

## Idiosyncratically mass and idiosyncratically count

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**The mass/count distinction in Telugu:** The mass/count distinction is known to come with signature surface and semantic properties (Chierchia 1998). On the surface, mass nouns differ from count nouns in that they don't combine with plural morphology, don't combine with numerals and in certain languages, there are quantifiers that appear only with mass nouns but not count, and vice versa. Semantically, mass nouns are interpreted as if they are not divided into minimal parts (non-individuated, Bale & Barner 2009). They do not allow for combination with predicates that obligatorily distribute to minimal parts, such as *large* (*\*the water is large*) and in comparison contexts, they compare by overall volume, whereas count nouns compare by number of entities (see e.g. Barner & Snedeker 2005). Telugu has a mass/count distinction that follows these properties: number inflection is obligatory for count nouns, but absent on mass nouns; count nouns can directly combine with numerals whereas mass nouns cannot, (1); and there is quantifier allomorphy: the quantifier *konni* 'few' appears only with countable nouns, (2), whereas *končam* 'little' appears exclusively with mass nouns, (3). Telugu mass nouns are interpreted as if they are unindividuated, since they do not combine with distributing predicates, (4), and comparisons are identifiably done by volume, but not number.

- (1) \* Raaju renDu isuka-lu konn-aa-Du  
Raaju two sand-PL dig-PAST-3.MASC.SG  
INTENDED: 'Raaju dug two (piles of) sand(s).'
- (2) Raaju konni/\*končam aratipanD-lu ṭinn-aa-Du  
Raaju few/\*little banana-PL eat-PAST-3.MASC.SG  
'Raaju ate few bananas.'
- (3) Neenu končamu/\*konni uppu ṭinn-aa-nu  
I little/\*few salt eat-PAST-1.SG  
'I ate little salt.'
- (4) # Vendi pedḍa-gaa un-ḍi  
silver large-GA be-3.NM.SG  
INTENDED: 'The silver is large.'

**Plural mass nouns in Telugu:** Certain nouns like *niiLLu* 'water' and *paalu* 'milk' show mixed behavior between being mass and count. They have morphosyntactic count properties: (i) they take the plural suffix *-lu* and trigger obligatory plural verbal agreement and (ii) they combine with the count quantifier *konni* but not *končam*:

- (5) Aa abbaaji konni/\*končam nii-LLu ṭaag-ees-ṭun-aa-Du  
the boy few/little water-PL drink-EMPH-PROG-PRES-3.MASC.PL  
'The boy is drinking some water.'

In contrast, their semantic behavior is more in keeping with an unindividuated interpretation, i.e. *mass* nouns. They do not combine with stubbornly distributive predicates, (6). Furthermore, comparison is done by *volume*, not number. *Raaju Raani kanna ekkuva paalu vaaDææDu* 'Raaju used more milk than Raani' is true if Raaju used one 5 ltr bottle of milk, compared to Raani's three 1 ltr bottles, hence the overall volume of milk is relevant, not the number of individual portions despite the plural suffix on *paa-lu*.

- (6) # Nii-LLu pedḍagaa unn-aa-ji  
water-PL big-GA be-PRES-3PL  
'The water is large.'

**Significance:** The data from Telugu show that nouns which are semantically mass must be allowed to co-occur with properties that are more generally indicative of count nouns, for instance, plural morphology. This much is known, since plural mass nouns are attested elsewhere, yet it is notable however, that the Telugu data fit neither of the attested types of mass plurals, in particular, not being plurals of abundance or covertly divided. Structuralist approaches to the mass/count distinction (Borer 2005, Bale & Barner 2009, de Belder 2013) face a particular problem, since count properties - in particular count quantifiers - can only arise through interaction with a noun that has individuated interpretation. Telugu shows that the link between the semantic and morphosyntactic properties is weaker than these approaches propose.

**Proposal:** We propose that the count properties of the plural mass nouns arises idiosyncratically. The plurality of the plural mass nouns is inherent, and following Kramer (2014), we take these inherent features to be located on *n*. Following Smith (2013), we assume that features are split into a semantic *i*F and a morphological *u*F, with these two halves of the feature divided at spell-out and sent to the relevant interfaces. The Telugu plural mass nouns are inherently specified for [*u*F:-singular], and thus their plurality has no semantic import, whilst accounting for the fact that *niiLLu* and *paalu* appear with plural inflection. Quantifier allomorphy in Telugu comes about through the morphological plurality of the noun which the quantifier combines with, not the mass/count status of the noun. Quantifiers undergo agreement with the quantified noun (agreement can be seen in Romance languages, e.g. Spanish *mucho*, *muchos*). Assuming Distributed Morphology, and the late insertion of exponents, we propose that the selection of *konni* and *končam* is regulated by the Vocabulary Insertion rules in (7). They are allomorphs of the same quantifier, yet *konni* surfaces only when it has received a plural specification through agreement.

$$(7) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{konni} \Leftrightarrow \sqrt{\text{KONCAM}}, [\text{uF:plural}] \\ \text{končam} \Leftrightarrow \sqrt{\text{KONCAM}} \end{array}$$

**Extensions:** Our proposal allows for a noun to look count, but be interpreted as a mass noun, since count properties can arise idiosyncratically in Telugu. We then predict the opposite mismatch should also arise; a noun made to look mass by idiosyncratic parts of a language, yet in reality not mass at all. This prediction is borne out with count-mass nouns in English (Doetjes 1997). These nouns like *furniture* on the surface seem to be mass (*cf. much* in (8a)), but are interpreted as though individuated (they combine with *large* in (8b)).

$$(8) \quad \begin{array}{ll} \text{a. I didn't buy much furniture.} & \text{b. That furniture is really large.} \end{array}$$

As with Telugu, the surface mass properties of count-mass nouns arise idiosyncratically, and not through a specification for being MASS. We propose that count-mass nouns are inherently semantically plural, and are interpreted as groups of the root noun. An inherent number specification prevents counting in English, as is seen with *pluralia tantum* nouns which also resist counting: *I bought three \*(pairs of) trousers/scissors*. An inherent number on *n* prevents the noun from combining with NumP in English, interrupting combination with numerals which are introduced in Spec,NumP (Watanabe 2010). Furthermore, since non-inherent number is introduced through NumP, count-mass nouns can receive no morphological specification for number and so are always obligatorily singular by default. Finally, in a similar vein to Telugu, mass/count quantifier allomorphy in English is sensitive to the morphological number of the head noun (*contra* Solt 2009):

$$(9) \quad \begin{array}{l} \text{many} \Leftrightarrow \sqrt{\text{MUCH}}, [\text{uF:plural}] \\ \text{much} \Leftrightarrow \sqrt{\text{MUCH}} \end{array}$$

**Selected References:** Bale, A. & Barner, D. (2009) *The interpretation of functional heads*. Borer, H. (2005) *Structuring sense vol. 1*. Kramer, R. (2014). *Gender in Amharic: A morphosyntactic approach to natural and grammatical gender*. Mathieu, E. (2012) *Flavours of division*. Wiltschko, M. (2008). *The syntax of non-inflectional plural marking*.