
Mass-count shifts and the mass-count distinction

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Sentences such as (1) in English have been analysed in the literature as cases of coercion of a count N (*apple*) into a mass one, cf. the well-known Universal Grinder Hypothesis (Pelletier 1979).

(1) There is apple in the salad.

A different analysis is offered by Bale & Barner (2009), which relies on their generalizations stated in (2)-(3):

- (2) No term that can be used in count syntax can also be used in a mass syntax to denote individuals.
- (3) Some mass nouns (in the context of use) have individuals in their denotation and others do not.

B&B's explanation of (2)-(3) relies on three assumptions: (i) nouns of the *furniture*-type are derived from roots that denote individuated join semi-lattices, i.e., join semi-lattices that have individuals at their bottom, whereas all other nouns are derived from roots that denote non-individuated ones; (ii) count interpretations are obtained via a count functional head that turns a non-individuated join semi-lattice into an individuated one; (iii) the mass functional head denotes the identity function. As a consequence, according to B&B (2009), the sentence in (1) would not be obtained by coercing the count N into mass, but it would rather display the baseline use of the NP *apple* in English, i.e. its use when no functional structure is added on top of it. In this talk, we argue that Gen(2) faces cross-linguistic challenges, in particular with respect to languages that exhibit General Number (Corbett 2000), and we propose an analysis of the cross-linguistic variation in the coercion effects triggered by mass-count use of NPs. Our proposal relies on different algebraic structures for the domains of mass and count, and on a cross-linguistic parametric difference at the interface with morphosyntax, specifically in the requirement of morphosyntactic marking of Number.

References: • Bale, A. & Barner, D. (2009): The interpretation of functional heads. Using comparatives to explore the mass/count distinction. *Journal of Semantics* 26, 217-252. • Corbett, G. (2000): *Number*. CUP • Pelletier, F. (1979). Non-singular reference: some preliminaries. Mass terms: some philosophical problems. 1-14.