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GENERICIS AND CONTEXT: DO COUNTEREXAMPLES DISSUADE ACCEPTANCE OF TRUE GENERIC STATEMENTS?

Abstract. This study investigates whether the salience of counterexamples in discourse affects the acceptance of true generic statements. Building on previous theoretical and experimental work on generics, we examine whether generics are sensitive to contextual cues that highlight exceptions. Polish participants completed a truth-value judgment task featuring majority and minority characteristic generics presented in two types of encyclopaedic contexts: neutral and exception-driven. The results show that plural generics were highly stable across contexts, while singular generics exhibited a small but statistically significant decrease in acceptance in exception-driven conditions. Predicate type also influenced judgments: minority generics were rated as less acceptable than majority ones. These findings support the view that generics display high tolerance of exceptions, with limited context effects attributable to heuristic misjudgment or anaphoric reinterpretation rather than semantic variability. The results further suggest that singular generics may invite more restrictive interpretations due to their morphosyntactic form.

Keywords: generics, context sensitivity, exception salience, heuristic judgment, plural vs. singular generics, Polish.

Introduction

Generic statements such as, for example, *Lions have manes* and *Ducks lay eggs*, are a pervasive means of generalising about kinds (Carlson, 1980; Krifka et al., 1995). They are cross-linguistically widespread (Chierchia, 1998; Lazaridou-Chatzigeorga, 2019) and emerge early in acquisition (Gelman, 2003;

for a comprehensive overview of generics, see Cella & Rosola, 2025). Unlike overtly quantificational sentences such as *All lions have manes*, generics are often judged true despite counterexamples. For instance, *Birds fly* remains acceptable even though there are exceptions such as ostriches and penguins (Greenberg, 2007). This combination of breadth and tolerance motivates a central question at the semantics-pragmatics interface: are the truth conditions of generics fixed by semantics, making them largely immune to contextual narrowing (Krifka, 1987), or are they sensitive to features of use, including the salience of exceptions and the conversational frame (Cohen, 2001; Nickel, 2008; Pelletier & Asher, 1997; Sterken, 2015)? A further possibility is that some apparent context effects reflect judgment heuristics rather than semantic variability (Bowker, 2024).

According to the classic account (Krifka, 1987), a sentence like *Birds fly* contains a silent operator (GEN) that produces a kind-level generalisation about what is normally true of birds; therefore, isolated counterexamples such as ostriches do not undermine it. A standard diagnostic contrasts nominal quantifiers with generics after a local set-up. If the discourse introduces a salient subset, for example “There are lions and tigers in this cage”, then *Every lion has a mane* can naturally be understood as every lion in this cage, which is an instance of implicit domain restriction. By contrast, the corresponding generic (*Lions have manes*) does not narrow to “the lions here” but remains a claim about the kind. On this view, exception tolerance is encoded in the semantics via GEN’s quantification over normal or relevant cases, and contextual narrowing of the domain is not available for generics in the way it is for overt quantifiers.

Cohen (2001) proposes that generics express probabilistic generalisations evaluated in two ways. On an absolute reading, a generic is acceptable when the property is sufficiently common within the kind, which explains why sentences like *Birds fly* sound correct even though there are exceptions. On a relative reading, a generic is judged in comparison to a contextually supplied set of alternatives, so the question is whether the property is more characteristic of the target kind than of other kinds in the comparison class. This framework explains why *Frenchmen eat horsemeat* can be acceptable even if few French people actually do so, since the rate is higher relative to other nationalities, and why *Mammals bear live young* can be acceptable even though fewer than half of mammals give live birth, because live birth is more characteristic than the alternative modes in the comparison set. It also captures cases such as *Tigers eat people*, which is false on the absolute reading but acceptable on the relative reading because tigers are more likely than an arbitrary animal to eat a person. Cohen develops these results

within a truth-conditional, compositional analysis that treats the relevant standard and comparison class as supplied by context.

