

STUDIES IN ENGLISH GENERICS

by

John Michael Lawler

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Linguistics)
in The University of Michigan
1973

Doctoral Committee:

Professor George Lakoff, Co-Chairman
Assistant Professor Michael H. O'Malley, Co-Chairman
Associate Professor Kenneth C. Hill
Associate Professor Robin Lakoff
Assistant Professor Charles R. Pyle, Jr.

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN PAPERS IN LINGUISTICS

Published occasionally by students and faculty at the Department of Linguistics of the University of Michigan. Subscriptions: 4 issues / \$8.00; Single issues / \$2.25.

STAFF: Karen Adams, Nancy Conklin, Laurence Krieg, John Lawler, Margaret Seguin.

UMPIL is concerned with all aspects of the study of languages and linguistics. It publishes original articles, dissertations, monographs, reviews, notes, comments, and squibs. These papers represent progress reports on current research. Although usually tentative, they are circulated to interested scholars for the purpose of inviting comments and suggestions. Readers are advised that they should not be cited without allusion to their preliminary nature nor reproduced without an author's consent.

⇒ CONTRIBUTIONS? COMMENTS? SUBSCRIPTIONS? QUESTIONS? Write:

UMPIL
1076 Frieze Building
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI 48104

This publication gratefully acknowledges support from the Rackham (Graduate School) Student Government.

STUDIES IN ENGLISH GENERICS by John M. Lawler is a dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Linguistics) in the University of Michigan. Doctoral Committee: George Lakoff, Michael O'Malley, Kenneth Hill, Robin Lakoff, Charles Pyle.

Copyright © 1973, Department of Linguistics, The University of Michigan. Printed in the United States of America.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

If "a dedication is just a scratch where it itches" (to take Walter Miller's word for it), then my acknowledgements represent a veritable case of hives. In the course of my studies and during the research leading to this work, I have received assistance, suggestions, support, examples and counterexamples, kindnesses uncounted, and some much-needed shoves in the right direction from a number of people and institutions. I despair of ever expressing my gratitude sufficiently to them all; in order, however, to still the itching, at least temporarily, I would like to express here, publicly and profusely, my thanks and appreciation,

to my wife Sally, for her help in all ways, and for her boundless optimism and unfailing good humor in the face of procrastination;

to Andy Rogers and Paul Neubauer, for teaching me more than I knew existed about syntax and semantics, and for bending a sympathetic ear to my ravings;

to Ann Borkin and Debbie James, for not only listening to and reading my sentences and speculations (a taxing job at best), but also suggesting many promising lines of research and new facts to account for;

to Mike Stewart, for finally writing down all the stuff he told me about, so that I could use it;

to Haj Ross and Jim McCawley, for reasons they well know;

to Charlie Pyle, N.P., Ken Hill, N.P., and Mike O'Malley, N.N.P., for being sympathetic and helpful as committee members and colleagues;

to Elaine Dornton, for invaluable assistance in the mechanics of getting this work completed;

to the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, for extending me facilities for research which assisted me immeasurably;

to the Linguistics Department of The University of Michigan, faculty, staff, and students, who helped me in many ways, big and little;

to Grant #GS-2939 from the National Science Foundation to The University of Michigan, for partial support for this work; and

first, last, and always, to Robin and George Lakoff, jointly and severally, to whom this work is dedicated. I could not have even considered doing this work without the benefit of their prior research, nor could I have brought it to its present state of quasi-completion without their constant aid, suggestions, and admonitions; they made it not only possible, but probable. The least I can do for them (besides promising them the royalties from the movie version) is to absolve them of blame for the (doubtless

many and varied) errors of commission and omission contained
in this work; I take credit for those.

John Lawler
December 1972

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	vi
VITA	ix
CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II : EMBEDDINGS	30
CHAPTER III : OCCUPATIONS AND CONVERSATIONAL PRINCIPLES	76
CHAPTER IV : GENERIC NOUN PHRASES	105
CHAPTER V : CONCLUSIONS AND BEGINNINGS	160
APPENDIX	169
BIBLIOGRAPHY	182

ABSTRACT

STUDIES IN ENGLISH GENERICS

by
John Michael Lawler

Co-Chairmen: George Lakoff, Michael H. O'Malley

This work comprises studies of several aspects of the phenomena frequently called "generic" in English grammar; these are similar, if not identical, to normal, non-generic constructions on the surface, but have different meanings, in that they refer either to repetition of activities (in the case of verbal generics) or to a class defined in some sense by the generic form (in the case of nominal generics). These include constructions like those underlined in (1)-(7):

- (1) Bill walks to school.
- (2) Harry's dog bites.
- (3) John drinks beer.
- (4) Mary teaches kindergarten.
- (5) A madrigal is polyphonic.
- (6) The madrigal is polyphonic.
- (7) Madrigals are polyphonic.

While these constructions have long been recognized as special and peculiar in many ways, there has been little serious work done on them; in particular, there are no satisfactory analyses of the semantics or syntax of any of them.

The present work adds to our knowledge and understanding of generics not by developing further analyses as such, although some are advanced, but by concentrating on the syntactic and semantic properties of these forms and developing from these some necessary characteristics for any adequate analysis of English generics. This is done by studying from a generative semantic viewpoint several of the many topics which suggest themselves, and noting the interrelationships with numerous other phenomena in English grammar.

Chapter I is an introduction to the study of generics, dealing with the distinctions and ambiguities of the constructions (primarily verbal generics) and suggesting tentative analyses.

Chapter II is a study of the behavior of generics embedded as verbal complements. It shows the major differences between stative and active embedding verbs, and presents strong evidence that the proper analysis of verbal generics requires use of quantifiers of some kind. In addition, it notes many inexplicable similarities between generics and statives, as well as numerous relationships with modals.

Chapter III deals with occupational generics (like (4) above), showing how much of society's values are reflected in our use of these constructions, and suggesting analyses deriving from conversational postulates.

Chapter IV is concerned with nominal generics like those in (5)-(7) above (respectively, "indefinite", "definite",

and "plural" generics), exploring numerous topics, such as their relationships with modals and quantifiers, their presuppositions, their uses in sentences, and their interactions with generic verbal constructions. An extremely tentative analysis is advanced for certain types of nominal generic.

Chapter V has the dual purpose of summing up the findings of the studies preceding and pointing some directions for further research uncovered (or left untouched) by the studies.

The major value of this work resides not in the analyses, which are dubious and ad hoc for the most part, but rather in the plethora of facts adduced, and their implications for linguistic theory. In order to understand generics, it is demonstrated that contexts and conveyed meanings must be taken into account, as well as highly abstract entities like quantifiers. This work provides strong confirmation of recent generative semantic views of language.