

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSIONS AND BEGINNINGS

In the preceding chapters we have explored a number of phenomena which have all been lumped under the term "generic" (if not here, then by someone else at some time). The purpose of this thesis was originally intended to be the analysis of all these phenomena (as well as others), showing to what degree they represent a unified phenomenon, properly describable with the same term. As the work progressed, it became evident that this was not only impossible, but premature. The arsenal of facts about generics built up to such a point that I found that adequate statement of the facts occupied more time and space than I had originally expected to take for the entire thesis; accordingly, this work has changed in outlook, organization, and theme. In choosing the title, I have intended to convey the notion that this is a series of studies, related but basically independent, dealing with the same topics. This has allowed me to deal at length with individual problems where the data was relatively clear (if puzzling) and the implications for other topics were interesting.

Even this method, however, has not allowed me to make very many significant generalizations or propose many satisfying analyses; I have no apologies, but I do regret

that the ~~state~~ state of the art is not sufficiently advanced to allow us to explain generics properly. In choosing this method, however, I have neglected, ignored, or passed over many interesting facts and problems which obviously must be successfully analyzed if headway is ever to be made in studying generics; many of these have been mentioned in the footnotes to various chapters. In this chapter I would like to sum up the material presented in this thesis, as well as its implications, and then go on to discuss some of the more pressing problems which await solutions--solutions which must form integral parts of an adequate theory of generics.

To my mind, the major conclusions which can be drawn from this work are the existence of quantifiers and the importance of conversational principles in the analysis of generics of all types. Chapter II, in particular, seems to bring forth unequivocal evidence that quantifiers of some kind are involved in the semantics of generic sentences; and Chapter IV contains much data that must (seemingly) be analyzed in a framework containing quantifiers. Chapter III, on the other hand, vitiates some of the problems regarding quantifier choice in verbal generics by showing how (in some cases) the existential generic conveys the sense of the universal. I believe that the evidence presented here must be taken into account in further studies of generics, and the importance of quantifiers and conversational postulates

must be recognized. In addition, I think that some of the categories of generic identified in this work have considerable theoretical importance, as well as being interesting in themselves.

Finally, the embedding possibilities for verbal generics and the usages of the various NP generics provide some interesting tests and implications for a number of semantic features; I believe that studies such as this one often tell us more about the material forming the context for the phenomenon than they do about the phenomenon itself. In particular, there seem to be good semantic grounds for grouping the verbs encountered in Chapter II in the manner that I have done; many semantic categories are involved in the restrictions on embedding generics, and is useful to consider these in trying to study the semantics of the verbs themselves. I believe that generics can serve as tests for a number of characteristics which are useful to the syntactician and the semanticist.

The analyses I have proposed have been, for the most part, tentative and vague. I have little hope that they are correct in detail, and several of them are dubious in general. They do have some virtues, namely that they take into account (or at least attempt to) the facts that have been established in this study; something that no other analyses do. I have hopes that future researches in this field will yield methods of explaining generics that have more to recommend them than these do.

We can now pass to the more interesting (and sometimes more depressing) task of discussing the problems that remain unsolved. Some of these we have already commented on: the incorporation of quantifiers into the semantic structures of verbal and NP generics, the syntax of such constructions, the proper statement of the conversational principles discussed in Chapter III. One problem which I have referred to in several places in the relationship between the generic verb and the stative verb. The similarities are so overwhelming that this should have been one of the most easily explained topics in this study; but, as I have noted, the proper explanation for this relationship (other than an ad hoc solution such as assigning the feature +STATIVE to all generics) continues to escape me; I hope it will not do so for long. This topic seems to me to be one of the potentially most fruitful ones in semantics, promising as it does to illuminate not only the generic, but also the possibilities of relationships between semantic features (like stative) and syntactic constructions (like the generic).<sup>1</sup>

The question of the relationship between NP generics and verbal generics is also an important one, and one that I have been able to shed relatively little light on.<sup>2</sup> I believe that they are, in fact, related closely, in that both make use of quantifiers; but the details of this relationship are refractory, partly because there are so many idiosyncratic facts involved in both constructions. One of the questions posed at the beginning of this work

was whether the two phenomena are properly describable with the same term, generic. While I have not adduced overwhelming evidence that this is the case, I believe that it is, and I continue to use this terminology for both. I would welcome further work on this question, particularly bearing on the topic of whether common structures should be posited for both types of generic.

While I have mentioned modals in many places, their mysteries never seem to be exhausted, and the relationships of generics to modals are obviously close. This is a difficult problem, not just because of the difficulty of analyzing generics, but because of similar difficulties with modals themselves. It seems we must wait here on further work on modals, possibly along the lines suggested by Lakoff (1972) . On the other hand, further work on generics can be of immense help in categorizing some of the vagaries of modals, and some of the data in this work may be of use here.