On Nickel's (2008) account, characterising generics are evaluated with respect to ways of being normal for a kind rather than by simple majority or a single "normal" profile. He motivates this with the puzzle of logically complex predicates, for example *Cats are black, white, and ginger*. Standard majority-style quantificational analyses either incorrectly predict that some cats must be black-and-white-and-ginger, or must treat *and* as *or* and then derive the wrong entailment patterns. Nickel's solution is to recognise multiple "normal ways" of being a kind, interpreting the sentence as saying that one normal way of being a cat involves being black, another involves being white, and another ginger, without requiring overlap or majority for any single colour. This preserves exception tolerance, matches the entailments, and avoids the spurious overlap prediction. The account is inquiry-based: what counts as a normal way depends on the aims of explanation, which also illuminates frame effects such as *Dobermans have floppy ears* being true in an evolutionary-biology setting but false in a dog-breeding discussion, depending on whether breeder intervention is left out of consideration.

Pelletier and Asher (1997) analyse characterising generics as defeasible defaults. A sentence like *Birds fly* licenses the default inference that a given bird flies, but this inference is withdrawn when more specific information becomes available, for example that the bird is a penguin. They formalise this behaviour with non-monotonic systems such as default logic, autoepistemic reasoning, and circumscription, which allow conclusions to be retracted in light of new evidence. A known limitation is that if generics are treated only as default rules outside the sentence proper, embedded occurrences become hard to assign ordinary truth conditions, which motivates hybrid treatments that combine defaults with a compositional semantics.

Sterken (2015) argues that generics are semantically context-sensitive because the covert operator GEN behaves like an indexical whose contribution is fixed by features of the utterance situation and the question under discussion. She motivates context sensitivity with cases where the very same generic shifts in truth across frames, for example *Dobermans have floppy ears* comes out true in an evolutionary-biology discussion but false in a dog-breeding setting. Speakers in the two settings do not count as disagreeing, which supports a context-sensitive treatment rather than a fixed-truth interpretation. She then argues that the variability is semantic (not merely pragmatic) by applying an Agreement Test and an A-Quantifier Test: when one replaces the generic with an explicitly adverbially quantified sentence such as *typically/usually/generally*, truth values remain stable across the same

contexts, indicating that implicature or ordinary domain restriction cannot explain the generic's variability. On the positive side, Sterken develops an indexical view on which GEN selects, in context, the relevant generalisation that relates the restrictor kind to the predicate, and she sketches a metasemantics for how this selection is coordinated between speaker and hearer; this preserves a unified, quantificational and truth-conditional semantics while explaining why some generics pattern like universals and others like "most" without resorting to ordinary domain restriction.

On Bowker's (2024) account, the apparent context sensitivity of generics reflects how people judge them, not a change in the sentences' truth conditions. He argues that speakers often rely on heuristics, that is, fast, fallible procedures such as availability, when deciding whether a sentence is true, and that context can shift these heuristics, producing different truth-value judgments even if the semantics remains constant. Using Sterken's cases as a test bed, he shows that contrasts like *Frenchmen eat horsemeat* feeling true in a cultural-contrast setting but false in a nutrition-survey setting can be explained by heuristic differences between generics and their adverbially quantified counterparts, without positing an indexical GEN (he also questions some of Sterken's A-Quantifier diagnostics). He further illustrates with *Books are cheap* across two shops: the judgment flips with the shopping context, which can be modelled by which kind or predicate a default generalisation mechanism targets, rather than by semantic context sensitivity. The upshot is a non-semantic alternative: before inferring that generics are context-sensitive, one should rule out heuristic explanations of the shifting judgments.

