavily.

(4)  *Jeg er lingvist.*
     I am (a) linguist

(5)  *Det er elg i kjøleskapet.*
     There is elk in the fridge

(6)  *Det er første gang at ei dame har skutt elg for Halvøya jaktlag.* (google)
     It is (the) first time that a dame has shot (an) elk for Halvøya hunting-team.

(7)  *Elg/elger/elgen/elgene* er ikke utrydningstuet (i Norge).
     Elk/elks/the elk/the elks are not threatened by extinction (in Norway).

(8)  *Elg/elger/elgen/elgene* har fire bein.
     Elk/elks/the elk/the elks has/have four legs.

(9)  *Vi så elg/elger i skogen.*
     We saw elk/elks in the forest.

Concerning the second claim. Even if indefinite plural is the label used by the Norwegian reference grammar (Faarlund et al 1997), recent theoretical works on the Norwegian noun phrase reject or neglect the idea that there is anything more indefinite to the Norwegian than to the English bare plural (e.g. Julien 2005). I show that this indefiniteness restriction is necessary to explain why the Norwegian bare plural, contrarily to its English - or Norwegian bare and suffixed - counterparts is unable to function as the subject of a true kind predicate (7), but still may receive generic (8), and weak indefinite (9), interpretations. Support for this claim is also provided from its inter-phrasal behaviour.

Both the wider range of interpretational and distributional properties of the truly bare noun compared to the bare plural, and, especially, the fact that this latter form displays the rare distinction between true kind- and generic predicates, are valuable observations for the longstanding debate on the (possible) referential properties of bare nouns crosslinguistically. The Norwegian data are compared and contrasted with related constructions in French and English. Bouchard (2002) proposes that most major differences in the nominal system of these two languages may be traced to their different choice in the marking of number - English on the noun, French on the determiner. The present proposal and the Norwegian data provide empirical support for Bouchards analysis while, at
the same time, developing it by introducing the concept of general number, and the effects of (in)definiteness.

Fig. I is a schematisation of Bouchards analysis - with the boldfaced parts highlighting my contribution. The top line of each box gives the grammar semantics pertaining to number of the signs it contains (exemplified on the second line), while the bottom lines provide examples of possible interpretations. The chart is cumulative in the sense that signs high in the hierarchy may access the meanings of those below them, and the signs lowest in the hierarchy have the most specified meanings. The French noun is understood as being unmarked for number, and thus as non-referential. It may function as a predicative, but has a very limited distribution in argument positions. English nouns come in two forms - singular and plural - and are always referential. This explains why English singulars always are interpreted uniquely or as mass - even in the predicative position. The various interpretations of English bare arguments are related to the fact that they may be valued as either atomized or non-atomized (Bouchard suggests Italian as an example of a language having only a non-atomized plural.). The placement of the Norwegian bare noun at the head of the chart, captures its diverse properties and functions. Cross-linguistic support is given by Albanian bare nouns which share with Norwegian the distribution in (1, 4, 5 and 6), but where the ability to be subject of kind- and generic predicates (7, 8), is blocked because of agreement requirements from the finite verb. The suffixed forms of the Norwegian noun are indicated in italics to remind us that even if their number value is as depicted in the chart, they differ from the other signs in also having a fixed (in)definiteness value. Even if the Norwegian bare plural receives both weak indefinite and generic readings, its inherent indefiniteness blocks the kind reading. Regarding singulars, the chart indicates why both non-atomized masses and mass-kinds are expressed by the bare singular in English, while Norwegian uses the bare form for non-atomized masses (5) but the definite singular for kinds; *Mennesket oppfant stål*(et) (Man invented (the) steel). Also the fact that the ambiguity in English sentences like *I am going to school,* in Norwegian is rendered by two different forms - the bare noun handles the intentional, and the definite singular the unique reading - is captured by the chart.

A language making a grammatical distinction between kinds and generics like the one displayed by the Norwegian indefinite plural, has never been properly described. A scrutiny of the Norwegian data reveals that true kind-predicates are even rarer than previously assumed, and that not even subjecthood of quantificational predicates like *be rare* or *widespread* should be taken as evidence for kind-reference, since, in Norwegian, these may combine with the indefinite plural. Even if the Norwegian data indicate that generics not necessarily are derived from kinds, the present proposal still confirms the main findings of the (neo-) carlsoninan approach (Carlson 1977, Chierchia 1998), like the affinity between kind-reference and definiteness, and the unified understanding of the English bare plural.