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ch' are abstract, countables. From the latter examples, one can see that abstract nouns also submit to the count–mass shift but, at the same time, the referential distinction in their case is naturally more hazy than in concrete nouns. Yet the general pattern followed by them is more or less the same.

We hope to have shown in this paper that there is referential validity in the over all distinction of mass and count nouns in English and that this is evident in the case of concrete nouns; that abstract nouns make use of the same distinction and patterning although usage here is more arbitrary; this is probably because of the subtle nature of the semantic area they cover.

ility of finding such areason, They observe that "the division between count and mass is not paralleled by one between concrete and abstract and that the divisions cut across each other." (bid, 130). The only explanation, perhaps, is that abstract nouns represent what is by and large intangible and indeterminate; as aresult, these nouns behave as mass rather than count units. They are not easily defined, and as far as reference is concerned it is not always easy to draw aclear–cut line between count and mass.

Quirk et al give alist of abstract nouns which are inconsistent in terms of mass and count membership in Englind. These are: *anger, applause, chaos, conduct, courage, dancing, education, harm, hospitality, leisure, melancholy, moonlight, parking, photography, poetry, publicity, research* (as in ,do some research), *resistance, safety, shopping, smoking, violence, weather, behavioure, home work, progress, sun–shine.*

V. i Abstract nouns –mass and count shift:

The classification of abstract nouns in to mass and count is undoubtedly, less perecise and more arbitrary than the one for concrete nouns. For whereas it is relatively easy to see physical distinction between egg (count) and egg (mass), it is more difficult to see this distinction in the case of some amorphous and intangible abstract nouns.
But this does not mean that abstract nouns are mass and concrete nouns are count; it simply means that the distinction is less precise and more confusing in abstract nouns.

Abstract nouns such as *way, day, hour, minute, week month, year, inch, kilometer, mile* having a distinct beginning and end are as such count. Several others like 'a *difficulty*', 'small *kindnesses*' 'a miserable *failure*', 'home *truths*' — listed by Quirk et al (p.1015) and many like 'a heavy *duty*', 'a fiery *spee-*

Group -4 : Nouns which are impossible to 'shift', and if forced into a 'shift', they sound odd and unacceptable. Quirk et al (ibid) provide a few interesting examples: there are no forms such as *educations* or *homeworks* or *a harm* or *a cheese*. There does not seem to be a clear cut explanation for this phenomenon. One might say that there has been no need yet in the language for a shift in the case of these nouns.

The category of nouns in 4 (notwithstanding an uncertainty about their precise number) does show that some nouns are just not shifted. Gleason is, therefore, overstating the case to divide English nouns into a three-number system. It also supports the accepted sub-classification of English nouns into mass and count.

It may be noted that this feature of 'shift from mass to count and vice versa cannot be accounted for very precisely in terms of change of meaning in all cases. Language in general does not exhibit a one to one correspondence between form and meanings. 'A *lamb*' (count) on being slaughtered for food changes into *lamb* (mass). The same is true of 'a *chicken*' and '*chicken*'. In the case of *iron* (mass) and *an iron* (count) there hardly appears any relationship of meaning:

V. Abstract Notuns — Count And Mass

The distincion between concrete and abstract nouns in English is not formally detectable. It is wholly semantac In the previous sections, we tried to seek a referential distinction between mass/ count in concrete nouns. In abstract nouns this referential distinction is still more arbitrary.

There is abroad tendency for concrete nouns to be count and abstract nouns to be mass. One cannot assign alinguistic reason to this tendency and Quirk et al also deny any possib-

IV. iv. Four Groups :

In an attempt to shed light on the shift potential, one can make a rough classification of English nouns on the basis of how readily they collocate in both mass and count subclasses. The following four groups emerge:

Group-1: Nouns which readily collocate in both sub–classes such as *glass, cake, stone*. These nouns can function freely in both the sub-classes.

Group -2 : Nouns which we feel as belonging primarily to one or the other sub-class, but which can be switched to the other class without any distortion. For example a typical mass noun may often be used as a count noun in the sense of-

"a unit of the mass noun" , as in— (taken from Quirk et al: 1973:p. 1015).

two *coffees*, two *cheeses*,

Or, in the sense of—

"a kind of the mass noun", as in —

Some *paint's* are more lasting than others.

This is a better *bread* than the one I bought last

What *breads* have you got today?