Taken together, these accounts agree that generics permit exceptions but diverge on the source of this tolerance. The received view locates it in the semantics of GEN and denies contextual narrowing (Krifka, 1987). Cohen (2001) ties acceptability to context-set standards or thresholds. Nickel (2008) anchors truth in contextually set standards of normality. Pelletier & Asher (1997) model application as defeasible inference sensitive to background knowledge. Sterken (2015) argues for semantic context sensitivity through an indexical GEN. A further, non-semantic option is that some apparent context effects arise from judgment heuristics rather than changes in truth conditions, as Bowker (2024) proposes.

Lazaridou-Chatzigoga et al. (2019) provide experimental evidence that context modulates acceptability judgments of generics and universally quantified statements. In English, they test bare-plural generics alongside universal quantifiers (*all*, *all the*, *each*) in three context types: neutral, supportive, and contradictory (the last makes counterexamples salient). In Greek,

they apply the same context manipulation and compare acceptance for definite-plural generics with acceptance for the universal quantifier *oli i* ‘all’. Their key finding is asymmetric: universals show large context effects, which the authors explain by quantifier domain restriction (QDR), that is, interpreting the quantifier over a contextually narrowed subdomain (for *All ducks lay eggs*, readers tacitly restrict to adult female ducks). Generics, by contrast, show only a modest acceptance drop in contradictory contexts. The authors do not claim a full change in the context of utterance or the question under discussion, as in the Sterken cases reviewed above; rather, they argue that their materials highlight exceptions. They also note a non-semantic alternative: explicit mention of counterexamples may prompt some participants to incorrectly update beliefs about prevalence, lowering acceptance of otherwise true generics. In sum, context matters, but the mechanism differs: for universals the effect is explained by QDR, whereas for generics it appears limited and plausibly due to exception salience or belief updating.

In light of these findings, our study isolates exception salience while keeping the discourse context constant. We minimise opportunities for domain restriction by presenting items in encyclopaedic contexts that do not support narrowing, and we vary only whether exceptions are made salient (neutral vs. exception-driven contexts). We then ask whether any salience effect is form-sensitive, comparing generic plurals (GP) with generic singulars (GS). The results show very high stability for GP and a small but reliable reduction for GS when exceptions are salient. Taken together, these outcomes favour a primarily semantic tolerance of exceptions for the generics we tested, with limited influence of exception salience; the modest GS reduction remains compatible with non-semantic judgment-heuristic explanations of minor shifts.

The current study

This study forms part of a broader investigation into the overgeneralization bias observed in the endorsement of false quantified majority and minority statements, such as *All ducks lay eggs*. Leslie et al. (2011: 17) refer to this phenomenon as the generic overgeneralization (GOG) effect, which they attribute to “overgeneralizing from the truth of a generic to the truth of the corresponding universal statement.” The study, whose design included presenting statements in contextual settings, yielded valuable insights into both quantified and generic statements. While results concerning the generic overgeneralization effect will be presented in a forthcoming

article, the present paper examines how contextual cues influence the acceptance of generic majority and minority statements. These two categories of generics follow the taxonomy proposed by Prasada et al. (2013). Majority characteristic generics, such as *Tigers are striped*, describe traits that are common within a kind but not universally present (e.g., albino tigers being exceptions). Minority characteristic generics, by contrast, express attributes found only in a subset of the kind, often linked to gender-specific traits. For instance, *Lions have manes* applies only to mature males. In general, both types of predications express the characteristic features of a kind. In other words, there is a principled connection between kinds and their properties (Prasada & Dillingham, 2006, 2009), which results in greater resistance to exceptions within the kind.

Following Lazaridou-Chatzigoga et al. (2019) and Karczewski et al. (2020), we employed truth-value judgment tasks in which a critical sentence in generic form was preceded by two types of short encyclopaedic contexts about animals: neutral and exception-driven. In the latter condition, exceptions to the rules posited by generics were made salient. To reduce survey fatigue and increase completion rates, we shortened the contextual passages compared to those used in our 2020 study. To ensure attentive reading before participants judged the truth value of majority and minority characteristic statements, we included concentration-inducing tasks (CITs) adapted from Litwin & Pietrzyk (2013), which had been pretested and psychometrically validated by a certified specialist. Unlike in previous designs, we excluded filler items to optimize response and maintain a concise design that kept participants focused on the critical items.

