Carrie Gillon

Mass, count and plurality in Innu-aimun

Introduction In this paper we examine the mass/count distinction in Innu-aimun, a dialect of Eastern Cree (Algonquian) spoken in Labrador, Canada. The existence of the mass/count distinction is controversial in Algonquian. This distinction has been claimed not to exist in Ojibwe (a related Algonquian language) (Rhodes 1990). Mathieu (2007), however, argues that this distinction is made in Ojibwe.

Certainly, the mass/count distinction is not made clearly in Innu-aimun. However, in this paper we provide evidence that the distinction between count and mass does exist and that this has implications for the interpretation of plurality in Innu-aimun.

The mass/count distinction The distinction in English between count and mass nouns is well known. Only count nouns can be pluralized (1), can combine with numerals (2), and take certain quantifiers (3). Mass nouns cannot be pluralized (1), need measure phrases or classifiers to combine with numerals (4), and take other quantifiers (5) (Chierchia 1998).

Languages can vary as to which lexical items are mass or count (English mass 'furniture' vs. French count 'meuble'). What is not known is whether all languages make a distinction between count and mass to begin with (see, e.g., Chierchia 1998, who argues Chinese only has mass nouns).

The problem The mass/count distinction is not clearly made in Algonquian languages in general. In Ojibwe, many mass nouns can be pluralized (6); only a very few words cannot (Mathieu 2007) (7). However, the fact that some mass nouns resist pluralization suggests that the mass/count distinction is still made. In Innu-aimun, on the other hand, the plural markers can be found on both count and mass nouns in Innu-aimun (8); even those that resist pluralization in Ojibwe can still be pluralized (9).

Logically, there are three alternative analyses: (i) nouns are either mass or count and pluralization creates a count noun (cf. Rhodes 1990 for Ojibwe), (ii) nouns are all count (cf. Davis and Matthewson 1999 for St'át'imcets (Interior Salish)), or (iii) some nouns are mass and the pluralization does not create a truly countable noun. As all nouns can be pluralized, it appears superficially as though all nouns are count. One piece of evidence suggesting that this is correct comes from the behavior of plural nouns: many of what would be considered mass nouns are morphologically plural in Innu-aimun (10).

However, numerals cannot combine with every mass noun (11) (some quantifiers also cannot combine with every mass noun). As numerals include an atom-accessing function (Kang 1994, Krifka 1999, Wilhelm 2008), we argue that the mass/count distinction still plays a role in the semantics in Innu-aimun. Only count nouns have atoms, regardless of pluralization. This implies that plurality is playing a different role in these languages than in better-known languages like English.

The analysis We argue that plurality in Innu-aimun occupies a different position than plurality in a language like English, following Wiltschko (to appear) for Halkomelem (Central Salish). Wiltschko follows Borer (2005) who argues (i) that the position Num divides stuff into countable things, (ii) all nouns come out of the lexicon as mass; only Num can create a count noun, and (iii) plural resides in Num. Wiltschko argues that plurality that resides in a different position therefore need not divide stuff into countable things. (That is, plural + a mass noun does not always create a count noun.)

Innu-aimun plural cannot always create a count noun (11 and 12) and therefore the plural morphology occupies a different position than Num. The semantics for 'plural' in Innu-aimun is different from that for the plural in English. English *–s* must create atoms; Innu-aimun *–at/-a* cannot.

Data

(1) a. cricket/crickets b. meat/*meats
(2) five crickets/*five meats
(3) each cricket/*each meat
(4) five pounds of meat
(5) little meat/*little cricket

(6) a. mikwam-iig *ice-animate.pl* b. waabigan-ag *clay-animate.pl* c. aninaatig-oog *maple-animate.pl*
d. azhashki-in *mud-inanimate.pl* e. bkwezhgan-an k. *bread-inanimate.pl* f. aasaakamig-oon *moss-inanimate.pl*
(Mathieu 2007: 4)

(7) a. bimide *oil* b. (a)niibiishaaboo *tea* c. doodooshaaboo *milk*
d. miskwi *blood* e. aamoo-ziinzibaawad *honey* f. bingwi *sand*(Mathieu 2007: 5)

(8) a. atiku-**at** *caribou-animate.pl* b. sisu-**t** *clay-animate.pl* c. meskami-**t** *ice-animate.pl*
d. shipu-**a** *river-inanimate.pl* e. nashûp-**a** *soup-inanimate.pl* f. atiku-iash-**a** *caribou-meat-inan.pl*

(9) a. mi-**a** *oil-inanimate.pl* b. nipish-**a** *tea-inanimate.pl* c. tutushinapui-**at** *milk-inanimate.pl*
d. piku-**a** *blood-inanimate.pl* e. amukashiuash-**a** *honey-inanimate.pl* f. nekau-**a** *sand-inanimate.pl*

(10) a. pakuenanis 'grain of rice' b. nipish 'one teabag, tea leaf' c. kauishuatkuash 'one (cob of) corn'
d. pakuenanish-at *rice-animate.pl* 'rice, grains of rice' e. nipish-a *tea-inanimate.pl* 'tea' (loose leaf tea) f. kauishauatkuash-at *corn-animate.pl* 'corn'

(11) a. *nisht^{u} mitshem-a *three food-inan.pl* b. *nisht^{u} uapetshekueneshku-a three moss-inanimate.pl c. *nisht^{u} kun-u *three snow-pl*

(12) a. mit *wood* 'wood' b. mit-**a** *wood-pl* 'more wood' c. mitshem *food* 'food' d. mitshem-**a** *food-pl* 'lots of food'
e. mashkush^{u} grass 'grass' f. mashkushu-**a** grass-pl 'lots of grass, lawn'

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