Clusters and Numeral Imprecision in 'Quasi-Count' Nouns

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Abstract

This paper investigates the semantic foundations of countability through the lens of *quasi-count* nouns (e.g., *cattle*, *police*) - pluralia tantum that resist modification by small, 'precise' numerals (#*four police*) but accept large, 'round' ones (*two hundred police*). From the perspective of numeral semantics, I propose that predicates are associated with a set of accessible counting scales, and it is only on these scales that they can be counted. I also present a mereotopological semantics for quasi-count nouns in which they are taken to denote entities that appear in 'clusters'. This property serves as a cognitive instruction to represent the domain as a group, as opposed to a series of individuals. Hence, quantity estimations will be undertaken in the non-symbolic Approximate Number System (ANS). For this reason, quasi-count nouns are typically restricted to counting on coarsely-grained scales.

Keywords: Mass/Count Distinction, 'Quasi-Count' Nouns, Individuation, Mereotopology, Numeral Imprecision, Approximate Number System.