
Varieties of Mass/Count Interpretation of Hybrid Nouns

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We take a closer look at the oft mentioned but under discussed category of hybrid nouns (a.k.a dual life nouns) like *apple*, *chocolate*, *potato*, and *rope*. We motivate an analysis in which there are differences in the mass meanings of certain nouns, contra analyses that assume mass has no meaning (e.g. Barner & Snedeker 2005; Borer 2005; Rothstein 2010; a.o.). Rather than relegate countability or one-ness to an unspecified contextual variable or extra-linguistic cognition, we propose a probabilistic model for inferences based on competition between the mass and count uses of the nouns.

It is widely assumed that mass nouns derived from count nouns that denote discrete solid objects refer to the substance, or at least parts, of which the objects are made. This widespread approach accounts for context and corresponding utterances in (1-2), where the mass use of *apple* is not sanctioned but the count use is sanctioned when the apples referred to are whole, and the opposite is true when the apples are in non-whole form. However, this approach undergenerates uses of hybrid nouns given examples like (3), where whole, diced, and puréed apples can all be referred to with the mass noun.

- (1) [Context: There are three whole apples on a table]
a. #There is apple on the table. b. There are apples on the table.
- (2) [Context: Two whole apples were coarsely diced, and added to salad]
a. There is a lot of apple in this salad.
b. #There are a lot of apples in this salad
- (3) Everyone who ate apple in the cafeteria got sick.

We put forward a competition-based account of the semantics of mass count. We propose that there are two dimensions of competition in our cases: (a) what forms are likely to be relevant, and (b) what the semantic referent is. (a) accounts for the contrasts between *apples* and *potatoes* and between *apple* and *chocolate*; (b) accounts for the interpretations of the count uses of nouns like *apples*, as well as the unmarked effects of their mass counterparts in cases like (3).

References: • Barner, D. and J. Snedeker (2005). Quantity judgments and individuation: Evidence that mass nouns count. *Cognition* 97(1), 41–66. • Borer, H. (2005). *In Name Only*, Volume 1. Oxford University Press. • Rothstein, S. 2010. Counting and the mass/count distinction. *Journal of Semantics* 27(3), 343–397.