Syntax for Kinds?

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The starting point of this paper is the status, in the grammar, of bare N, where by bare N I mean, specifically, an N node that dominates some terminal ($=N^{min}$), traditionally assumed to come from a lexicon of some sort, or alternatively, as in the Minimalist Program, the terminal itself as the lowest instantiation of some N-marked member of the numeration (e.g., cat^{min}). Clearly, N^{min} may either be the highest instantiation of the nominal projection (e.g., $N^{min=max}$ which is immediately dominated by a verbal projection), or, in turn, may be embedded within a bigger nominal structure, the latter, potentially, including not only N^{max}, but also functional structure which is specifically associated with the nominal extended projection, to wit, a Classifier Phrase, a Quantity Phrase, and a DP, as well as possibly other nodes. By extension, then, the question here concerns not only the status of N^{min} when maximal, in the intended sense, but also whether there is a fixed interpretation associated with N^{min} across its different structural environments.

At least in some accounts, bare N is assumed to be interpreted as a KIND. The structure of such a bare N when assumed to be thus interpreted, however, is not necessarily agreed upon. Thus Chierchia (1997) assumes, fundamentally, that such KIND interpretation is associated with a structurally bare N (maximal, in our terms), while in other accounts (e.g., Longobardi, 2001) a KIND interpretation (e.g. for generic mass nouns) emerges from the fact that $N^{min=max}$ moves (possibly covertly) to D where it is interpreted as a proper name of a KIND. For Longobardi, then, but not for Chierchia, such bare Ns are instantiations of DPs, with lower functional heads potentially phonologically null. A further wrinkle is the fact that by and large, bare plurals (Div^{max} in the terminology of Borer, 2005), are likewise often assumed to be interpreted as KINDS (cf. Carlson, 1977 and much subsequent literature). What, if any, is the structural relationship between bare N when it is indeed fully bare, and when it carries a plural inflection? Is it indeed the case that both can be interpreted as KINDS, and if so, why?

We note before proceeding that a KIND interpretation (as distinct from a generic and/or a universal interpretation) in e.g. English may be associated at the very least with bare N (mass), with bare plurals, and with singular definite descriptions, indicating that a KIND reading may emerge in diverse nominal contexts which are, for all intent and purposes, otherwise available in the grammar with a non-KIND interpretation, raising the prima facie question of whether there is, indeed, in the grammar, a deterministic mapping from syntax to a KIND reading:

1. a. Milk was introduced into the East Asian diet after WW II.
   b. Potatoes were introduced into the European diet after the invasion of the Americas
   c. The Wooly Mammoth disappeared around 5,000 years ago

Clearly, if we allow the projection of phonologically null functional structure above N^{max}, the actual occurrence of 'bare N' or 'bare plural' provides us with little structural information. What is needed, rather, are cases which are structurally unambiguous, one way or the other, and in which $N^{min=max}$ (or bare plural) is either conclusively maximal, or alternatively, is clearly embedded within a bigger nominal structure.

As it turns out, compounds as well as modificational genitives (in the sense of Munn, 1995) in both Hebrew and English provide excellent, unambiguous structural environments in which to test the behavior of $N^{min}=N^{max}$ as well as Div^{max} when nominally maximal. The primary focus of this paper is thus the investigation of these structures, leading to the conclusion that maximal $N^{min=max}$ as well as maximal Div^{max} are not KINDS, but rather, they are properties, functioning either as modifiers or as predicates. Turning to cases where $N^{min=max}$ and Div^{max} are unambiguously embedded in larger nominal extended projections, I will argue that they receive the very same interpretation, acting as modifiers of functional heads such as DIVISION ($<e>_{DIV}$), QUANTITY ($<e>_{\#}$) or INDIVIDUAL ($<e>_D$) (and see also Kayne, 2007). It thus emerges that a KIND interpretation, to the extent that it could be associated deterministically with syntactic structure(s) altogether, certainly cannot involve structures such as $N^{min}=N^{max}$ or Div^{max}. Nor, as I shall show, is it plausible to assume that it is associated with a proper name interpretation, a la Longobardi. And finally, given the heterogeneous ways of expressing a KIND reading and the fact that each represents a structure otherwise independently available in the syntax, one must ask whether there is, in fact, a syntactic structure that is deterministically associated with KINDS, as such.