This study draws on data from Polish, a language that lacks articles and does not have formal markers for genericity or definiteness (e.g., Grzegorzczkowska, 2010; Karczewski, 2016; Świączkowska, 2004). When referring to kinds, Polish speakers can use two constructions: singular and plural forms, as illustrated below:

- | | | | |
|-----|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| (1) | Kaczka | znosi | jaja. |
| | duck-NOM.SG | lay-PRES.3SG | egg-ACC.PL |
| | ‘A duck lays eggs’ | | |
| (2) | Kaczki | znoszą | jaja. |
| | duck-NOM.PL | lay-PRES.3PL | egg-ACC.PL |
| | ‘Ducks lay eggs’ | | |

Due to the lack of articles, the Polish sentence *Kaczka znosi jaja* can be translated into English as either *A duck lays eggs* (indefinite generic) or *The duck lays eggs* (definite generic).

Aims and hypotheses

The present study aimed to examine potential variation between the acceptance rates of singular and plural generic statements across neutral and exception-driven conditions. Building on our previous research (Karczewski & Wajda, 2015), which demonstrated the equivalence of plural and singular generics expressing the characteristic attributes of the kind, we hypothesised that the acceptance rates of plural generic (GP) statements and singular generic (GS) statements would not differ significantly across contexts. Following the received view that generics are largely immune to context (Krifka, 1987), we further predicted that the exception-driven condition would not significantly affect the acceptance rates of either GP or GS statements. Moreover, because minority characteristic contexts made the exceptions more salient by highlighting that *only* male or female members of a given kind possess the property whereas majority characteristic contexts pointed to the fact that there are instances of the kind that do not have the defining feature (e.g., *Zebras with white fur have reportedly been seen in the wild*), we expected lower acceptance rates for minority statements than for majority statements in the exception-driven condition. This prediction was strengthened by the fact that minority predicates are linked to comparatively restricted subkinds, usually involving fewer than 50% of the members of the kind. Furthermore, a large difference between the acceptance rates of majority and minority statements in our main study suggested that a similar response pattern may be observed with generic statements.

Materials and design

The experiment was conducted online and lasted approximately 15–20 minutes. Each trial was paired with a concentration-inducing task (CIT), yielding 32 items per list (16 experimental, 16 CITs). Both experimental items and CITs followed the same two-screen format: participants first read a short context (Screen 1) and then judged the truth of a statement (Screen 2). For experimental items, the context was either neutral or exception-driven and preceded a statement containing a generic (singular or plural) or quantified form (“all” or “every”). An example sequence of a CIT is shown below.

Display 1: *Zamiast dzwonić, ojciec cicho zapukał do drzwi, żeby nie obudzić śpiącego dziecka. (Instead of calling, the father quietly knocked on the door so as not to wake the sleeping child.)*

Display 2: Ojciec zadzwonił do drzwi. (*The father rang the doorbell.*)

The test set included eight majority and eight minority characteristic statements about animals. Each target sentence was introduced by either a neutral or an exception-driven context. Illustrative examples of both context types for each predication are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Examples of majority and minority characteristic statements used in the experiment, each presented in neutral and exception-driven conditions

Majority characteristic items	
Neutral condition	
Zebry żyją na sawannach. Odżywiają się głównie trawą oraz liśćmi drzew i krzewów.	Zebras live in savannahs. They feed mainly on grass and the leaves of trees and shrubs.
Exception-driven condition	
Zebry żyją na sawannach. W naturze czasami można spotkać zebry o białej sierści.	Zebras live in savannahs. Zebras with white fur have reportedly been seen in the wild.
Minority characteristic items	
Neutral condition	
Lwy to jedne z największych dzikich kotów. Szybko poruszają się na krótkich dystansach.	Lions are among the largest wild cats. They move quickly over short distances.
Exception-driven condition	
Lwy to jedne z największych dzikich kotów. Tylko samce mają bujne owłosienie wokół głowy.	Lions are among the largest wild cats. Only male lions have long hair around their heads.

