

**Mass Nouns and the Structure of the Nominal Phrase:
Evidence from the Marsican Dialects
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1. The Problem.

There are at least two conflicting semantic assessments of the extensional properties of mass nouns: (a) they do not denote individuals (Quine 1960) vs. they denote pluralities of individuals (Chierchia 1996). In an attempt to shed new light on the “singular/plural” puzzle, a DP hypothesis of the alternation (‘she wants a *wine, *mud/dog, house’) is proposed. The syntactic claim is that mass nouns are NPs while count nouns are DPs, with implications for their semantic interpretation. The proposal is based on the overt morpho-syntax of the determiner system of Marsican dialects (M) of western Abruzzo.

2. The Data:

Comparative data collected in 30 Marsican communities (Cianciusi, 1998) shows that masculine mass/count nouns take etymologically distinct determiners (1a) leading to the observation that mass nominals have no morpho-syntactically plural forms (1ii). (the examples are from Pescasseroli, L’Aquila).

- 1. a. i. [sə^hkanə]/ [ʎi^hkanə] ‘the dog/dogs’
- ii. [lə^hvinə]/ *Plur. ‘wine/*plur.’
- b. i. [la^hkasa]/ [lə^hkasə] ‘the house/houses’
- ii. [la^hssɔna]/ *Plur. ‘pork fat/*plur.’

It will be shown, moreover, that mass/count morpho-syntactic effects extend to other phrase structures in this agreement impoverished variety of Marsican: quantifier phrases, demonstrative phrases, pronominal (clitic) phrases, de-adjectival and de-verbal nominal phrases,. The overt (non)realization of the category mass in natural languages will also be noted beyond La Marsica (Avolio 1996, Caratù 1990) and Romance.

3. The Syntactic Analysis

It can be argued that mass vs. count defines the manner world objects are semantically distinguished, a conceptual knowledge akin to ‘counting’ (‘she has 2 *wines, *muds/dogs, houses’) (discussions with Lindsey Chen). On this assumption, a syntactic analysis is proposed (2), in which nouns bear a lexico-semantic specification [+/- cont] (contra Chierchia 1996). In the syntax count nouns check their strong feature in (Merge with) D.

2. a. DP (count) , NP (mass)

b. Num selects DP: {if DP, then Num (DP)}

c. Derivations:

- i. [NumP **ʎi** [Num kanə [DP [D ~~kanə~~ [NP [N ~~kanə~~]]]]]]] *gli cane* ‘i cani’ Count,PI
- ii. [DP **sə** [D kanə [NP [N ~~kanə~~]]]]] *se cane* ‘il cane’ Count.Sg
- iii. [NP **lə** [N panə]]] *le pane* ‘il pane’ Mass,Sg
- (iv. -----*Mass,PI)

Hence, count nouns are structural DPs (2cii) with a count specifier [sə]. In contrast mass nouns stay in situ. Hence, they are NPs (2ciii) with a pleonastic mass specifier [lə]. Notably, Number selects a count object DP, hence count nouns in D merge in Num (2ci) with a plural count specifier [ʎi]. Under the proposed theory plural mass nouns are underived (*MassPl 2civ) as an epiphenomenon of computation.

4. Summary and Conclusions

The description of the morpho-syntax of mass/count determiners in Marsican suggests that DPs denote bounded ('countable') individuals accessible to the referential determiner D in DP, and by extension accessible to Number. In contrast NPs denote un-bounded ('non-countable') individuals inaccessible to D in DP, and by extension inaccessible to Num in NumP. If substantiated, the DP(NP) hypothesis (2) invites further study of the structural parallelism with v P(VP), with implications for phase theory (Chomsky 2001, 2005) and the universal typology of syntactic clauses and Mass/Count systems.

On more general considerations an answer to the question "why mass nouns don't have plural morphology" follows from the analysis (2) (contra Chierchia 1996). Finally, Marsican-like languages instantiate a unique typological realization of the mass/count contrast strictly through the determiner system (1), in the absence of either a classifier system in Chinese-like languages in complementary distribution with an inflectional number system for nominals in Italian-like languages (contra Borer 2005:92).

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