Or, in the sense of—

an instance of ", as in —

"a *difficulty*, small *kindnesses*, a miserrable *failure*, home *truths*

Group- 3: Nouns which seem to be firmly established in one sub-class, count for example, but which it is possible, by some stretching of the language and by some stretching of the notion of acceptability, to use in the other sub-class (mass). Examples are *bag, book, shelf, car* .....(all illustrated in sentences earlier).

it also illustrates the flexilility of English and provides an insight into how language is constantly changing or developing.

IV.iii. Gleason's three-number system :

Gleason (1965: 175) in his discussion of mass and count nouns suggests that the English noun has a three-number system rather than two: " If it is true that every common noun can occur in both patterns of use, the the count-mass distinction is not one that divides the nouns of English into two separate sub -classes. Rather it is one, like the plural singular distinction, that affects all, or nearly all nouns." Compared with Quirk et al's suggestion (of dual class membership of nouns), Gleason's is much more radical in the sense that he assumes that potentially *all* nouns can function as both mass and count. It amounts to saying that the division of nouns into mass and count is to be avoided.

One has to decide whether to adopt Gleason's rather radical suggestion that all nouns, if stretched, can function as both mass and count, or that this 'shift' is not applicable to all nouns, in which case we will be following the rather traditional approach that there are two sub-classes in English nouns: mass and count .

A question can be asked here: if the 'shift' really involves *all* nouns, why has this phenomenon not been observed before? Though the number of nouns that can be 'shifted' may appear larger on investigation than one would normally expect, yet it seems going too far to claim that the 'shift' involves *each and every noun* in English . The truth to me seems to be that this ability of nouns to 'shift' between mass and count is only a potentiality, a phenomenon the kind of which we witness in many other language areas as well.

Gleason (1965:136) likewise makes the point that "many words are commonly used both as mass nouns and count nouns. Sometimes there is a profound difference of meaning: *Iron* is a metal. *An iron* is an instrument for pressing clothes. Or the differences may be subtle and almost undefinable, as in *education* vs. *an education* ..... The shifting of nouns from mass to count and from count to mass seems to be a fairly regular and productive pattern in English." ' Fire' is uncountable but it is countable in the expression, Have you got a *fire* on you"? Gleason gives an interesting example of this phenomena : "*book* and *shelf* are both fairly typical count nouns. With the present vogue of speaking animal stories, we can imagine one featuring a mother termite concerned over her child:

> "Johnny is very choosey about his food, He will eat *book*, but he won't touch *shelf*. "

Gleason goes on to suggest "that every noun, given the the right context, can occur in either type of usage, count or mass. (ibid, 151.).

Christophersen and Sandved (ibid, 110) also provide some interesting examples:

> "Considering the size of the site, there is simply too much *house* on it ."
>
> Cardealer: "The price may seem a bit high, but you get a lot of *car* for your money."

One sometimes hears the sentence —

"Have you any bag left? (Is there any space left in your bag?).

All these examples, and many more, illustrate the user's inbuilt competence and his knowledge of the linguistic structure , and his ability to use language creatively and vividly.

ents ('a fine set of woods', for instance) and so have many abstract-noun uncountables ('a real beauty'). (Strang: 1968: 121).

I believe the suggestion made by Quirk et al to look upon these nouns as participating in a dual class membership is more acceptable because it takes account of both the relationship, and the distinction of form and meaning.

IV. ii. a. Christophersen and Sandved's extension of this view :

Christophersen and Sandved agree with Quirk et al but they go a step further to cover many more nouns. To them. a noun used as both mass and count is a single 'word' having two forms. They point out a meaning relationship which cuts across the functional division of mass/count: "It is important to realize that the distinction between countables and uncountables is less a distinction between two different subclasses of nominals than between two different functions of nominals. If a nominal is used with certain determiners, without the plural morpheme, it denotes something uncountable. But very often, the same nominal may also be used with other determiners and the plural morpheme and in that case it denotes something countable." (Christophersen and Sandved: 1969: 110). They also point out that this ability to serve as either mass or count is not restricted to a small number of nouns but" potentially any noun can occur in both functions." (ibid). A few examples follow:

Get us two *teas*, please.

We bought fifty *ice-creams* for the party.

The largest steal *works* in Asia are in the Soviet Union.

I like all *coffees* but prefer Arabic coffee to any other.

