1. **Introduction**
   - bare nouns interact with aspect in important ways
   - what happens in languages other than English?
   - De Swart (2010): cross-linguistic study of bare noun telicity features – the importance of the article system and number marking
   - this paper: telicity and bare nouns in Malagasy, a language with number neutrality
   - bare nouns do not pattern as expected
   - outline of talk
     §2 Telicity and bare nouns
     §3 Background on Malagasy nominal system
     §4 Malagasy bare nouns and telicity
     §5 Discussion

2. **Telicity and bare nouns**
   - telic: a verb or verb phrase with an inherent end point
   - definites and indefinite singulars → telic interpretations of certain verbs
   - bare plurals → atelic interpretation

(1)  a. Sandy ate the apple in/for two minutes.
     b. Sandy ate apples #in/for two minutes.

(2)  a. Alex almost ate an apple. (counterfactual or scalar)
     b. Alex almost ate apples. (counterfactual only)

(3)  a. Marion ate up an apple.
     b. # Marion ate up apples.

(4)  a. # Jamie found a flea on his dog for two weeks.
     b. Jamie found fleas on his dog for two weeks.

(5)  a. # Kim repairs an iPad.
     b. Kim repairs iPads.
• why? bare plurals have cumulative reference; definites and indefinite
  singulars have quantized reference

3. Malagasy nominal system
• Malagasy: Austronesian language, VOS
• bare noun arguments are possible (but only in non-subject position)

(6) a. Manolotra penina izy.
   AT.offer pen 3(NOM)
   ‘She offers some pen/s.’

b. Rakofana kopy ny tsaramaso.
   TT.cover cup DET bean
   ‘The bean/s are covered with some cup/s.’

c. * Tonga mpianatra.
   arrive student
   ‘A student arrived.’

• there is a pre-nominal definite determiner ny (unmarked for number), but
  no indefinite determiner
• all nouns (bare or otherwise) are number neutral
• bare noun objects are indefinite (novel)

(7) Nisy zazakely ao an-trano. #Nahafantatra zazalahy aho.
   PST.AT.exist child there ACC house PST.AT.know boy 1SG(NOM)
   ‘There were children in the house. I knew boys.’
   (consultant’s reaction: “the two sentences don’t go together”)

4. Bare nouns and telicity – predictions and facts
• given the indefiniteness of bare nouns and number neutrality, we expect
  the following (Henriette de Swart, p.c.):
  o bare nouns should be acceptable in telic contexts, but only if
    interpreted as singular
• cf. Japanese (Fujimori 2005): bare nouns are interpreted as singular
  (quantized) with telic verbs and plural (cumulative) with atelic verbs
(8)  a. Taro-ga matci-o (*gofunkan) su-tta [telic]  
    T.-NOM match-ACC for.five.minutes strike-PAST 
    ‘Taro struck a match (*for five minutes).’

    b. Taro-ga yasai-o (nijikan) ni-ta [atelic]  
    T.-NOM vegetable-ACC (for.two.hours) boil-PAST 
    ‘Taro boiled vegetables (for two hours).’

4.1 saika ‘almost’
• active and passive verbs in Malagasy are typically atelic: counterfactual reading is the only one available with saika ‘almost’ (the determiner plays no role)

(9) Saika nanorina (ny) trano io vehivavy io.  
    almost PST.AT.build (DET) house DEM woman DEM 
    ‘This woman almost built a/the house.’ (counterfactual only)

• to force the telic reading, the prefix aha- is used (Rajaona 1972, Phillips 2000)
• with saika ‘almost’, the only interpretation is scalar (she started building, but did not complete the house)

(10) Saika nahorina trano io vehivavy io.  
    almost PST.AHA.build house DEM woman DEM 
    ‘This woman almost built a house/houses.’ (scalar only)

• the scalar reading arises even when the bare noun is interpreted as plural, contra expectations

4.2 Telic contexts
• note that the compatibility of a bare noun with a telic verb is itself surprising
• active telic prefix: aha-

(11) a. Nahatapaka karoty ny antsy.  
    PST.AHA.cut carrot DET knife 
    ‘The knife cut some carrot/s.’
b. Nahasambotra olona ny polisy.
PST.AHA.stop person DET police  'The police arrested a person/people.'

c. Nahafongana trano ny fahavalo.
PST.AHA.destroy house DET enemy  'The enemy destroyed some house/s.'

- passive telic prefixes: voa-, tafa-

(12) a. Voaseho mpianatra ny boky.
VOA.show student DET book  'The books were shown to some student/s.'

b. Voaroso akondro ny vahiny.
VOA.serve banana DET guest  'The guests were offered banana/s.'

c. Tafiditra trano ny fahavalo.
TAFA.enter house DET enemy  'The enemy entered some house/s.'

