**The Semantic Mass-Count Distinction for Categories Lacking a Syntactic Mass-Count Distinction**

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Abstract:

The mass-count distinction as a syntactic distinction among nouns is generally taken to have semantic content, that is, to reflect a semantic mass-count distinction. On the standard approaches, the semantic mass-count distinction consists in differences in mereological properties of either the extension of nouns or of the entities (or entities-in-situations) in those extensions. This raises the general question how the semantic distinction applies to syntactic categories lacking a syntactic mass-count distinction. That question has often been answered with respect to the verbal domain of events, which, so the general view, displays the very same semantic mass-count distinction as nouns. This paper challenges that view, and more generally, the view that categories lacking a syntactic mass-count distinction display a semantic mass-count distinction. Syntactic categories lacking a (syntactic) mass-count distinction classify semantically as number-neutral, rather than dividing into mass and count. The paper rejects the standard approaches to the semantic mass-count distinction for the characterization of number-neutrality and suggests one in terms of a primitive, cognitive notion of unity, which is associated with the syntactic count category and which is absent in number-neutral domains. The  resulting view is one of a perspectival, language-driven ontology of countability that may diverge significantly from the more language-independent cognitive ontology in which conditions of gestalt, integrity and persistence play an individuating role.