IV. i. Concrete–Mass shift and Semantic Shift:

It is also possible to change something countable into mass: *oranges* when peeled and squashed become *orange, eggs,* when beaten and fried together are *scrambled* egg. The truth is that there are many examples in English of words used both as count and mass—with some semantic shift—

Give me *a cake*	I like to eat *cake.*
She reads *a* (*news*) paper every morning.	This is inferior quality paper.
Children pelted the snake with *stones*	This building is made of *stone.*
Who broke my *glasses*	*Glass* is fragile.

This ability of viewing some thing from two different points of view is called 'shift' or 'conversion'. Quirk et al (1973, 128–129) seethis conversion ability or potentiality as a widespread phenomenon in English nouns : "The distinction according to countability into count and mass nouns is basic to English. Yet, language makes it possible to look upon-some objects from the point of view of both count and mass."

IV.ii Nouns with dual class membership :

There are many such nouns with dual class membership. Often they have considerable difference in meaning in the two classes.

As we have seen, Strang, too, talks about words which can be used as both count and mass, but she considers them homonyms. Talking about mass nouns, she says, "..... the words in this class must be distinguished from similar words which are central nouns (count nouns)— there is a central noun *ethic* as well as the uncountable *ethics:* many of the material-name uncountables have countable homonyms with different refer-

ocate with various noun categories and then attempt to pin point the referential difference between count and mass nouns: "Nouns which behave like 'bottle' in column 2 ((*chair, word, finger, remark* . . . .) which must be seen as individual countable entities and cannot be viewed as an undifferentiated mass, called COUNT NOUNS. Those conforming like *furniture,* to the pattern of column 3 (*grass, warmth, humour* . . . .) must by contrast be seen as an undifferentiated mass or continuum, and we call them NON–COUNT NOUNS. (Quirk and Greenbaum: 1973: 60)

In a few cases, however, this again appears to be arbitrary and somewhat illogical. Take for example 'wheat, and 'rice, which being non–plural forming are mass; are 'oats' 'Lentils' —both plural in form — by a parallel implication *count* nouns? Besides, one finds that this distinction does not hold good for all languages, *Chevux* in French is count but *hair* in Engilsh is non count. (Palmer: 1971: 35).

Notwithstanding some isolated and rare instances of this kind, one may safely agree that there does exist in world reality a general basis for the distinction between mass and count in nouns. Indeed one comes across corresponding linguistic patterns in numerous nouns reflecting this polarity. It is true that this generalization applies more neatly to concrete nouns than to abstract nouns: it is in nouns of the latter–category that usage becomes more arbitrary. By and large, there does appear a general correspondence between linguistic patterns and world reality.

IV. THE 'SHIFT' IN CONCRETE NOUNS

In the previous section we found it possible to distinguish between count and mass nouns in the concrete world. This possibility is further substantiated by the fact that we have the two systems of measurement: counting (for numbre and volume) and weighing.

and plural. Strang supports this distinction unreservedly basing her explanation on meaning as reflected in the difference in structure "the functions of singular and plural distinction in nouns..... are primarily referential in character". (ibid, 106)

III. MASS–COUNT POLARITY BASED ON REFERENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE

III.i. Strang's refutation:

When we come to the mass–count distintion, we find that it is not as clear as the singular–plural contrast. Strang, talking about mass nouns, says, "The special patterning of these words is feature of Engilsh structure, and does not in any sense reflect the nature of things. (Strang: 1968: 112)

Notwithstanding Strang's refutation of world reality as being reflected in mass–count polarity one cannot really say that there isn't *any* referential significance in it. At best, one can interpret it as recognition of absence of a very clear cut relationship between linguistic structuring and the patterns obtained in world reality. Indeed, Strang implicitly accepts a connection between language and reference.[1]

III. ii. Quirk and Greenbaum's view:

Quirk and Greenbaum also take notice of the semantic reference of words. They first demonstrate how articles coll-

1. Discussing the use of articles, Strang (Pp. 124–125) Points out that in order to have five possibilities: cake, the cake, a cake, cakes, and the cakes, one has in fact "chosen homonymous forms, one countable, the other uncountable". Now, a homonym is a Lexical item having identical sound or form as another but a different meaning. Strang's 'homonymous' forms as noted above cannot simply be described as homonymous unless they have different referents. 'Cake' (mass) and 'a cake' (count) do reflect different referents in would reality.

nouns. Thus according to Strang, countable nouns are the central or unmarked form whereas uncountable nouns are the exceptional marked form.

