

Neuter gender in Maceratese: Two notions of uncountability

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Research question. In a (partly-)semantic gender system, can a single gender imply one of multiple distinct but related semantic notions? We argue yes from Maceratese, an Italo-Romance variety where every neuter (N) noun is uncountable (Loporcaro & Paciaroni 2011). But, uncountable in what sense? One third of Maceratese N nouns can express countable meaning by triggering masculine agreement (ibid.; henceforth *flexible N*), while the rest require N agreement and require classifiers to express countable meaning (*rigid N*). We argue that both sorts of N imply that the noun token takes its meaning from an uncountable semantic field (*notional uncountability*), but rigid N adds the stronger implication of exclusion from count morphosyntax (*morphosyntactic uncountability*), (1).

1. a. rigid N → morphosyntactic uncountability + notional uncountability
- b. flexible N → notional uncountability

Novel data. (2–3) shows the flexible N of *caffè* ‘coffee’ and *pesce* ‘fish’ with the count-mass polysemies (Falkum 2017) of substance-serving and meat-specimen.

2. So *scallato* {lo, lu} *caffè* *yyacci*{o,u}. ‘I heated the cold coffee
 aux heated the-{N, M}.sg coffee cold-{N,M}.sg {N substance, M serving}.’
3. M’ *è* *piaciut*{o,u} {lo, lu} *pesce* *nojfran*{o,u}. ‘I enjoyed the local fish
 to.me aux liked-{N,M} the-{N, M}.sg fish local-{N,M}.sg {N meat, M specimen}.’

Rigid N nouns include *vi* ‘wine’ and *rojbif* ‘roast beef’. They require N (and singular) agreement (4a), and they require classifiers for countable meaning, e.g. *vecchié* ‘glasses’ in (4b). There is no discernible generalization pertaining to meaning or inflectional classes regarding which N is rigid.

4. a. So *bbiuto moccò de vi* {roscio, *rusciu, *rusci}. ‘I drank some red_N wine.’
 aux drunk some of wine red-{N.sg, *M.sg, *M.pl} *no reading entails drinking a serving*
- b. So *bbiuto moccò de vecchié de vi* roscio. ‘I drank some glasses of red_N wine.’
 aux drunk some of glasses of wine red-N.sg *entails drinking multiple servings*

The two sorts of N exhibit a surprising contrast with *quarsiasi* ‘any/whichever’, which (5) shows is a singular count determiner. N *caffè* ‘coffee’ can combine with it to quantify over subkinds (6a), but *vi* ‘wine’ requires a classifier like *tipu* ‘type’ to quantify over subkinds (6b). In our account of this contrast, rigid N implies incompatibility with count morphosyntax (1a), whereas flexible N merely implies notional uncountability, which in (6a) manifests in the subkinds instantiating sums of stuff.

5. Poli *sceye quarsiasi* {foya, *foye, *foyame}.
 can-2sg choose any leaf leaves leafage ‘You can choose any {leaf, *leaves, *foliage}.’
6. a. Qui *vennemo quarsiasi (tipu de) caffè colombiano.* ‘Here we sell any kind of Colombian coffee.’
 here sell-2pl any (type of) coffeecolombiano-N.sg *classifier omissible*
- b. Qui *vennemo quarsiasi *(tipu de) vi roscio.* ‘Here we sell any kind of red wine.’
 here sell-2pl any (type of) wine red-N.sg *classifier obligatory*

Gender. We assume that each noun has at most one binary or unary gender feature. Each noun in Maceratese either requires or forbids feminine agreement (barring natural gender), so we assume the unary [fem] ‘requires feminine agreement’. By contrast, nouns like *caffè* ‘coffee’ and *pesce* ‘fish’ in (2–3) neither require nor forbid masculine agreement, so we assume the binary [$\pm$ msc], where [+msc] means ‘requires masculine agreement’. We analyze rigid N nouns as [$-$ msc] and neuter-or-masculine ones as genderless, notated as $\emptyset$. (7) summarizes the gender agreement of each feature; (7d) follows Picallo’s (2008) analysis of N pronouns in Spanish as stemming from a lack of gender features in the antecedent, which shares with (7c) that N agreement stems from the inability to license any other agreement.

7. a. [fem] → feminine b. [+msc] → masculine c. [$-$ msc] → neuter d. $\emptyset$ → neuter

In our analysis, the N agreement in (2a) and (3a) stems from *caffè* ‘coffee’ and *pesce* ‘fish’ remaining genderless, while their masculine agreement in (2b) and (3b) stems from the tokens combining with [+msc], which in the context of $\emptyset$ nouns has meaning pertaining to countability.

Morphosyntactic uncountability. To account for rigid N nouns like *vi* ‘wine’ being excluded from count morphosyntax, we appeal to gender selectional restrictions on morphosyntactic features of countability.

