

## **Empirical, Theoretical and Computational Approaches to Countability in Natural Language**

A conference organized by the Linguistics Department (Sprachwissenschaftliches Institut) of Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany.

*Ruhr-Universität Bochum, September 22-24, 2010*

Conference website: <http://www.linguistics.rub.de/countability2010/>

### **Aims and scope:**

The distinction between mass and count nouns has been addressed in a variety of linguistic (and also extra-linguistic) approaches. Initially, it has been suggested that the distinction is a property of lexemes, or that it can be derived from properties of the objects denoted by the respective nouns. This assumption has been severely challenged by a variety of approaches, leading to the assumption that countability is a property of constructions and phrases. Yet, a critical survey of the most advanced work on the count-mass distinction has shown that multiple, partially conflicting views on this phenomenon are still competing.

As an illustration for unsettled questions, consider the following:

- If the mass-count distinction is actually dependent on formal syntactic and/or semantic marking, how are nouns to be classified that lack such a marking, e.g., nouns in preposition-noun combinations (determinerless PPs)?
- If *mass* is taken to be a basic property of nouns to which syntactic marking must be added to transform the noun into a count noun, why do certain languages already require such marking for mass terms (e.g., Romance languages)?
- How can the apparent tension between theoretical constructional (i.e., token-based, and hence construction-specific) and computational (i.e. primarily type-based, and hence possibly lexical-class-based) classification be resolved?

The goal of this conference is to bring researchers from all areas of linguistics together to clarify the numerous existing theories concerning the count-mass distinction and also to offer a platform for new insights and constructive criticism.

We therefore invite original contributions which relate to the following issues within or around the count-mass distinction:

- Cross-linguistic empirical and/or theoretical analysis of the count-mass distinction
- Empirical and/or theoretical analysis of countability in a specific natural language
- Psycholinguistic experiments
- Manual or computer-aided classification/annotation of countability
- Historical/etymological contributions

### **Invited Speakers:**

Hagit Borer (University of Southern California, Los Angeles)

Francis Jeffry Pelletier (Simon Fraser University, Burnaby)

Henriette de Swart (OTS, Universiteit Utrecht)

**Conference Organizers:**

Tibor Kiss

Tobias Stadtfeld

Antje Müller

Katja Keßelmeier

Claudia Roch

Jan Strunk

**Electronic submission:** Abstracts no longer than six pages should be sent to [countability2010@linguistics.rub.de](mailto:countability2010@linguistics.rub.de) not later than **May 31, 2010**.