RELEVANCE VS. 'REAL WORLD' QUANTITY IN THE (NON)MARKING OF PLURALITY: A MORPHO-SEMANTIC APPROACH

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Looking at languages like English, Number marking seems to be a straightforward affair: count nouns referring to more than one token of the denoted entity are marked for plurality: *a cat is in the street*, *cats are in the street*. Yet, even in these languages, there are cases where count nouns clearly referring to several tokens are not marked for plurality, apparently because the plurality is conceived of as an unindividualized mass: cf. *I bought tomato in the market*, to be compared with *I bought wine* (French *J'ai acheté de la tomate*, *J'ai acheté du vin*). Note that *I bought tomatoes* (*J'ai acheté des tomates*) is a possible alternative, semantically identical but for the massifying effect.

There are languages, on the other hand, where massifying does not seem to be a (limited) option, but seems to occur across the board. Chinese is an oft-cited example. Moreover, these languages show a correlation between generalized massifying and the necessity for individualizing operators (classifiers) in cases of overt quantification.

A third type of languages seems to exist, however, in which count nouns clearly referring to more than one token *may or may not* be marked for plurality, and even when they are not they are quantified directly without inserting an individualizing operator. Creoles figure prominently in this type. Overt plural marking in such languages appears to depend on two interacting factors: (a) the position of the denoted entity in an extra-linguistic individualization hierarchy: humans > familiar animals > artefacts > unfamiliar animals and other natural objects; (b) the speaker's decision about the relevance of overtly mentioning that she is talking about more than one token. That decision, in turn, will depend on the speech situation and the position of the entity in the hierarchy, with complex interactions between both types of criteria. There is no indication that the unmarked pluralities are ever viewed as masses.

Plural marking can therefore be regulated by cognitive and pragmatic factors. This is a possibly crucial result, in view of data showing that classifiers are not uniquely or even primarily related to quantification and counting. This opens the possibility that cognitive and pragmatic factors could be generalized – the limit being, maybe, overt expression of massifying as with French *du/de la* N_{COUNT}, where the class of possible nouns is severely limited.