We adopt Cowper & Hall (2012), where count vs. mass morphosyntax is formalized via the presence vs. absence of # as a head, a privative feature encoding individuation (cf. Borer 2005). We assume that each feature can have at most one selectional restriction in terms of a (possibly singleton) natural class. There are no non-singleton natural classes among the features in (7), so we assume that # is incompatible with [-msc], notated as $\#_{[-msc]}$. It follows that [-msc] nouns can only occur in DPs without # like (8a); (8b) is ungrammatical due to violating the selectional restriction of #.

8. a. $\begin{array}{c} \text{DP} \\ \hline \text{D} \quad \text{N} \\ \text{(lo) } v\text{I}_{[-msc]} \text{ 'the wine substance'} \end{array}$ b. $\begin{array}{c} *DP \\ \hline \text{D} \quad \#P \\ \quad \quad \#_{[-msc]} \quad \text{N} \\ \text{quarsiasi} \quad v\text{I}_{[-msc]} \times \text{'each \{kind, serving\} of wine'} \end{array}$

$\#_{[-msc]}$ allows nouns with gender features other than [-msc] to occur in nominals with # and thus combine with count determiners like *quarsiasi* ‘any’. It follows from $\#_{[-msc]}$ that rigid N implies morphosyntactic uncountability, whereas flexible N is allowed in count morphosyntax, as seen with *caffè* in (6a). So, what does flexible N imply?

Notional uncountability. We define notional (un)countability as applicable to (perhaps partial) semantic triads consisting of three uses of nominal meaning: Kind-, instance- and subkind-reference. (9) illustrates this triad for the ‘substance’ meaning of *coffee*, and (10) illustrates it for the ‘serving’ meaning,

9. a. Coffee is everywhere. *kind realizing substance*
 b. This coffee (☿) is hot. *instance (substance)*
 c. This coffee (☿) is everywhere. *subkind realizing substance*
 10. a. Coffees are everywhere. *kind realizing servings*
 b. This coffee (☿) was prepared fast. *instance (serving)*
 c. Learn how to prepare our best-selling coffees. *subkinds realizing servings*

The countability of a kind-instance-subkind triad is inherited from the morphosyntactic countability of the instance vertex, (9b) and (10b). Thus, (9) is uncountable and (10) is countable. This notion therefore subsumes Chierchia’s (2010:§2.1.3) notion of count and mass kinds, but it extends to subkind-denoting nominals as in (9c) and (10c). Crucially, such nominals have differing values of morphosyntactic vs. notional countability when the subkind(s) realize substances; subkind-denoting *coffee* is morpho-syntactically countable (*two coffees* can mean ‘two kinds of coffee’), but notionally uncountable due to taking its meaning from the uncountable triad in (9), specifically (9c).

We analyze the gender features $\emptyset$ and [+msc] as having the meaning in (11) in the context of $\emptyset$ nouns. For simplicity, we assume two distinct interpretation domains for countable and uncountable entities (Landman 2020:§2.6), notated as COUNT and MASS. $\emptyset$ has the same meaning as [-msc]: the only difference is # (individuation) being compatible with $\emptyset$ but incompatible with [-msc].

11. a. $[[+msc]] = \lambda P_{\langle s, \langle e, p \rangle \rangle} \lambda w \lambda x. P_w(x) \wedge \text{COUNT}(x)$
 b. $[[\emptyset]] = [[-msc]] = \lambda P_{\langle s, \langle e, p \rangle \rangle} \lambda w \lambda x. P_w(x) \wedge \text{MASS}(x)$

We follow the aspect of Pelletier (2012) where nouns denote properties which range over both countable and uncountable entities. Applied to the property denoted by *caffè* ‘coffee’, (11a) yields a property which ranges over countable sums of coffee (e.g. servings), exemplified by M *caffè* in (2), and (11b) yields a property which ranges over uncountable sums of coffee, exemplified by N *caffè* in (2). These properties can then shift to kinds or subkind-level properties, which accounts for the agreement and interpretation of the kind-denoting nominals in (12) and of subkind-denoting ones (omitted).

12. {Lo, Li} *caffè sta dappertutto*. N ‘Coffee is everywhere.’
 the- {N.sg, M.pl} *coffee COP everywhere* M ‘Coffee servings are everywhere.’

Discussion. Manzini & Savoia (2018) analyze the Central Italian neuter as denoting a property which is interpreted conjunctively with the property denoted by the complement, as is achieved by (11b). However, more is needed to account for the differences between the flexible N of *caffè* ‘coffee’ and the rigid N of *vi* ‘wine’, which we achieve by positing that only the latter implies morphosyntactic uncountability. Thus, the Maceratese gender system is one where neuter implies either morphosyntactic uncountability or merely notional uncountability, depending on whether the neuter is rigid or flexible.

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