Mass-to-Count Shifts and Number Morphology

Olga Kagan, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, olga@sharat.co.il

INTRODUCTION

The mass-count distinction is characterized by **elasticity**:

(1) We ordered five beers.

A PUZZLE:

The Russian analogue of (1) is bad:

(2) *Dajte nam pjat' piv/vod.
'Give us five beers/waters'

But if the suffix *-in* functions as the M→C operator, counting is fine:

(3) gorox 'pea' → goroš**in**a 'a pea' → pjat' gorošin 'five peas'

QUESTION

Why is (2) bad? How does it differ from (1) and (3)?

PROPOSAL

Counting with (originally) mass Ns:

√ if PL applies on top of M→C: NUM (PL(M→C (N)))

X if M→C applies on top of PL: *NUM (M→C (PL (N)))

The suffix *-in* applies below NumP (goroš -in - y)

[[-in]] = λPλx.P(x) & MEAS(x) = <1,NU>

The result is a **count noun**, which can be pluralized and is compatible with NUM. ⇒ (3) is good

➢ **Why is (2) bad?**

In **Russian**, mass plural is LOW (root-level, below nP, cf. Acquaviva 2008, Alexiadou 2011).

✓ **lexical gaps** (*pivy 'beers')

✓ **non-compositional meanings** (vody 'waters' but also 'amniotic fluid'

When a mass stem is pluralized,

(i) There is a lexical gap (we cannot continue) OR

(ii) The N exists under abundance reading (vody 'waters'). But then the units are large amounts of X, not disjoint and not packageable into salient container types. Hence M→C cannot apply.

English

➢ **Why is (1) good?**

In English, mass plural can be created HIGH (above nP, in ClP). First the context-sensitive M → C shift takes place (e.g. water → bottle of water), then pluralization and counting become possible.

References

•Acquaviva, P. 2008. Lexical plurals: a morpho-semantic approach. Oxford University Press.

• Alexiadou, A. 2011. Plural Mass Nouns and the Morpho-syntax of Number. Proceedings of WCCFL 28.

• Chierchia, G. 2010. Mass nouns, vagueness and semantic variation. *Synthese* 174(1): 99–149.

• Rothstein, S. 2010. Counting and the Mass-Count Distinction. *Journal of Semantics* 27(3). 343–397.