Chapter 8, Problem 2: Plural and Mass NPs Without Specifiers

A.   (i) Pat loves (those) dogs.

  (ii) (Some) furniture can be very expensive.

B.

$$
\begin{bmatrix} phrase \\ \text{SPR} \quad \langle\,\rangle \end{bmatrix} \rightarrow \mathbf{H} \begin{bmatrix} \text{HEAD} \quad noun \\[4pt] \text{VAL} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \quad \left\langle \begin{bmatrix} \text{DP} \\ [\text{COUNT} \quad -\,] \mid [\text{AGR} \quad [\text{NUM} \quad pl]] \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle \\[8pt] \text{COMPS} \quad \langle\,\rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}
$$

We have included only syntactic information in this rule, suggesting that the interpretation of determinerless plural and mass NPs is the same as the interpretation of the NOMs that they exhaustively dominate. This is not quite right. These NPs are usually interpreted as though they were quantified with something similar to *most*:

  Puppies are cute means most puppies are cute.

  Spinach tastes good means most spinach tastes good.

But they can also get existential interpretations:

  Pat invests in stocks means Pat invests in some stocks.

  Popeye eats spinach whenever he can means Popeye eats some spinach whenever he can.

Contrary to what these examples might suggest, these two interpretations are not tied to subject and object positions:

  Problems arose has an existential interpretation.

  I love spinach has a 'most' interpretation.

Since this is a syntax text, we focus on the syntactic effects of the rule for plural and mass determinerless NPs, leaving it to others to formalize the semantic effects.