

LAD Conferences

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L a b o r a t o i r e d e r e c h e r c h e s u r l e s a s y m é t r i e s d ' i n t e r f a c e s

Gennaro Chierchia, Harvard

Counting, Number, and Number Marking

What is the semantic import of number marking? What is the relation between ‘counting’ and noun morphology? What are the meaningful units or features that number morphology spells out? What is the mass-count distinction and how does it interact with number marking? What are the main dimensions of variations along the mass/count contrast? How does number interact with other parts of the DP, particularly with numerals, measure phrases, classifiers, and determiners? These questions have been at the center of intense debates. I would like to partially address them in connection with several empirical puzzles.

Here is an example of a concrete area where these questions matter. In number marking languages, like Romance or Germanic the phenomenon of “fake” mass nouns is widely attested. These are nouns like “furniture” that are grammatically mass (e.g. do not combine with numerals **three furnitures*) but cognitively count. Such a phenomenon is seemingly unattested in languages like Modern Greek and in classifier languages like Mandarin, Korean, etc. In contrast with this, the ungrammaticality of **three water(s)* is universal. So, one aspect of the interaction between counting and the mass count distinction is extremely steady crosslinguistically; another aspect is quite variable. Why exactly? On most current theories, these phenomena are treated on a par. So they should be stable/variable in the same way.

Professor Chierchia, one of the world's leading formal semanticists, is Haas Foundations Professor of Linguistics in Harvard University's Faculty of Arts and Sciences. His scholarly reputation was first established by his 1984 dissertation on the syntax and semantics of infinitives and gerunds, widely viewed as a breakthrough in the study of the processes that map meaning onto syntactic structure. Several years later he began developing his theory of "dynamic semantics," with consequences for the understanding of the rules governing interpretation of pronouns, question-quantifier interactions, and similar phenomena. The mature theory of dynamic semantics was the foundation for "Dynamics of Meaning: Anaphora, Presupposition, and the Theory of Grammar" (University of Chicago Press, 1995), the fourth of Chierchia's six books.

Representative Publications

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