# NUMBER and asymmetric conceptual connections in genericity

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It is generally assumed that our acquisition and understanding of world knowledge is guided by generic sentences (Gelman, 2010), but the way that distinct structures underlying generics guide the acquisition of particular conceptual connections has remained underexplored. This talk focuses on three morphosyntactically distinct generic subjects: bare plural (BP), the most permissive in its interpretations, and indefinite singular (IS) and definite singular (DS) which are more restricted. I argue that the root distinction between all three is reflected by grammatical NUMBER when recognizing that nominals may be not just singular and plural (IS and BP, respectively), but also numberless (DS) (Borik & Espinal 2012, 2014). These distinctions in NUMBER map on to different semantic representations, such that numberless nominals in DS generics denote properties of kinds which are quantified by the iota operator of the definite, while singular and plural nominals in IS and BP generics denote properties of individuals which are quantified by a generic quantifier, GEN. How these representations guide the acquisition of new predicates is explored in two learning studies examining participants' expectations about the conceptual nature of unknown (pseudo-word) predicates in terms of being principally connected ('*in virtue of*': definitions, essential properties, and causes) vs. accidentally connected ('*just happens to*': accidental properties and statistical co-occurrence) (Prasada & Dillingham, 2006, 2009). Compared to BP generics, IS generics lead to increased expectations of a principled connection whereas DS generics diminish the expectations of an accidental connection. This asymmetry follows from the restrictive nature of the semantic representations. While BP subjects merely require their predicate be compatible with some generic group of individuals, IS subjects require their predicate be compatible with generic individuals, increasing the acceptability of essential/principally connected information, and DS subjects require their predicate be kind-relevant, reducing the acceptability of accidental/statistically connected information.