*Philosophy of Language: Revisiting Events Semantics*

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**Handout 6**

**Events and the Mass-Count Distinction**

**1. Last time: the semantic status of the event quantifier**

Where does the event quantifier come from and why does it always narrow scope?

(1) a. Mary did not walk

b. Everyone bought a present.

Champollion’s idea: verbs themselves are generalized quantifiers

*Walk* denotes the set of sets that include a walking event.

(2) λP[∃e(walk(e) & P(e))]

Adverbials: *slowly* maps event quantifier onto an event quantifier:

(3) λP[∃e(walk(e) & P(e))] | 🡪 λP[∃e(walk(e) & P(e) & slowly(e)]

Conjunction: intersection of generalized event quantifiers

(4) a. John walked and danced.

b. λP[∃e(walk(e) & P(e)) & ∃e(dance(e) &P(e))]

Question for the approach

Is the view applicable only to the Neo-Davidsonian approach? - No

Given the original Davidsonian view:

*Walk* denotes function from individuals to sets of sets of events

(5) λxλP[∃e(walk(e, x) & P(e))]

Challenges for the approach

(6) a. John quickly greeted every guest.

b. John sometimes did not wake up.

c. John suddenly walked quickly.

(7) The truthmaker approach

∃e(quickly(e) & e |= *John greeted every guest*)

Is the truthmaker approach compatible with the Generalized Quantifier Theory of verbs?

Yes: conceive of sentential units existential generalized quantifiers ranging over truthmakers:

(8) λP[∃e(quickly (e) & e |= *John greeted every guest*) & P(e))]

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**2. Event nominalizations**

**2.1. Gerunds**

Inperfect and perfect nominals

(9) a. John’s kissing Mary (fact)

b. John’s kissing of Mary (event)

**2.2. The mass-count distinction and event nouns**

**2.2.1. Criteria for the mass-count distinction**

1. Determiner choice

Mass:

(10) a. much, little, small amount of (water/wood/furniture, \*things)

b. a great deal of trouble / \* of things

Count:

(11) many, few, small number of (things, \*water/wood/furniture)

Numerals only for count nouns: *two, three, second, third*

(12) a. \* two water / wood / furniture

b. \* the third furniture / wood

2. Plural only for count nouns (things, \* furnitures)

3. Anaphora *they* vs. *it*, *one of*

(13) one of the thing / the furniture

Gerunds and simple event nominalizations

1. Activities and count nominalizations

*Walking*: mass, *walk*: count

(14) a. much / little walking, \* one walking, \* walkings

b. a / one walk, walks

*Raining, rain*: both mass

Concrete states and nominalizations

*Sleeping, sleep*: both mass

(15) a. too much sleeping

b. sleep \* one sleep

Telic events and nominalizations

*Fall*: count, *falling*: mass

(16) a. a fall, several falls, \* little fall

b. too much falling

Same for *jumping - jump*

Summary

Mass categorization of activities or states

Count categorization:

1. Events with an inherent boundary

2. Temporally maximally continuous events (processes, states)

Other forms of event nominalization

Event collections based on participant collection

German prefix *ge*:

(17) a. das Lachen (laughing) –Gelaechter (collective laughing)

b. das Reden(speaking) – das Gerede (collective speaking)

Conclusion

Ontological mass-count distinction plays a role for syntactic mass-count choice in nominalizations.

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**3. The mass-count distinction**

**3.1. Views of the mass-count distinction**

**3.1.1. The mass-count distinction as an ontological distinction**

Things that have a boundary vs. things that lack a boundary

Nominal domain:

Things that come with an essential shape vs. things that do not come with an essential shape

Rigid embodiment: composite of matter and form

*Statue – clay*

*Chair – wood*

Problems for the view in the nominal domain

Object mass nouns: *furniture, footwear*

Grain nouns: *sand, rice, pasta*

Sequence-style nouns: *fence, sequence, line*

Portion and collection nouns: *portion, quantity, sum, collection*

Distinguish technical use and ordinary use, but will that solve the issue?

**3.1.2. The mass-count distinction as a distinction among extensions**

For a mass noun N, the extension of N is homogenous: divisive and cumulative

For a singular count noun N: N is atomic

**3. The mass-count distinction as a language-driven distinction**

1. Susan Rothstein (2017)

Mass-count distinction a distinction in ‘grammaticized individuation’

Formally: distinction in semantic type

Count noun: atomic relative to a reference set, of type (<<e, <e, t>>, t>)

Mass noun: no reference set, of type <e, t>

2. Hagit Borer (2005)

Syntactic distinction between mass nouns and count nouns

Count nouns: classifier - noun *ind*– N

Mass nouns: noun only: N

Manifestations of *ind*-category:

Classifier language (Chinese): classifier

Mass-count language: singular determiner *a*, plural morphology

3 ‘Literal’ grammaticized individuation: Moltmann (2021)

Represent language-driven unity at some ontological level

The unity property *U*: ‘being described by a singular count noun in the situation in question’

Situations keep track of uses of nouns:

If an entity *d* is described by using a singular count noun: *d* is *U* in the situation of use.