The overall study employed a within-subject Latin square design to present 128 experimental items, distributed across eight unique lists of 16 items each, with participants randomly assigned to one of these lists. Four independent variables were manipulated:

1. Type of generalisation: generic vs. quantified
2. Sentence type: singular vs. plural
3. Predication type: majority vs. minority
4. Context type: neutral vs. exception-driven

This article focuses solely on generic statements in relation to variables 2–4.

Methodology

All analyses were conducted in R (version 4.1.1; R Core Team, 2021) on Windows 10 (x64, build 19044). Because participants provided multiple responses, the data were analysed using generalized linear mixed-effects models (GLMMs) with a binomial response distribution and a logit link function. This modelling approach allowed us to estimate the effects of form (singular vs. plural generics), predicate type (majority vs. minority), and context type (neutral vs. exception-driven) while accounting for within-participant dependency. A total of 577 respondents completed the experiment. The sample was approximately balanced with respect to gender, age, and education. Each participant provided 16 truth-value judgments. After reshaping the data from wide to long format, the final dataset consisted of 9,232 observations (577×16). All models included random intercepts for participants to capture individual variability in response tendencies. Following current recommendations on mixed-effects modelling, we evaluated random-slope structures for fixed effects; however, these more complex models did not converge reliably and did not improve model fit, so only random intercepts were retained. Model summaries report odds ratios (OR), 95% confidence intervals (CI), and p-values.

Results

The difference between GP and GS in the neutral conditions

For generic statements in the neutral condition, the odds of a “true” response were 58.26. No significant difference was found between singular generic (GS) and generic plural (GP) statements; both forms were judged equally acceptable.

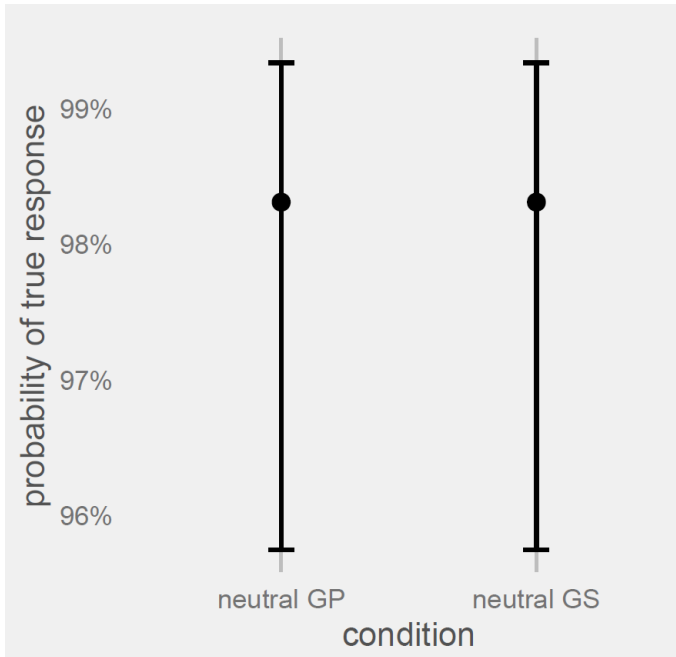
Table 2

Results testing the difference in acceptance between generic plural (GP) and generic singular (GS) statements in the neutral condition

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Score</i> _{GP,GS}		
	<i>OR</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	58.26	22.54 – 150.63	< 0.001
Condition [neutral_GS]	1.00	0.74 – 1.36	1.000
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29		
$\tau_{00 \text{ Id}}$	12.01		
<i>ICC</i>	0.78		
N_{Id}	577		

Note: $N_{\text{Observations}} = 2308$; $R^2_{\text{conditional}}/R^2_{\text{marginal}} = 0.000/0.785$.

