

Innu-aimun plurality

Carrie Gillon*



Arizona State University, Department of English, P.O. Box 870302, Tempe, AZ 85287-0302, USA

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Abstract

There is an ongoing debate about the syntax and semantics of plurality. On one end of the spectrum, [Borer and Ouwayda \(2010\)](#) argue that all (true) plurality resides in Div and provides atomic structure to the noun; any other non-Div plurality does not provide any semantic content. On the other end, [Butler \(2012\)](#) argues that plurality can occur in multiple positions (including adjoined to DP), and each may be associated with different semantics. Intermediate positions suggest that there are two or three different types of plural that occupy different positions ([Acquaviva, 2008; Harbour, 2008, 2011; Alexiadou, 2010; Mathieu, 2012a,b, 2013, 2014](#)). In this paper, I show that there are two different types of plural in Innu-aimun (Algonquian): a counting plural (following [Mathieu, 2013, 2014](#)) and a lexical plural (following [Acquaviva, 2008; Alexiadou, 2010](#)).

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1. The problem

Plural mass nouns are a well-known problem for traditional analyses of plurality. For example, in Greek, some mass nouns can be pluralized, *without* being coerced into a count noun ([Tsoulas, 2006](#)).

(1) Greek ([Tsoulas, 2006:5](#))

- a. To patoma itan gemato **nera**.
the floor was full water.PL
'The floor was full of water.'
- b. Me tosa **nera** ke **xomata** pos na mi gemisi to spiti **laspes**.
with so.many.PL water.PL and earth.PL how SM not fill.3rd the house mud.PL
'With so much water and earth how do you expect not to fill the house with mud.'

As Tsoulas points out, this is a problem for more traditional analyses of plurality because plurality is usually argued to operate over atoms (either by ruling them out or by creating sums of those atoms). Mass nouns (which are usually assumed to lack atomic structure) should not be pluralizable.

Greek is not the only language that allows plural mass nouns: Arabic, Persian, French, etc. have all been shown to have plural mass nouns with mass-semantics ([Corbett, 2000; Acquaviva, 2008; Alexiadou, 2010; Mathieu, 2012a](#)). These

* Tel.: +1 480 965 0926.

E-mail address: carrie.gillon@asu.edu.

plural mass nouns are associated with an ‘abundance’ interpretation. The situation is similar in Innu-aimun (Algonquian).¹ Mass nouns can also be pluralized. (In fact, all known mass nouns can be pluralized.)

- | | | | | |
|-----|----|------------------|----|---------------------------------|
| (2) | a. | mîk ^u | b. | mîku-a ² |
| | | blood | | blood-INAN.PL |
| | | ‘blood’ | | ‘lots of blood’, ‘more blood’ |
| | c. | pimî | d. | pimî-a |
| | | oil | | oil-INAN.PL |
| | | ‘oil’ | | ‘lots of oil’, ‘barrels of oil’ |

However, what makes Innu-aimun different from Greek is that, while some mass nouns seem to retain their mass interpretation in only allowing the abundance interpretation (2)a, others do not have to. For example, in (2)b, *pimîa* admits what looks like a coerced reading, ‘barrels of oil’, in addition to the abundance plural.

What is the semantics of plural on mass nouns in Innu-aimun? Is this a special case of plurality that does not require or introduce atomic structure (as in a lexical plural; Acquaviva, 2008; Alexiadou, 2010)? Is this the kind of plural that introduces atomic structure (as in a dividing plural; Borer, 2005; Borer and Ouwayda, 2010)? Or is this the kind of plural that already requires individuation (as in a counting plural; Mathieu, 2013, 2014)? I argue that there are two different plurals in Innu-aimun: one that requires atomic structure (that is, a counting plural), and one that does not (a lexical plural).

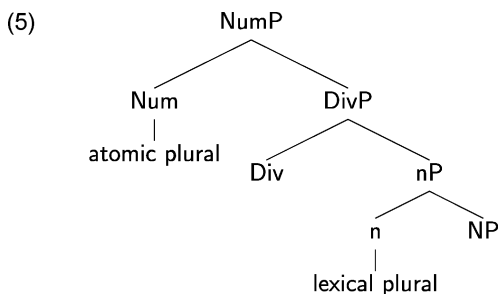
I treat the counting plural as an operator which yields sums of atoms (Link, 2002 [1983]), as is standardly assumed. Plural nouns denote the proper sum of the atoms that make up the predicate NP. This requires that the predicate have atomic structure.

$$(3) \quad \llbracket \text{pl}_{\text{counting}} \rrbracket = \lambda P [\textcircled{P}]$$

I argue that the second type of plural does not require atomic structure, unlike the counting plural. Instead, it is more like ‘much’ (cf. Soit, 2009). This plural, rather than creating sums of atoms, creates sums of quantities that are larger than some standard of comparison. μ_{DIM} is a measure function whereby a portion of matter is associated with a degree on some dimension (e.g., weight, volume, etc.) and d_{Std} is a standard of comparison that is context-dependent.

$$(4) \quad \llbracket \text{pl}_{\text{lexical}} \rrbracket = \lambda P \lambda x [P(x) \ \& \ \mu_{\text{DIM}}(x) > d_{\text{Std}}]$$

I tie these two different plurals to two different positions. I argue that the atomic plural occupies Num, and the lexical plural occupies a lower position (n).



This paper has the following structure. In section 2, I discuss a number of proposals on the syntax and semantics of plural. In section 3, I provide the basic data. I show that there are three different classes of nouns in Innu-aimun. All three classes can be pluralized, but they have variable behavior in terms of their (plural) semantics and their ability to occur with a numeral. In section 4, I examine the proposals introduced in section 2 as applied to Innu-aimun, and show that two

¹ Innu-aimun is also known as Montagnais, and is part of the dialect continuum of Cree (MacKenzie, 1980). Innu-aimun is the variety of Montagnais spoken in Labrador and Québec, Canada. My consultants live in St John’s, NL or in Sheshatshiu, NL. Innu-aimun/Montagnais is spoken by approximately 11,000 people, and by fewer than 1600 in Labrador (Statistics Canada, 2006); children are still acquiring the language.

² All data is from original fieldwork, unless otherwise noted.

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