Abstracts Workshop „Mass and Count in Romance and Germanic Languages"

The abstracts are in chronological order according to the workshop schedule.

Areal pathways of bare nouns in Romance

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When the Romance languages emerged from Latin, they appeared with an overt DP and an article system that allowed for a distinction between mass and count nouns in the object zone. The counterpart of the "positive grammaticalization" of articles was the "negative grammaticalization" of zero marking for mass. After a first common Romance starting point, areal differences emerged when some languages grammaticalized obligatory markers for mass (like the French partitive *du pain*) whereas others gramaticalized markers for objects on the opposite side of the animacy scale (like the Spanish differential object marker *a* in *quiero a María*). A further evolution can be shown in Brazilian Portuguese, where the clear syntactic distinction between mass and count seems to be partly abandoned.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate some of the diachronic pathways that made emerge the current areal distribution of the mass-count distinction in Western Romance.

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Indefiniteness, mass and the neuter gender: evidence from Central-Southern Italo-Romance

Tania Paciaroni / Michele Loporcar, University of Zurich

The count/mass distinction has been crucially invoked in analyses of the gender systems of Central-Southern Italo-Romance dialects. These dialects have been traditionally analysed as having a three-way gender opposition (examples from Macerata, Area Mediana, in (1)):

(1)   Macerata
   a. *lo   pa*   b. *lu   ka*   c. *la   ma*
      DEF.N.SG bread(N)   DEF.M.SG   dog(M)   DEF.F.SG   hand(F)
      'the bread' (mass)   'the dog' (count)   'the hand'

While this kind of description is still around in the literature (cf. e.g. Fernández-Ordóñez 2009: 55), who – reporting Romance facts such as (1) – speaks about "new gender distinctions based on the count/mass interpretation of nouns", an alternative account which increasingly gains popularity (cf. Ledgeway 2009: 150; 2012: 105; Maiden 2011: 170-2) objects that the contrast (1a-b) is not one of gender, but only a semantic count/mass distinction within the masculine gender.

In this talk we will discuss new evidence militating in support of the traditional view, showing that in at least some dialects morphological change has brought about the rise of an indefinite article, showing neuter agreement, at least under some conditions, if the controller is neuter:

(2) *lu   lavoru   ɛ   t:ut:o   no   ʃpɔrte*   (as opposed to M *nu* occurring
DEF.M.SG   work(M).SG   is   all(N).SG   INDF.N.SG   sport(N)   with masculine controllers)
'to work is a full sport'

Were it just a simple mass/count distinction, we would not expect there to be any indefinite article since, especially under a contextual view of the mass/count distinction, for languages like English it is maintained that "count NPs are NPs in which the noun is preceded by a, one, two, a few, several, many" (Joosten 2003: 167). Thus, data such as those in (2) are evidence that the class of nouns associated with mass referents cannot be exhaustively described as a purely semantic class: rather, it must be defined as an agreement class and, as such, it matches the (morpho-syntactic) definition of a gender-value.

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Nominal morphology and semantics – where's gender in Gallroromance?
Elisabeth Stark, University of Zurich

The talk starts from the observation that Modern Standard French as opposed to Modern Standard Italian, Spanish and many other Romance varieties, does neither mark noun class, nor gender nor number overtly on nouns:

1)   a.   [so], <seau>/ <seaux> (m.), 'bucket(s)'
        b.   [o], <eau> / <eaux> (f.), 'water(s)'

Additionally, Standard French cannot have bare nominals in argument position (except under the scope of negation), and possesses a specialized indefinite determiner (the so-called 'partitive article') indicating a mass reading for the respective nominal:

2)   a.   *Je n'aimerais acheter que *(des) vins excellents pour l'anniversaire de mon père*
                'I would like to buy only excellent wines for my father's birthday'

        b.   *J'aimerais acheter *(du) vin pour l'anniversaire de mon père*
                'I would like to by (some) wine for my father's birthday'

In front of these rather peculiar morphosyntactic properties of Standard French, the aim of the talk is twofold: First, it wants to shed a light on other Galloromance varieties like some Modern Occitan dialects and Catalan in order to understand where this bundle of properties is found in a similar manner, and second, it aims at a possible explanation of these facts which relates in a principled manner nominal determination and gender and number agreement inside nominals as coding strategies to indicate the mass vs. count interpretation of nominals.