Figure 1. Model-estimated acceptance rates for generic plural (GP) and generic singular (GS) statements presented in the neutral context



The difference between GP and GS in the exception-driven conditions

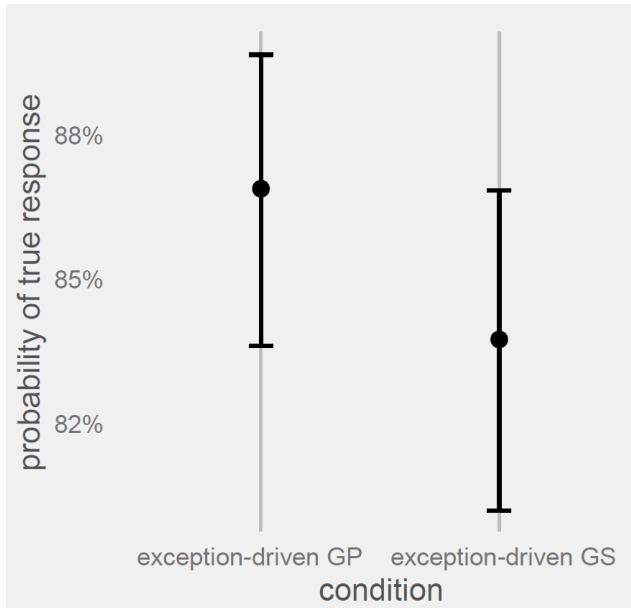
In the exception-driven condition, the odds of a “true” response were 6.45, reflecting a marked drop relative to the neutral condition. Although singular generics (GS) showed slightly lower odds (about 19% lower) than plural generics (GP), this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 3
Results testing the difference in acceptance between GP and GS statements in the exception-driven condition

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Score</i> _{GP,GS}		
	<i>OR</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	6.45	5.19 – 8.01	< 0.001
Condition [exception-driven_GS]	0.81	0.65 – 1.02	0.069
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29		
$\tau_{00\ Id}$	1.12		
<i>ICC</i>	0.25		
N_{Id}	577		

Note: $N_{Observations} = 2308$; $R^2_{conditional}/R^2_{marginal} = 0.002/0.256$.

Figure 2. Model-estimated acceptance rates for GP and GS statements presented in the exception-driven context



Difference between plural generic statements (GP) across conditions and predicates

For plural generic statements, the odds of a “true” response in the exception-driven condition for majority predicates were 9.47. Predicate type had a significant effect: responses were 24% less likely to be “true” for minority than for majority predicates, though the effect size was small. No significant effect of context type was observed.

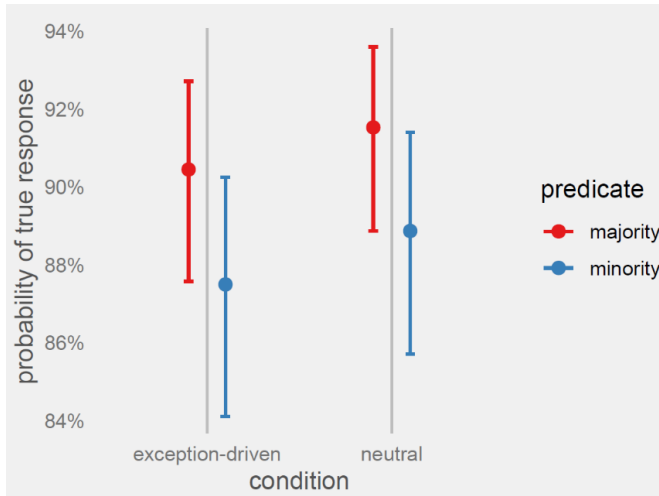
Table 4

Effects of predicate type (majority vs. minority) and context (neutral vs. exception-driven) on acceptance of GP statements

