Abstract

MAIN AARführt: A major factor that grounds the mass/count distinction is the (non-resolution) of overlap in context.

MAIN ARGUMENTS: (i) Counting presupposes that Ns be interpreted relative to counting contexts, which are contexts enforcing a resolution of overlap in N denotations (following some suggestions in Rothstein (2010) and Landman (2011)); (ii) There is a typal difference between mass and count Ns (in line with Kriela (1968); Rothstein (2010)); lexical entries of mass Ns specify the null context as the context for evaluation, and because it allows for overlap in their denotations, it makes them uncountable; in contrast, lexical entries of count Ns do not specify such a context, and therefore their counting context may vary from utterance to utterance. Adopting this semantics has two major benefits: (i) Predict on semantic grounds, for a large class of Ns, when can(not) expect to find mass/count variation cross- and intralinguistically. (ii) Explain why superordinate object mass Ns resist mass-count coercion.

Signature Property of Mass Nouns
Mass nouns cannot be directly modified by numerals, barring coercion:

(1) ?Billie has three muds/rices.

(2) Alex has three cats/chairs/cars.

Divergent Mass-to-Count Coercion Patterns

Object mass nouns (furniture, kitchenware, silverware) resist mass-to-count coercion:

Rothstein-Landman Synthesis

Proposition: Counting in Context

The IND function
We assume IND: \{(x, y), (x, \emptyset)\}

- When N denotes individuals (cat, lentils, furniture, fence):
  \{Returns sets of entities that intuitively count as ‘one’\}
- When N does not denote individuals (mud, blood, air):
  \{Returns the empty set\}

The mass/count distinction in terms of disjointness:

Mass Ns are SATURATED with the NULL context

- Count Ns interpreted at context of utterance ci
- Mass Ns interpreted at null context \(\emptyset\)

Ns interpreted relative to a number neutral property and a counting base:

Proposal: Predictions for Mass-to-Count Coercion

General process for mass-to-count coercion

- Replacement of IND with CL, a conventionalized, salient unit or measure.

Examples

- Conventionalized, salient unit or measure for water, e.g., BOTTLE of water.
  \{If container reading, then disjoint, and therefore disjoint at ci\}
- Also for Granular mass Ns (e.g. rice) with CL, e.g., BOWL of rice.
- BUT: For Object mass Ns (kitchenware, furniture), conventionalized, salient unit or measure (e.g. item) amounts to the identity IND = CL.

- Only disjoint at a specific counting context!
  \{Not disjoint at ci\}
  \{Different cardinalities at different counting contexts \Rightarrow COUNTING GOES WRONG\}

Conclusion and Extensions

Puzzle for Granulars

- But the general account does not predict rise to be mass or mass/count variation (rice vs. lentils).
  \{- Single lentils/rice grains don’t overlap \Rightarrow IND-RICE/IND-LENTIL\} is disjoint.
  \{BUT, disjointness of IND set wrongly predicts stable count encoding\}

Need to add e.g. a Vagueness story (Chierchia, 2010).

Solution to the puzzle in Sutton and Filip (2015, 2016)

Assume IND as pretheoretical

- More details forthcoming work... Watch this space!

Selected References