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Count Mass and Number in the Niuean nominal phrase
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This paper will address the issue of the universality of the count/mass distinction, with a focus on count/mass and number in Niuean, a Polynesian language of the Tongic subgroup. Niuean appears to have no count/mass distinction, and I will argue that this is due, not to the nature of count and mass in the language, but instead to the nature of the number markers and determiners in the language. The count mass distinction often reveals itself grammatically through the inability of mass nouns to undergo pluralization (without change of meaning) and their ability to appear as bare nominals. In Niuean however, notional mass nouns can pluralize and are not differentiated from notional count nouns in their ability (or not) to appear as bare nouns The question arises, therefore, whether Niuean lacks a count-mass distinction. I will argue that it does not, but that the plural marker in Niuean lacks an individuation feature, and hence it is not prohibited from appearing with mass nouns. I further argue that this also holds of the singular in Niuean. If individuation is required (as in counting or quantifying, for example) deficient classifiers are used in place of number markers. Thus, number marking in Niuean is different from that in languages in which number is a diagnostic for count and mass. In addition, obligatory left peripheral elements (e.g. determiners) in the noun phrase in Niuean do not serve any individuating purpose either, denoting instead, aspects of meaning such as case and a value for proper/common. These materials are equally required regardless of the count or mass value of the nominal, hence the inability for mass nouns to appear as bare nominals is explained. The discussion will focus on a detailed analysis of the various elements within the Niuean noun phrase, including case, quantifiers, number particles, classifiers, and collective particles, and it will address the issue of the universality of the count/mass distinction, and the difficulty of developing clear diagnostics for determining this universality.

The role of base levels for mass/count construals in Chintang
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Chintang (Tibeto-Burman > Kiranti, Nepal) does not have a lexicalised mass/count distinction. Every noun can be construed as countable or mass *ad hoc*. For objects, this distinction is reflected in object agreement: count referents trigger agreement as in (1a), mass referents do not, as shown in (1b).

(1) a.   *Abo sa tac-c-o.*
          now meat bring-d-[SUBJ.NPST.1]d[iA.]3[s]O
          'Now let's bring (a specific amount of) meat

    b.   *Abo sa tac-ce*
          now meat bring-[SUBJ.NPST.1]d[iS]
          'Now let's bring (some) meat.'   (elicitation PRAR 2010)

What is relevant, however, are base levels. Base levels mark an amount in a variably quantifiable referent that is relevant for grammatical processes. They come in two kinds:

- A noun has a **lexical base level** when its combination with 'one' yields a clear mental image. The existence of such a base level is relevant for the semantic processes necessary for count or mass construals (for instance, a 'mass of meat' is very different from a 'mass of cat(s)').
- For complex object referents, it is often necessary to assume a **referential base level** that determines object agreement. The relevant base level may vary across languages, i.e. one language (e.g. English) may focus on the countable totality of a referent whereas another (e.g. Chintang) focusses on a subamount of the referent that is a mass.

This talk will describe the relevance of base levels for the grammar of Chintang and present some differences to English (and most of SAE) that depend on base levels.

Scary nouns denoting food in modern Russian

Daniel Weiss, University of Zurich

Why are nouns designating such diverse fruits and vegetables as 'potato', 'almond', 'grape', 'strawberry' or 'cabbage' in modern Russian uncountable, whereas others, such as 'gherkin', 'date', 'nut' or 'apple', allow for the distinction of grammatical number, and still others like 'pumpkin' or 'quince' have an optional number opposition? Any plausible account of this capricious behaviour calls for a cognitivist approach. Not surprisingly, various criteria have been discussed, including visibility of the plant (±"underground"), growth in bunches or single exemplars, consumption in raw or cooked condition and/or in entire or chopped form, possibility of being held in one hand, etc. Moreover, lexical borrowings from non-Slavic languages seem to play a crucial role.

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Automatically detecting mass nouns in English

Gerold Schneider and Daniel Schreier

In this small pilot study, we extract mass nouns from large automatically parsed English corpora in a data-driven fashion. We compare and sum over pre- and postmodifying contexts using collocation statistics. This includes comparing features such as

1. typical determiners ('some milk'),
2. mass quantifiers ('a slice of bread'),
3. high frequency of zero determiners,
4. post-modifications of mass quantifiers.

We conclude with a small-scale evaluation.

Synchronic and diachronic aspects of the MASS/COUNT-distinction in some Upper German dialects
Elvira Glaser / Agnes Kolmer, Zurich

In this talk, we will first outline the MASS/COUNT-system in Bavarian, which differs from Standard German in the occurrence of the indefinite article in noun phrases with MASS expressions.

und	*do*	*hod=a*	*se*	*wiida*	***a***	*broud*	*ebrokt*
and	then	has=he	REFL	again	INDEF	bread	dipped

'and then he dipped bread again' (e.g. into a soup)

In our descriptive analysis, we will consider different syntactic and semantic characteristics and lexical fields in conjunction with the corresponding system of pronominal reference.

Brauchst	*koan*	*kaffa,*	*i*	*gib*	*da*	***oan***	(Pfeffer)
need.2SG	none	buy	I	give	you	one	(pepper)

'You don't need to buy (it), I'll give you some (pepper)'

Secondly, we will embed the Bavarian system in the areal context of some neighbouring Franconian and Swabian dialects, in which the use of the indefinite article in MASS-contexts is also present, although there are differences in the pronominal reference. Finally, we will address the hitherto unanswered question of how the generalized use of the indefinite article found in Bavarian today emerged, taking into account data from Middle High German and Early New High German.

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