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>score_{GP}</i>	
		<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	9.47	7.05 – 12.73	< 0.001
predicate [minority]	0.74	0.58 – 0.94	0.016
condition [neutral]	1.14	0.89 – 1.46	0.290
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29		
$\tau_{00 \text{ Id}}$	2.01		
<i>ICC</i>	0.38		
N_{Id}	577		

Note: $N_{\text{Observations}} = 2308$; $R^2_{\text{conditional}}/R^2_{\text{marginal}} = 0.005/0.382$.

Figure 3. Model-estimated acceptance rates for GP statements across majority and minority predicates in neutral and exception-driven contexts



The difference between singular generic statements (GS) in the neutral and exception-driven conditions

For singular generic statements, the odds of a “true” response in the exception-driven condition for majority predicates were 7.38. Condition had a significant effect: responses were 42% more likely to be “true” in the neutral condition than in the exception-driven condition, although the effect was small. Predicate type also influenced responses: minority predicates were 33% less likely to receive a “true” response than majority predicates. Together, these results show a modest but statistically reliable context effect for GS statements.

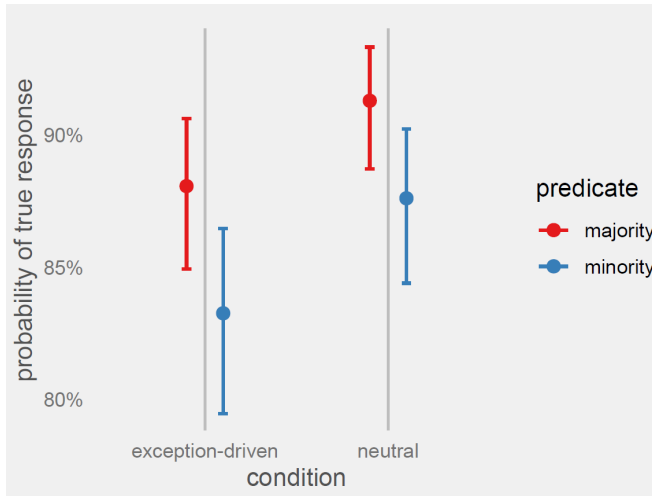
Table 5

Results examining the effects of predicate type (majority vs. minority) and context (neutral vs. exception-driven) on acceptance of GS statements

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>score_{GS}</i>	
		<i>CI</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	7.38	5.64 – 9.67	< 0.001
Condition [neutral]	1.42	1.12 – 1.80	0.004
predicate [minority]	0.67	0.53 – 0.85	0.001
Random Effects			
σ^2	3.29		
$\tau_{00 Id}$	1.71		
<i>ICC</i>	0.34		
N_{Id}	577		

Note: $N_{Observations} = 2308$; $R^2_{conditional}/R^2_{marginal} = 0.014/0.350$.

Figure 4. Model-estimated acceptance rates for GS statements across majority and minority predicates in neutral and exception-driven contexts



Discussion

This study examined whether making exceptions salient in the discourse context affects the acceptance of generic plural (GP) and generic singular (GS) statements. The findings offer three insights: (1) the potential semantic equivalence of plural and singular generics, (2) the impact of exception-driven context on the acceptance of singular generics, and (3) the differences between majority and minority predications.

The results confirmed our hypothesis that acceptance rates for plural and singular generic statements would not differ significantly across contexts, supporting our previous research on the equivalence of plural and singular characteristic predications in Polish (Karczewski & Wajda, 2015).

