

Mereological choices for count nouns and mass nouns

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Many semantic theories about count nouns and mass nouns use mereological notions like part and sum.

At the lexical level, count nouns are often deemed to be "atomic" (a part of a cat could not be a cat), while mass nouns are sometimes deemed to be "distributive" (any part of some water would also be water).

At the compositional level, one sometimes uses "individual" sums as the denotations of plural count nouns, and "material" sums as the denotations of mass nouns.

Are mereological notions like these intimately related, or should they be distinguished?

In this talk, we examine how certain key theoretical choices determine answers to this question.

The choices we favor lead us to distinguish three parthood relations: one specific to mass nouns, one specific to plurals, and a more ordinary parthood relation akin to spatial containment.

We then explore whether and how certain mass terms and plurals can corefer.