

# **Generics in English**

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# Generics: Two Types

- **Two quite distinct phenomena have historically been called “generic”**

- 1. Reference to a kind**

- 2. Expressions of general regularities**

# Reference to a Kind

- **The potato was first cultivated in South America.**
- **Potatoes were introduced into Ireland by the end of the 17th century**
- **The Irish economy became dependent upon the potato.**

**These do not denote some particular potato or group of potatoes, but rather the kind, Potato (*Solanum tuberosum*)**

# Characterizing Sentences

- **A potato contains vitamin C and amino acid**
- **Potatoes contain protein**
- **The potato contains thiamin**

**Does not express a specific episode or an isolated fact, but reports a kind of “general property”...a regularity that summarizes groups of particular episodes or facts.**

# Generics – two types

- **The first type of “genericity” is a feature of NPs**
- **The second type of “genericity” is a feature of entire sentences**
- **The two types can occur together because one common regularity holds across individuals of a kind, and so the regularity is predicated of the kind.**

# Generics – two types

- **When referring to kinds, we abstract away from instances, whereas when we use characterizing sentences we abstract away from particular events**
- **A general law or regularity about members of a kind is naturally stated as holding of the kind**