

## English Linguistics - Seminar

### The Mass/Count Distinction - Applied Investigations

Instructor: Kurt Erbach  
Time: Tuesday 16:15-17:45, Wednesday 14:15 - 15:45  
Place: HG-RPW5 / 1.005 (Übungsraum D), HG-RPW5 /2.016 (Raum E)

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#### **Course description**

This course surveys applied linguistic research pertaining to the mass/count distinction. The mass/count distinction is one of the foundational topics in formal semantics, and constitutes a considerable challenge for language learning. The mass/count distinction is a cross-categorial notion that is indirectly reflected in the syntax and semantics of various expressions of quantity and number. In English, for instance, count, but not mass, nouns, are straightforwardly used in cardinal constructions with numbers and plural morphology: *two apples* vs. *#two soil(s)*. However, given sufficient context, these constructions are sometimes felicitous with mass nouns; *This garden center carries two soils, one that is Bio and one that contains fertilizer*. Our main focus in this class is the way that theories of the mass/count distinction have been part of applied research, for example in language acquisition, second language acquisition, bilingualism, etc. Each week, a different paper will be assigned as the background for the lecture to take place on Tuesday, and the source of further discussion to take place on Wednesday.

#### **Learning goals**

- Understand the main linguistic challenges presented by the mass/count distinction and applied investigations thereof.
- Develop skills in reading primary scientific research literature
- Develop skills in academic discourse
- Develop skills in scientific presentation

#### **Course requirements**

**Studienleistung** will be based on assigned readings. Questions will be given with each reading assignment, and students must be prepared to provide and answer to the assigned questions in the class in which the paper is discussed. Students must orally answer 3 questions by the end of the semester in order to pass the class and take the exam. Alternatively, students may choose to prepare a short presentation (5 minutes) on both an original question prompted by reading the paper and a work-in-progress answer to the question based on independent research. If a student is unable to attend class, then the questions (assigned or independently conceived) can be written-up and submitted to the teacher by the end of the day on which discussion should take place, or at another time agreed upon by student and the instructor.

**Exam:** This course will culminate in an oral exam in which students will be asked a series of questions about course content throughout a 30 minute period on a date after the last week of classes. A list of potential questions and a rubric detailing the presentation requirements will be given to students at least two weeks prior to the presentations.

#### **Accessibility**

If for any reason a student finds it difficult to access the classroom or course materials, or a student's personal needs are not being met in some way, then please contact the instructor in order to resolve the issue.

#### **Common courtesies**

Students are expected to behave in accordance with the [LSA Revised Ethics Statement](#). In summary, students are expected to maintain an organized and respectful learning environment for your peers. It is expected that discourse will occur without interruptions, aggression, or harassment. Additionally, please do not hold private conversations in class. If there is any urgent matter that you must attend to, please feel free to leave class and follow up with the instructor in order to find out what was missed. Please silence phones and other electronic devices during class, and please do not use messengers or social media. You may use a laptop or tablet to take notes.

## Course syllabus (subject to change)

### Part 1: Mass/count theories

- Week 1: Oct 8: Introduction  
Oct 9: Übung
- Week 2: Oct 15: Early mass/count theories  
Oct 16: Übung
- Week 3: Oct 22: Rothstein (2010)  
Oct 23: Übung
- Week 4: Oct 29: Sutton & Filip (2016)  
Oct 30: Übung

### Part 2: Language Acquisition

- Week 5: Nov 5: Soja, Carey, Spelke (1991)  
Nov 6: Übung
- Week 6: Nov 12: Gathercole (1997)  
Nov 13: Übung
- Week 7: Nov 19: Samuelson, L. K. and L. B. Smith (1999)  
Nov 20: Übung

### Part 3: Second Language Acquisition

- Week 8: Nov 26: Snape (2008)  
Nov 27: Übung
- Week 9: Dec 3: Amuzie & Spinner (2012)  
Dec 4: Übung
- Week 10: Dec 10: MacDonald & Carroll (2013)  
Dec 11: Übung
- Week 11: Dec 17: Mohr (2018)  
Dec 18: Übung

### Part 4: Corpus studies

- Week 12: Jan 7: Allan (1980)  
Jan 8: Übung
- Week 13: Jan 14: Grimm & Levin (2011)  
Jan 15: Übung
- Week 14: Jan 21: Schmidtke & Kuperman (2017)  
Jan 22: Übung
- Week 15: Jan 28: Herda (2019)  
Jan 29: Übung
- Exam: Feb 4-5

