

snippets

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Giorgio Magri – *École Normale Supérieure* *The plurality inference of object mass nouns*

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Plural *coins* in the upward entailing (UE) environment (1a) triggers a *plurality inference*: John is required to have two or more coins. This inference disappears in the downward entailing (DE) environment (1b): John is required not to have a single coin, not just not to have two or more. Finally, Spector (2007) notes that both behaviors are displayed in the non-monotonic environment (1c): the plurality inference survives in the UE component of the meaning, as the two students who have coins are required to have more than one each; but disappears in the DE component, as all other students are required not to have any coins.

- (1) a. John has *coins* in his pocket.
= John has more than a coin.
- b. John does not have *coins* in his pocket.
= John does not have a single coin.
- c. Exactly two students have *coins* in their pockets.
= There are two students who have at least two coins while all other students have no coins at all.

Crucially, object mass nouns (*change, furniture, footwear, etcetera*) behave analogously, as shown in (2). In the UE environment (2a), *change* triggers a plurality inference analogous to (1a): both sentences require John to have more than a single piece of change. In a scenario where John has just a quarter in his pocket, (2a) would be infelicitous or inappropriate just as (1a). But this plurality inference disappears in the DE environment (2b): John is required not to have a single piece of change, just as for (1b). Finally, the UE and DE behaviors combine in the non-monotonic environment (2c) just as they do in (1c).

- (2) a. John has *change* in his pocket.
- b. John does not have *change* in his pocket.
- c. Exactly two students have *change* in their pockets.

Existing accounts of pattern (1) with plural count nouns rest on the idea that singular and plural morphology have the same morphological complexity and thus "compete" on semantic grounds. For example, Sauerland (2003) assumes that singular count morphology carries an *atomicity presupposition* while plural morphology carries no presupposition. As the two forms have the same morphological complexity, Heim's (1992) principle of *Maximize Presupposition* forces the use of singular morphology whenever its atomicity presupposition is satisfied. Plural morphology is thus only licit

when this atomicity presupposition is not satisfied, whereby the plurality inference in (1a). According to Spector (2007), competition happens at the level of scalar implicatures rather than presuppositions. In order to extend these approaches to the plurality inference triggered by object mass nouns in (2a), we would have to posit a competition between *change* and something like *a piece of change*. But the latter is structurally more complex, and thus not a licit competing alternative, according to recent theories of alternatives such as Katzir's (2007). In conclusion, these approaches to the plurality inference of count nouns based on a competition between singular and plural morphology miss the analogy with object mass nouns, for which there are no two competing morphological forms.

References

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