- the singular and the plural readings are both available for the bare nouns
- these judgements do not change if a determiner is added

4.3 Iterativity
- bare nouns should allow cumulative reference and therefore to be compatible with iterative contexts – with a plural reading

(13) Nahita parasy tao anatin' ny fandriany Rasoa
PST.AT.find louse LOC in DET bed.3 Rasoa
nandritran' ny herinandro iray.
during DET week one  'Rasoa found lice in her bed during one week.'

- the bare noun parasy 'louse' can be interpreted as singular or plural
- if singular, Rasoa finds a single louse every day for one week (pluractionality?)
4.4 Habituals
• unsurprisingly, bare nouns allow habitual readings, while definites do not

(14) a. Mifoka sigara Rabe.
    AT.smoke cigar Rabe
    ‘Rabe smokes cigars.’ (✓ habitual, ✓ episodic)

    b. Mifoka ny sigara Rabe.
        AT.smoke DET cigar Rabe
        ‘Rabe smokes the cigar.’ (∗ habitual, ✓ episodic)

• overtly marked singulars (with iray ‘one’) also force the episodic reading unless accompanied by an overt quantifier

(15) a. Mifoka sigara iray Rabe.
    AT.smoke cigar one Rabe
    ‘Rabe smokes one cigar.’ (∗ habitual, ✓ episodic)

    b. Isan’ andro no mifoka sigara iray Rabe.
        each day FOC AT.smoke cigar one Rabe
        ‘Every day Rabe smokes one cigar.’ (✓ habitual, ∗ episodic)

4.5 Summary
• bare nouns in Malagasy are number neutral, but allow plural readings (apparent cumulative reference) in telic contexts

5. Discussion
• how to reconcile the Malagasy facts with what we know about bare nouns in other languages?
• maybe the tests don’t work in Malagasy – need different tests
• maybe bare nouns aren’t truly bare – there is a null indefinite determiner

5.1 Scope
• Malagasy bare nouns allow both wide and narrow scope
  o opaque contexts:
(16) Te hanam- bady dokotera aho
want FUT.AT.have spouse doctor 1SG(NOM)
‘I want to marry a doctor.’
context 1: I want to marry any doctor. want > ∃
context 2: I have a particular doctor in mind. ∃ > want

(17) Mitady alika aho.
at.look-for dog 1SG(NOM)
‘I’m looking for a dog.’
context 1: I just want a dog, any one will do. look-for > ∃
context 2: I’m looking for a particular dog. ∃ > look-for

○ modals:

(18) Tokony hamaky boky ianao.
should FUT.AT.read book 2SG(NOM)
‘You should read a book.’
context 1: I think you should do more book-reading. should > ∃
context 2: I have a particular book in mind. ∃ > should

○ other quantificational elements:

(19) a. Namaky boky frantsay ny mpianatra rehetra.
pst.read book French DET student all
‘All the students read a French book.’ (∀>∃ or ∃>∀)

b. Tsy nahasitrana zaza ny dokotera. Marary loatra ilay izy.
NEG PST.CAUSE.cure child DET doctor sick too DEM 3(NOM)
‘The doctor was not able to cure a child. He (the child) was too sick.’

c. Tsy nanam- bady dokotera aho satria
NEG PST.AT.have spouse doctor 1SG(NOM) because
nipetraka lavitra ahy izy.
pst.at.live far 1SG(ACC) 3(NOM)
‘I didn’t marry a doctor, because he lived far from me.’

5.2 The null determiner
• the null determiner explains the syntax: bare nouns are restricted in
distribution (can’t be subjects, can’t move) ⇒ null heads require licensing
• Landau (2007): EPP is a PF constraint that requires the head to be overtly realized
• DPs with a null determiner will not be able to undergo movement (to subject position, scrambling, topicalization, raising to object, etc.)

• the null determiner explains the semantics:
  • the null determiner is similar to ‘a’ or ‘some’ and therefore allows variable scope
  • the null determiner allows for a quantized reading of bare nouns interpreted as plural (like ‘some’)

(20)  a. Sandy ate the apple in/for two minutes.
   b. Sandy ate apples #in/for two minutes.
   c. Sandy ate some apples in/for two minutes.

(21)  a. Alex almost ate an apple. (counterfactual or scalar)
   b. Alex almost ate apples. (counterfactual only)
   c. Alex almost ate some apples. (counterfactual or scalar)

(22)  a. Marion ate up an apple.
   b. # Marion ate up apples.
   c. Marion ate up some apples.

• I have a hard time getting the scalar reading in (21)c, but other native English speakers get it

6. Conclusion
• looking at bare nouns and interactions with telicity can potentially shed light both on analyses of aspect, but also the syntax and semantics of bare nouns

References