However, there was a difference in how respondents perceived the truth value of plural and singular generics in the exception-driven context. GP statements proved robust across contexts: acceptance rates did not differ significantly between neutral and exception-driven conditions, supporting the classic view that plural generics are tolerant of counterexamples (Krifka, 1987; Krifka et al., 1995). This stability suggests that plural generics express more naturally prototypical characteristics of the kind and thus possess greater *generalizing power* – they maintain their perceived truth even when counterexamples are made salient. In other words, plural generics appear to convey properties which make them stronger and more resistant generalizations than singular generics, whose acceptance

proved more context-dependent. Contrary to our predictions, GS statements showed greater susceptibility to contextual manipulation at least on the surface level. While the overall acceptance remained high, a small but statistically reliable reduction was observed when exceptions were highlighted. Our results partly align with findings by Lazaridou-Chatzigoga et al. (2019) who reported context sensitivity for plural generics in English and Greek. Lazaridou-Chatzigoga and her colleagues provided two explanations. For English generics, explicit mention of counterexamples may have led the participants to revise their beliefs about the truth value of the statement. For Greek generics an anaphoric interpretation rendered the statement naturally false, without undermining the claim that generics are largely immune to contextual variation. Our findings point to two possible explanations for this pattern, both traceable to cognitive bias. First, occasional rejections of true generics in exception-driven contexts may reflect heuristic misjudgment rather than genuine semantic falsity, as participants seemed to rely on salient counterexamples when evaluating truth. Second, participants may have misinterpreted a critical statement as anaphoric rather than generic. On this understanding, they assumed specific statements were false in light of the highlighted counterexamples. Although the singular generics in our experiment expressed universal meaning, the limited context may have introduced ambiguity and prompted a specific, non-generic interpretation. Overall, the pattern suggests that singular generics invite more restrictive interpretations, possibly because singular subjects draw greater attention to individual-level instantiation than plural ones. There is some evidence in the research, both theoretical and empirical, that may shed light on how the phenomenon can be interpreted. For instance, Dayal (2004) argues that plural kinds support access to multiple instantiations while singular kinds limit this access. The false interpretation of generics as denoting a specific rather than general meaning was reported by Karczewski (2016, 2022) in his study on comprehension of generic noun phrases by native speakers of English. Our understanding of the reasons for smaller acceptance of singular generics in exception-driven contexts accords with Bowker's arguments that situations such as the one discussed above do not necessarily provide evidence for context-sensitivity of generics. Conversely, "[a]s our truth-value judgments are the result of heuristics, they might be explained by the effect of context on those heuristics, rather than semantic context sensitivity" (Bowker, 2024: 195).

Finally, predicate type exerted a systematic influence: minority characteristic generics (e.g., *Lions have manes*) were judged less acceptable than majority ones, regardless of form or context. This outcome was expected,

given the higher contextual salience of minority predicates (a stronger formulation of the contextual cues). Although both majority and minority generics express characteristic properties, minority predicates are associated with more restricted subkinds (typically fewer than 50% of the kind, e.g., mature male lions) and may therefore appear less robust to exception salience.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings support the view that generics display semantic tolerance of exceptions. However, subtle form- and predicate-related factors influence how people's judgments of generic statements shift under contextual pressure. Plural generics remain highly stable across contexts, whereas singular generics show a modest decline in acceptance in exception-driven contexts.

The small GS context sensitivity may be explained by heuristic processes, in particular a shift toward misguided interpretations of the truth of a generic statement caused by salient counterexamples. Alternatively, the phenomenon may result from misinterpreting generic generalizations as referring to specific instances. Both cases can be considered errors in reasoning or, following Bowker (2024) heuristics that fallibly reflect truth values.

Predicate type systematically modulated acceptance: minority generics were rated lower than majority generics across contexts. This effect may reflect differences in contextual formulation or the lower prevalence of characteristic traits within minority kinds.

In addition to the explanations above, these results highlight the need for theoretical models to account for differences between plural and singular generic forms and between majority and minority predicates. For example, the divergence between GP and GS may suggest that genericity is not uniform across morphosyntactic forms. Future research should examine whether GS context sensitivity generalises across languages and explore methods to disentangle heuristic from semantic factors in experimental designs.

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