

Nominal concepts and quantities

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In this talk, I will discuss potential answers to the following three questions: 1) What are the smallest parts that fall within the denotation of a given count noun? 2) What counts as an individual (one unit) with respect to a given count noun? 3) What types of measurements/comparisons are licensed by a count noun? Traditional approaches to the mass-count distinction have hypothesized that the answers to these three questions are interconnected. The smallest parts that fall within the denotation of a count noun are the individuals. Furthermore, the denotations of count nouns are measured and compared by counting the number of individuals contained within them. Lately, this traditional approach has come under much scrutiny, both within the theoretical and experimental literature. Data concerning numeral modification, in particular fractional modification such as *two and a half apples*, raises the issue of whether “subatomic” parts are included in the denotation of count nouns (e.g., see Haida & Trinh 2021, Snyder & Barlew 2019). Furthermore, the truth conditions invoked by *many*, *more* and *most* suggest that there is much greater flexibility in the way count nouns are measured and compared: counting is not the only measurement available (e.g., see Bale & Schwarz 2019, Winter 2022). Finally, recent experimental studies on counting within the developmental literature suggest that perhaps the notion of a “unit” is determined pragmatically rather than by some inherent grammatical/conceptual feature within the noun itself (e.g., see Syrett & Aravind 2022, Srinivasan, Li & Barner 2015). In light of this kind of data, I will discuss various ways that the traditional link between units, minimal parts and measurement can be re-imagined.

References:

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