*U* may, but need not, correlate with integrity, having a boundary etc.

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**4. How do verbs as event predicates fare with respect to the mass-count distinction on the different views?**

**4.1. General fact**

In English verbs do not come with a syntactic-mass count distinction:

verbs do not come with a plural.

In Chinese nouns do not come with a syntactic mass-count distinction and numerals are inapplicable to nouns directly.

Question

Are English verbs as event predicates on a par with Chinese nouns?

**4.2. Evidence for verbs as event predicates being mass, rather than dividing into mass and count**

**4.2.1. Choice of adverbial quantifiers**

Adverbial quantifiers are mass, rather than count

*Bit, deal*, and *amount* are nouns selecting only mass NPs:

(18) a. John slept a little bit / \* a couple / ok a couple of times.

b. Last week, Mary worked out a great deal / \* a great number / ok a great number of

times.

c. John and Mary argued a good deal / \* a great number / ok a great number of times.

d. John jumped a bit / \* a couple / ok a couple of times.

e. John worked out a little bit / \* a great number / ok a great number of times this year.

Restrictions on *amount*: better with nouns than with verbs

(19) a. ? John worked a great amount.

b. a great deal / amount of work

c. a good deal / amount of arguing

*Much* vs. *many*, *litte* vs. *few*:

(20) a. John jumped too much / \* too many / ok too many times.

b. John slept / worked too little / \* too few / ok too few times.

c. . John stumbled many / \* a few / ok a few times.

d. John slept / worked little / \* too many / ok too many times.

e. John was inattentive too much / \* too many / ok too many times.

Neutral meaning of *a lot*:

(21) a. It rained a lot.

b. Joe misspoke a lot.

c. John has negotiated a lot.

**4.2.2. No direct application of numerals**

Ordinals:

*First, second*, *third* etc. cannotact as adverbials, meaning ‘for a first, second, third time’

(22) a. ??? Mary stumbled third(ly).

b. Mary stumbled a third time.

(23) a. ??? John married second(ly).

b. John married a second time

Cardinals:

*Time(s)* is required:

(24) a. \* John died only one.

b. John died only one time / once.

(25) a. \* John jumped three.

b. John jumped three times.

(26) a. \* John ran to the house four.

b. John ran to the house four times.

*Time* has the semantic function of a numeral classifier

(27) a. John fell three times.

b. John slept three times today.

c. Mary worked out three times this week.

d. John was attentive three times.

e. John owned the painting three times in his life.

*Times* picks up event units on the basis of one of three conditions obtaining:

[1] having a boundary (or being an atom with respect to the verbal event concept)

[2] being maximally continuous in time

[3] occurring at contextually given occasions

*Time(s)* fails to apply when no individuating conditions obtain:

(28) ??? John knew Bill a few times.

**4.2.3. Frequency adverbials**

Observation: Frequency adverbials do not require the classifier time(s)

(29) a. John stumbled frequently.

b. John slept frequently.

c. John was rarely awake

Frequency adverbials do not presuppose countability, but rather they ‘introduce’ it, just like *times*.

* Pick up events with inherent boundary
* Count maximally continuous events
* Count events taking place at given (countable) occasions

Frequency adverbially are not syntactically count:

Adjective *frequent* can modify event mass nouns and not just event plural nouns

(30) a. the frequent rain

b. the frequent fog in this region

c. the frequent rainfalls

**4.2.4. Plural anaphora?**

Plural anaphora as further evidence for the mass status of events.

Geis (1975):

(31) Mary jumped and fell. This happened this morning. / \* They happened this morning.

German *beides*:

(32) a. Das ist beides heute morgen passiert.

b. \* Sie sind heute morgen passiert.

c. \* Beide sind heute morgen passiert.

*They* requires nominal antecedent in English (and count NPs in German!)!

(33) a. John bought rice and milk. He forgot to bring them home.

b. John tried the wine and the juice. Mary tried them too

(34) Hand probierte das Gemuese und das Brot. Marie probierte \* sie / ok das beides auch.

**4.3. Conclusions**

Verbs as event predicates classify as mass with respect to the applicability of quantifiers and numerals.

But the lexically determined individuation of events plays a role for the choice of mass or count for nominalizations.

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