

## Greek plural mass nouns revisited

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The aim of the present study is to explore in what way morphophonological number affects the ontology of objects referred to by nouns. Specifically, it focuses on mass nouns with plural morphology in Greek, in an attempt to draw inferences on the locus of the grammatical mass-count distinction, on the relationship this distinction bears to number and the interpretation of the latter in Greek.

Our hypothesis is that Greek nouns come specified as mass or count from the lexicon (Doetjes 2012) and, thus, number can only play a modificational role with respect to this distinction. Especially for mass nouns with plural morphology, we side with Tsoulas (2006) in that plural contributes a *bigger than expected quantity* implicature. We propose that this implicature is triggered by the speaker's intention to convey emotion. We formally capture this by attributing the plural marking on the noun to an [intensity] feature on the speaker-oriented Ground Phrase (Wiltschko 2017), at the left periphery of the sentence.

Let us see how the Greek data motivate the above hypothesis. In the examples that follow, the mass noun for water appears with plural morphology but is interpreted in different ways.

- (1) Fere mas (tria) nera se parakalo.  
BRING US (THREE) WATER.PL PLEASE  
“Bring us three bottles/glasses of water, please.”
- (2) Hithikan (\*tria) nera se olo to dhiadhromo.  
WERE.SPILLED (\*THREE) WATER.PL AT WHOLE THE CORRIDOR  
“A lot of water was spilled in the whole corridor.”

As indicated by the translations given and by the compatibility versus incompatibility of the cardinal with the noun, *nera* shifts its denotation to count in (1) but keeps its mass reading in (2). Crucially, though, the word for water in (1) is interpreted, not merely as *water*, but as *standard servings of water* (Tsoulas 2006). We take these cases to involve lexical ambiguity and leave them out of the scope of this study. In our interest lie examples like (2). Before we look into such cases in more detail, it is important to note that the existence of nouns with plural morphology and mass denotation pose an important problem for derivational analyses of the mass-count distinction, that postulate a complementary distribution of the two (Borer 2005). What these nouns suggest is that, at least in Greek, the locus of this distinction is the lexicon and not supra-lexical structure. Having taken a stance with respect to this, it is time to put under the magnifying glass the interpretation of plural number on mass nouns.

Plural morphology on mass denoting nouns, as in (2), has been argued to contribute an abundance reading of the noun referent, as an implicature (Tsoulas 2006, Kane et al. 2016). Alexiadou (2011) claims that these plural mass nouns are few, have an idiomatic flavor and involve an idiosyncratic interpretation of plural. To account for these properties, she proposes that in these cases number attaches below the word level, on the nominalizer (n). We, on the contrary, argue contra Alexiadou that plural marking of mass nouns giving rise to an *unexpectedly big quantity* reading is a productive linguistic process. This, along with the fact that this abundance reading is predictable as it emerges in many similar environments, supports the idea that number is located

higher than the noun even in these cases. We do not take a stand as to whether it projects its own phrase (Ritter 1991) or is a modifying feature of Determiner Phrase (Dobrovie-Sorin 2009) here.

The productivity of the construction under consideration is exemplified by the following example. Suppose that a person walks into their house and finds the whole floor covered in something. In such a situation, both of the utterance versions below are felicitous.

(3) Pios ghemise to dhiadhromo ladhia/laspes/ sokolates/ himus/ saltses?  
WHO FILLED THE CORRIDOR OIL.PL/MUD.PL/CHOCOLATE.PL/JUICE.PL/SAUCE.PL  
“Who spilled all this oil/mud/chocolate/juice/sauce all over the corridor?”

At this point it needs to be mentioned that (3') would also be felicitous in a similar context:

(3') Pios ghemise to dhiadhromo ladhi/laspi/sokolata/ himo/saltsa?  
WHO FILLED THE CORRIDOR OIL/ MUD/CHOCOLATE/JUICE/SAUCE  
“Who spilled oil/mud/chocolate/juice/sauce all over the corridor?”

Truth-conditionally, the two utterances are identical. Even the abundance implicature could be conveyed by the verb *ghemise* alone in (3'). What (3) and (3') differ in is expressive power. The plural on mass nouns in (3) not only generates an implicature of abundance but also expresses the speaker's emotional state. The speaker is taken over by some overwhelming emotion, they are most usually upset or surprised.

To recapitulate, Greek displays mass nouns with plural morphology that retain their mass denotation. This means that morphophonological number cannot alter the ontology of the object that a noun refers to, as this is specified by the lexicon. It is attached higher in the structure and has a modificational role. Plural number on mass nouns triggers an implicature of abundance. This implicature, though, is the expression of the speaker's overwhelming emotion at the time of utterance and reflects their intention to convey that emotion.

To formally capture that last claim, we resort to a left periphery of the sentence elaborate enough to host a speech act domain. We adopt Wiltschko's (2017) speaker-oriented Ground Phrase and propose that this is the source of the number specification in Greek mass plurals. An [intensity] feature on Ground<sup>0</sup> externally values the number feature of the embedded DP as plural. This external source would explain why that plural does not have an atomization role, as in count nouns. As for the relationship between intensity and plural, the cognitive association needs to be further explored. It might point to a broader cognitive representation of number, in languages that display this kind of interaction. The proposed structure follows in (4). Italics are used for formal features: (4) [<sub>GroundP</sub>[<sub>Ground</sub> *intensity*][<sub>CP</sub>.....[<sub>DP</sub>[<sub>D</sub> *plural*][<sub>NP</sub> *nera*]]].

#### Selected references

- Borer, H.** 2005. *Structuring Sense*, Vol. I: *In Name Only*. Oxford: OUP.
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