## References

- [Allan, K. \(1980\). Nouns and countability. \*Language\*, 541-567.](#)
- [Amuzie, G. L. and P. Spinner. \(2013\). Korean EFL Learners' Indefinite Article Use with Four Types of Abstract Nouns. \*Applied Linguistics\*, 34\(4\), 415-434.](#)
- [Gathercole, V. C. M. \(1997\). The linguistic mass/count distinction as an indicator of referent categorization in monolingual and bilingual children. \*Child Development\*, 68\(5\), 832-842.](#)
- [Grimm, Scott & Beth Levin. 2011. \*Between count and mass: Furniture and other functional collectives\*. Stanford University.](#)
- [Herda, D. \(2019\). On the Effect of Pluralization on the Numeralization of Nouns in English and Polish: A corpus Based Study. \*Linguistica Silesiana\*, 40, 139-155.](#)
- [Pelletier, F. J. \(1975\). Non-singular reference: some preliminaries. In \*Mass terms: Some philosophical problems\* \(pp. 1-14\). Springer Netherlands.](#)
- [MacDonald, D., & Carroll, S. \(2013\). WHO HAS MORE? SECOND-LANGUAGE PROCESSING OF MASS-COUNT NOUNS. In \*Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Linguistic Association\*.](#)
- Mohr, S. (2018). The Use of Pluralization and the Conceptualization of Countability in African Varieties of English. Postdoctoral dissertation ['Habilitation'], University of Bonn.
- [Rothstein, S. \(2010\). Counting and the mass/count distinction. \*Journal of semantics\*, 27\(3\), 343-397.](#)
- [Samuelson, L.K., & Smith, L.B. \(1999\). Early noun vocabularies: do ontology, category structure and syntax correspond? \*Cognition\*, 73, 1-33.](#)
- [Schmidtke, D., & Kuperman, V. \(2017\). Mass counts in World Englishes: A corpus linguistic study of noun countability in non-native varieties of English. \*Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory\*, 13\(1\), 135-164.](#)
- [Snape, N. \(2008\). Resetting the Nominal Mapping Parameter in L2 English: Definite article use and the count-mass distinction. \*Bilingualism: Language and Cognition\*, 11\(1\), 63-79.](#)
- [Soja, N. N., Carey, S., & Spelke, E. S. \(1991\). Ontological categories guide young children's inductions of word meaning: Object terms and substance terms. \*Cognition\*, 38\(2\), 179-211.](#)
- [Sutton P. & Filip, H. \(2016\). Counting in context. In Moroney, Mary, Little, Carol-Rose, Collard, Jacob & Burgdorf, Dan \(Eds.\), \*Semantics and Linguistic Theory \(SALT\) 26\*, 350-370.](#)

## FURTHER READING

- [Akamatsu, N. \(2018\). Do cognitive linguistic insights help Japanese learners improve their use of English articles?. \*Studies in English Language Teaching\*, 41, 1-20.](#)
- [Baldwin, T., & Bond, F. \(2003\). Learning the countability of English nouns from corpus data. In \*Proceedings of the 41st Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics\* \(pp. 463-470\).](#)
- [Brems, L. \(2003\). Measure noun constructions: An instance of semantically-driven grammaticalization. \*International Journal of Corpus Linguistics\*, 8\(2\), 283-312.](#)
- [Chierchia, G. \(1998\). Plurality of mass nouns and the notion of “semantic parameter”. In \*Events and grammar\* \(pp. 53-103\). Springer, Dordrecht.](#)
- [Deal, A. R. \(2017\). Countability distinctions and semantic variation. \*NaturalLanguageSemantics\*25\(2\), 125-171.](#)
- [Grimm, S. \(2018\). Grammatical number and the scale of individuation. \*Language\*, 94\(3\), 527-574.](#)
- [Gathercole, V. C. M. 2002. Command of the mass/count distinction in bilingual and monolingual children: An English morphosyntactic distinction. In D. K. Oller & R. E. Eilers \(eds.\), \*Language and literacy in bilingual children\*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 175-206.](#)
- [Inagaki, S. \(2014\). Syntax-semantic mappings as a source of difficulty in Japanese speakers' acquisition of the mass-count distinction in English. \*Bilingualism: Language and cognition\*, 17\(3\), 464-477.](#)
- [Krifka, M. \(2009\). Counting configurations. In \*Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung\*. Vol. 13, pp. 309-324.](#)
- [Lazaridou-Chatzigoga, D., & Alexandropoulou, S. \(2013\). A corpus study of Greek bare singulars: implications for an analysis. \*Revista da ABRALIN\*, 12\(1\).](#)
- [McEnery, T., & Xiao, R. \(2007, July\). Quantifying constructions in English and Chinese: A corpus-based contrastive study. In \*Proceedings of the Corpus Linguistics Conference CL2007\*.](#)
- [Roberts, S. H., & Gathercole, V. C. M. \(2006\). Categorizing collections of objects: Linguistic and cognitive factors influencing Welsh and English speakers' judgements. \*First language\*, 26\(2\), 161-185.](#)
- [Schneider, G., Hundt, M., & Schreier, D. \(2019\). Pluralized non-count nouns across Englishes: A corpus-linguistic approach to variety types. \*Corpus Linguistics and Linguistic Theory\*.](#)
- [Vermote, T., Lauwers, P., & De Cuyper, L. \(2017\). Transcending the lexical vs. grammatical divide regarding the mass/count distinction. Evidence from corpus studies and acceptability surveys in French and Dutch. \*Language Sciences\*, 62, 37-51.](#)
- [Wijaya, D., & Djasmeini, C. C. \(2017\). Input-Based Processing Instruction vs. Output-Based Traditional Instruction in Learning Plural-s. \*Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching\*, 14\(1\).](#)
- [Willim, E., & Jodłowiec, M. \(2011\). Consciousness of contrast in input enhancement: a case for contextualised re-translation as a CR technique.](#)
- [Xiao, Z., & McEnery, A. \(2004\). A corpus-based two-level model of situation aspect. \*Journal of linguistics\*, 40\(2\), 325-363.](#)
- [Young, R. \(1993\). Functional Constraints on Variation in Interlanguage Morphology. \*Applied Linguistics\*, 14\(1\), 76-97.](#)
- [Ziegeler, D. \(2010\). Count-mass coercion, and the perspective of time and variation. \*Constructions and frames\*, 2\(1\), 33-73.](#)