

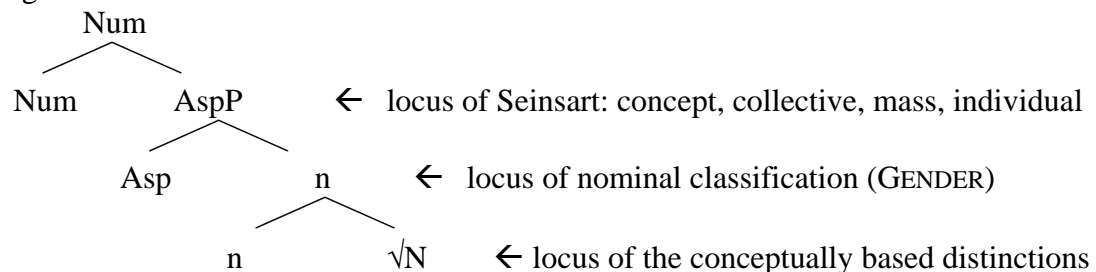
Decomposing the mass count distinction

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Cross-linguistic variation in the manifestation of the mass-count distinction. The mass/count distinction manifests itself in different ways across different languages. For example, in English mass nouns cannot be counted, they cannot be plural marked, they can be used as arguments without a preceding determiner and they systematically interact with verbal Aktionsart (mass nouns trigger an atelic interpretation in contexts where a singular count noun would trigger a telic interpretation). In Halkomelem (Central Salish) as well as Blackfoot (Algonquian) the situation is different: while some apparent mass nouns cannot be counted (like in English), many apparent mass nouns can be plural marked, apparent mass nouns do not differ from (singular) count nouns in their ability to function as arguments (all nouns require a preceding determiner for argumenthood), and there is no detectable interaction with verbal Aktionsart (see Wiltschko 2005 for Halkomelem).

Decomposing the mass count distinction. The observed variation can be accounted for if we assume that the mass/count distinction is not a primitive but instead can be decomposed (is multi-dimensional in Joosten's 2004 term). I argue that we need to recognize a distinction between substance and individual denoting nouns which is purely conceptually based and located at the level of the nominal $\sqrt{\text{root}}$. Secondly, we need to recognize a formal distinction between count and mass nouns, which I assume to instantiate the nominal equivalent of verbal Aktionsart, namely *Seinsart* (Rijkhoff 1991). I assume that this distinction is located at the level of inner nominal Aspect giving rise to a four way classification: abstract nouns, mass nouns, collective nouns, and individual nouns. Formally, these are the nominal equivalent of the familiar verb classes: states, activities, achievements and accomplishments respectively. These *Seinsart* distinctions in Asp predictably interact with other syntactic heads (Num, n, and verbal Asp).

(1) English mass: count distinction



Given that the same functional categories can be associated with distinct substantive content (Ritter & Wiltschko to appear) it follows that the mass count distinction as it manifests itself in English is not universal but is instead the result of a specific constellation of facts.

Composing the mass count distinction in English. I argue that the language particular instantiation of the mass/count distinction results from the following constellation of facts.

i) Nominal $\sqrt{\text{roots}}$ can denote a substance, or an individual. This root-level distinction has semantic effects: for example, only individuals can be counted but substances cannot (unless they are packaged or viewed as kinds).

ii) English *Seinsart* distinctions while not morphologically marked on the noun manifest themselves syntactically. For example the head of NumP selects for specific instantiations of Asp resulting in the observed restrictions on plural marking in mass, collective, and abstract nouns as well as the interaction with verbal *Aktionsart*

English-internal evidence for the dissociation of the root-level substance individual distinction (which is solely conceptually based) and the Asp level mass count distinction (which has a formal syntactic correlation) stems from the familiar fact that not all individual denoting nouns necessarily map onto grammatical count nouns (*furniture*), though all substance denoting nouns map onto grammatical mass nouns.

Cross-linguistic variation in the composition of the mass/count distinction. I propose that while the conceptually based root-level distinction between substance and individual is (possibly) universal the syntactically relevant mass/count distinction is not. This explains the Halkomelem pattern which arises in the absence of a mass/count distinction in Asp (though roots can still denote substances and individuals).

Furthermore, evidence from Blackfoot (Algonquian) suggests that the *Seinsart* distinctions in Asp can be based on substantive content distinct from the one responsible for the mass count distinction (boundedness). In particular, the formal nominal classification in Blackfoot is based on animacy (Frantz 1991). I show that Blackfoot plural marking as well as verbal *Aktionsart* is sensitive to animacy rather than to a mass count distinction of the English-type.

What remains to be seen is whether or not Halkomelem has another way in which nominals are classified formally or whether *Aktionsart* is simply missing (similar to the claim that Russian lacks verbal *Aktionsart*, MacDonald 2008).

Selected References

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