

On the absence of a grammaticized mass/count distinction in Halkomelem Salish and its implication for nominal denotation

Overview. This paper has three related goals: First, I establish that Halkomelem Salish (like English) has nouns denoting *substance* and nouns denoting *individuals*. However, there is no grammaticized distinction between these two sets of nouns. In other words, Halkomelem lacks a grammatical distinction between mass and count nouns. Second, I propose a formal analysis that captures this cross-linguistic difference between Halkomelem and English: Halkomelem lacks the functional category which is responsible for the count/mass distinction in languages like English. And third, I discuss what we can learn from the properties of Halkomelem about the nature of the *mass/count* distinction as well as the properties of nominal denotations in general.

The absence of a grammaticized mass/count distinction in Halkomelem. Evidence that the distinction between nouns denoting substance and nouns denoting individuals does not map onto a grammaticized distinction in Halkomelem stems from the following considerations:

i) Plural marking in English only targets nouns denoting individuals (i.e., count nouns). Halkomelem differs in that both nouns denoting substance and nouns denoting individuals can be pluralized (1).

ii) In English, certain quantifiers are sensitive to the mass/count distinction. This is not the case in Halkomelem where all quantifiers can co-occur with nouns denoting substance or individuals (2).

iii) In English mass nouns differ from count nouns in that they can be used in what appears to be a *bare form*. This is not the case in Halkomelem: nouns used as arguments are always preceded by a determiner, independent of whether they denote individuals or substance (3).

In sum, Halkomelem does not show any distributional differences between nouns denoting substance and nouns denoting individuals. I take the absence of any distributional differences as evidence that Halkomelem lacks the grammatical distinction between *mass* and *count* nouns.

A formal analysis and its implications. I argue that the absence of the *subcategorization* of nouns into mass and count nouns is a consequence of the absence of a certain functional category, which I identify as the same projection hosting *number* or *classifiers* (Borer 2004). In particular, I propose that the distributional properties of mass nouns in English derive from the fact that mass nouns move to *number* (4). Since Halkomelem lacks the functional category *number* (see Wiltschko 2004 for independent evidence) nouns cannot undergo movement into *number* and as a consequence there is no grammaticized mass/count distinction (5). According to this analysis, the mass/count distinction is a language specific grammatical property. As such it is independent of whether or not a given noun denotes a substance or an individual (a distinction which is most likely universal). That the two notions must be distinguished is evidence by the existence of apparent syntax/semantics mismatches, namely the well-known instances of so called “object-mass-nouns” (6) which denote individuals but nevertheless pattern like mass nouns. Crucially, languages differ as to what types of nouns display such apparent syntax-semantics mismatches (7).

The denotation of nominal roots. If Halkomelem does indeed lack the functional category *number*, then this has important implications for the denotation of nouns. In recent analyses, it has been proposed that nominal roots denote *stuff*, which in the absence of a *divider* is interpreted as a *mass* noun. Since dividers (such as number marking or classifiers) are located in *number* the question arises as to how Halkomelem nouns are divided. In other words, if the absence of a divider corresponds to a default mass interpretation, then why are nouns in Halkomelem (which lacks *number*) not uniformly interpreted as mass nouns? The solution to this problem lies in the fact that the *substance/individual* distinction is independent of the *mass/count* distinction. Thus, the apparent necessity of a *divider* in languages like English follows from the presence of the functional category which hosts dividers. In other words, in English *number* has to be filled just because English has *number*. In contrast, Halkomelem does not have *number* and so it does not have to be filled. In such a system, nouns can nevertheless denote *substance* and *individuals*. We can conclude that it is not an inherent (lexical) property of nouns that they have to be individuated in order to denote (countable) individuals (contra Borer 2004, Chierchia 1998). The alternative conclusion, namely that all nouns in Halkomelem are inherently divided cannot be on the right track, since nouns need not be *massified* or *kindified* to denote substances (8) or kinds (9), respectively.

Data

(1) Plural marking on nouns:

- a. I see *gravels/*snows/*ices/*fogs.
b. tsel kw'êts-l-exw te th'exth'éxet/ syiqyíq/ spepíw/shweláthetel/
1sg.s see-trans-3o det gravel.pl/snow.pl/ice.pl/fog.pl
'I saw a lot of gravel/snow/ice/fog.'

(2) Nominal determiners and quantifiers

- a. ?the/*a/this/that/*one/*every/no/*these/*those/*two/*several/*many/some/no/all/
much/little wood
the/a/this/that/one/every/no/these/those/two/several/many/some/no/all/*much/*little
tree(s)
b. tsel kw'êts-lexw {qex/ mekw'/isale} {siyólh/theqa/theqtheqát}
1sg.s see-trans Q/Q/two wood/tree/tree.pl
'I saw lots of wood/trees.'

(3) Distribution of "bare N's"

- a. I saw wood/trees/*tree.
b. tsel kw'êts-lexw *(te/ye) swíyeqe/sí:wí:qe/siyólh
1sg.s see-trans-3o det/det.pl man/man.pl/wood
'I saw men/wood.'

- (4) a. [DP D [CIP [plural]_{CI} [NP N]]] → English count N
c. [DP D [CIP [N] [NP ~~N~~]] → English mass N

- (5) [DP D [NP N]] → Halkomelem Nouns

(6) Object mass N's in English

much furniture/clothing/fruit/silverware/mail/jewelry

(7) Cross-linguistic variation in categorization

- a. much furniture → mass N in English
b. les meubles → count N in French

- (8) tsel kw'êts-l-exw te siyólh
1sg.s see-trans-3o det wood
'I seen some wood.'

- (9) tsel kw'êts-l-exw te mekw' letslótstel siyíts'em/ siyólh/theqtheqát
1sg.s see-trans-3o det Q different.kind sand/wood/trees
'I seen many different kinds of sand/wood/trees.'

Selected references:

- Borer, Hagit. 2004. *Structuring Sense*. Oxford University Press.
Chierchia, Gennaro. 1998. Reference to Kinds across languages. *Natural Language Semantics* 6:339-405.
Wiltschko, Martina. 2004. On Number in Halkomelem Salish or The problem with "the two man". *UBC Working Papers in Linguistics*.