In devoting so much space to the semantics of generics, I have unavoidably shorted the consideration of the nuts-and-bolts syntax of these constructions. This is unfortunate, since there is much here that needs explanation. Why, for example, is it the present tense that is normally generic? And what about the fact that genericity sometimes shows up in different tenses--including the progressive, which is, if anything, antipathetic to generic notions in its meaning? Also, the syntax of the constructions that must be posited

to account for the semantic nature of the generics becomes rather complicated; and it is by no means clear how far such rules can be justified independently. Finally, there must be some reason why the overt performative verbs and the sense verbs both allow normal present tense active forms without necessarily implying genericity; these seem to be the only active verbs which have this property. The performative verbs have it only in their performative usages, which restricts them to 1st person singular; we have seen that reports, in third person particularly, function as statives, not actives. The sense verbs, on the other hand, are on the borderline between actives and statives, particularly in the present tense, and something might be made of this in describing them (as well as in trying to relate generics to statives); but I have little to offer there in this regard.

The potential and functional generics have largely been ignored in this work; I had hoped that their analysis would be possible, and that it would illuminate much about other topics. However, they still remain unexplained, a fertile topic for further research.

Further research along some of the lines pursued in this work is also indicated. In particular, much more could be done about embeddings, both in expanding the list of verbs considered, and in treating other types of embeddings such as relative clauses, tensed complements, and nominalizations. In cursorily inspecting these, I noted a few

peculiarities, although the bulk of the examples showed that there were many regularities; this is something that could be done with our present knowledge rather easily (although the explanations might not be so easy).

Finally, the sheer bulk and incredible diversity of facts regarding NP generics has prevented me from discussing them as thoroughly as I might have wished. There are a number of points of departure for further research inherent in the discussion here. I have, for example, ignored the question of what, if any, relation holds between the articles the and a encountered in the generic NP and the normal uses of these articles, considering them here as totally idiosyncratic. Yet there must be some relation; can it be an accident that these articles are used? Likewise, the other types of generics discussed in the notes to Chapter IV would repay further investigation.

It would be useful to be able to expand on the comments made in Chapter IV on the restrictions on the use of the various generic NP's in various functions in the sentence. If it turns out to be true (as I suspect) that the indefinite generic is restricted (in at least some of its meanings) to use as a subject, this should tell us something useful about the construction. In addition, there seem to be other constructions in which certain NP slots can only be filled by generics of one type or another;<sup>3</sup> these need much more work, particularly in analyzing the implications of this fact for the semantics and syntax of the constructions

involved. Also, the interactions of NP generics with the (usually generic) verbs in their sentences needs a great deal more attention; I have only scratched the surface.

The relationship of generic NP's to mass nouns was noted by Stewart (1971); I have not discussed this here, although it appears that mass nouns are, in fact, only a special case of a generic NP, and the relationship between them is highly reminiscent of that between generic verbs and statives; this will, I am sure, repay further analysis, as will a study of the relation between generic NP's and the overt quantifiers any, every, and all, which have been alluded to in various places in this work. Vendler's (1967) work in this regard is very illuminating, as well as intriguing.

In conclusion, while there is a substantial body of facts and phenomena presented here, there are probably many more as yet undiscovered; all of these are important, in various ways, not only for the proper analysis of generics, but for the interactions and implications that they can give us about practically every topic in modern syntax.



## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>One of the possible hypotheses which has occurred to me, but which I have no evidence for (nor any idea how to find such evidence) is that the relationship is a matter of common (or at least similar) structure on the logical level. That is, it is conceivable that the prelexical semantic structure of a stative verb contains (or, alternatively, the stative verb entails, by meaning postulate) a generic. The lexicalization of this structure (or the transderivational relation between it and the verb) would give the appropriate meaning to the stative; the structure appearing in the generic, however, would presumably be deleted by a rule which was not a lexical insertion, thereby giving the distinction between a "feature" and a construction. I have only the most nebulous, vague feelings about this idea; in particular, the exact natures of such structures are difficult to visualize at best; but there must be in any theory some such mechanism to relate semantic material bound into the word to that given by syntactic context.

<sup>2</sup>This seems to be as good a place as any to mention tend. Alert readers of Lawler (1972) will have noted by now that I have studiously avoided discussing this verb and its ilk, although it was discussed in that paper. This is because I have very little to say about it--it appears to be a generic of sorts, but it is not any kind of generic we have discussed in this work. Its closest affinities seem to be with the indefinite NP generic, in that some notion of intrinsic quality and non-accidental nature are involved somehow. Further than this I cannot go.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, (Quang (1971)), where the object of the "quasi-verb" is noted to be either definite or generic, in some sense; there is also some enlightening discussion here of the generic nature of certain quantifiers.