

# snippets

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## 2.

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***Another problem for alternative-based theories of plurality inferences: the case of mass plurals***

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Bare plurals like *books* trigger plurality inferences in U(pward)E(ntailing) contexts, (1a), but not in D(ownward)E(ntailing) contexts, (1b). Furthermore in non-monotonic contexts, they are observed in UE part of the meaning, but not in the DE part of the meaning, (1c) (Spector 2007).

- (1) a. John read books.  
b. John didn't read books.  
c. Only John read books.

Sauerland (2003), Spector (2007), Zweig (2009) and Ivlieva (2014) develop 'alternative-based theories' of the phantasmagoric behaviour of plurality inferences. Putting the details aside, all of them crucially exploit singular counterparts of plural bare nouns, e.g. *a book*.

Magri (2011) identifies an interesting problem for these theories posed by so-called 'count mass nouns' (aka 'collective mass nouns', 'fake mass nouns', etc.). His observation is that these mass terms trigger plurality inferences in the same way that bare plurals do. For example, in UE contexts, (3a), *change* implies that there is more than one coin, which disappears in DE context, (3b). And in non-monotonic contexts, (3c), the plurality inference is only observed in the UE part of the meaning.

- (3) a. John has change.  
b. John does not have change.  
c. Only John has change.

Magri argues that this observation is problematic for the alternative-based accounts, because there is no grammatical singular counterpart (*\*a change*). Although he suggests that one way to save the theories might be to have *a piece of change* as an alternative to *change*, he also points out that such a move is theoretically costly, as what counts as an alternative should be structurally constrained (Fox & Katzir 2011, Katzir 2007).

Against this backdrop, we raise another problem for the alternative-based accounts that comes from *pluralia tantum* of the kind known as 'mass plurals', e.g. *clothes*, *belongings*, *possessions*, *goods*, *movables*, *valuables*, *eatables* (McCawley 1975, Ojeda 2005). We observe that these nouns also give rise to plurality inferences. Concretely, (4a) has a plurality inference that more than one article of clothing is involved, while (4b) does not. Moreover, (4c) has a plurality inference only in the UE part of the meaning.

- (4) a. This bag has clothes in it.  
b. This bag does not have clothes in it.  
c. Only this bag has clothes in it.

The problem is analogous to Magri's, and potentially graver: it is not obvious what counts as a singular alternative. For nouns like *belongings* and *clothes*, the singular counterpart is simply ungrammatical (*belonging* and *clothe* do not function as singular nouns in the relevant way). As Magri suggests, one way to save the alternative-based accounts might be to postulate *ad hoc* singular alternatives. However, for mass plurals, the noun part needs to be different as well. For instance, for *clothes*, a suitable singular alternative might be *an article of clothing* or *a garment*. One might think that a *garment* should indeed be a legitimate alternative to *clothes*, as it seems to be structurally as complex as *clothes*. Yet, it is not always easy to find such suitable, structurally simple singular nouns for other mass plurals, e.g. *belongings*, *valuables*, *eatables*, etc.

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