Uncountable nouns are of two types: those which lack a plural form, and those which lack a singular form. This paper deals only with the first type which is normally called Mass nouns.

Mass nouns have one form only: the verb that collocates with them takes a singular form. As for the articles used with them, mass nouns behave like the plural forms of 'central nouns'.

II.i. Count and mass in concrete nouns:

Having shown the formal distinction between count or central nouns and mass nouns one may ask whether this distinction is merely part of the arbitrary nature of language or whether it has any referential (semantic) significance.

But before this, one may as well apply this referential significance to the singular/plural distinction in English. One can see that the singular/plural distinction does represent an objective feature in world reality: singular signifies 'one unit' and plural means 'more than one'. But there may arise complications in some cases here and there. What, for instance ,can we say about units which are put together but are not alike–as in the expression' in her twenties' where it is obvious that twenty two is not the same as twenty three or twenty four! The singular–plural polarity, again, seems to be blurred around the edges in expressions like' one and a half inches' /'one inch and a half' and 'one and a third miles'/'one mile and a third.' Apart from a few cases of this kind, however, it may be accepted that there is a clear distinction between singular

b. functionally, nouns can be the subject or the complement in a sentence without undergoing a morphological change,

c. positionally, nouns can directly follow two types of closed–system words: those called determiners, and those called prepositions,

d. morphologically, nouns reflect variation for number and for case,

e. nouns subdivide into several genders, i.e., subclasses capable of patterning with certain pronouns and not with others. (Strang: 1968: 100–01)

It seems clear from Strang's definition of the Noun that word classes must be defined in structural or formal terms even at the risk of criticism that such formal definitions are sometimes circular:

"Nouns are words which can be head–word to a closed system of words we shall call determiners ..... and determiners are (in turn) words which functioning as adjuncts show their head–words to be nouns. "(ibid, 124)

Such criticism only proves that language, in the ultimate analysis, is arbitrary and does not lend itself to neat and precise classifications which the linguist seeks to impose on it.

II. COUNT AND MASS NOUNS:

Following Strang's terminology, the words which conform to her critaria are called 'central nouns'. One of the criteria noted above for such words (d) is that they exhibit a variation of form for number, i.e., they have singular and plural forms which collocate with singular and plural verb forms. However, some words do not show this variation for number. These nouns form a sub–class called Uncountable or Mass

tive, or another adverb: that of the Noun is in terms of meaning: a noun is a name of a person, place or thing: Some recentlly proposed definitions have been in terms of inflection. 'A noun is a word which forms a plural by adding- s or the equivalent. (Gleason: 1965: 115). He concludes that in order "to be useful in grammar, the Parts of Speech must be based on structural (that is, grammatical) features of the words classified. " (ibid, 117). Gleason seems to be less scathing than some others in respect of the traditional definitions. In fact, in a footnote (ibid, f. n. 115) he seems to defend traditional definitions' He meant to say that the lack of rigorous inconsistency in the traditional definitions was not necessarily a weekness or deficiency in their own forms: in fact, the defnitions of nouns and verbs in terms of meaning depended for completion on the syntactic definitions supplied for other parts of speech.

Zandvoort avoids the problem of providing a definition of Noun and begins straightaway with a discussion of the form, and uses of nouns:

"An English noun usually has the following forms:

a. the stem: boy, girl, ship, ass ....

b. the stem+ sibilant suffix: boys/boy's/boys'; girls/girl's/ ..... (Zandvoort: 1969:90)

Strang defines nouns in formal terms. First she places nouns into three major categories: those functioning characteristically in the noun phrase, those functioning characteristically in the verb phrase, and those whose members are not primarily associated with either kind of phrase. Then she identifies as "central nouns" the words which comply with the following criteria:

a. Lexically, nouns constitute an open class,

I. i. Fries' rejection of the traditional parts of Speech definition:

Fries (1952) was the first to reject the traditional definitions and categories of parts of Speech and to devise new categories based exclusively on non-semantic formal criteria, claiming, "We cannot use lexical meaning as the basis for the definition of some classes, 'function in the sentence' for others, and 'formal' categories' for still others. We must find as the basis for our grouping into parts of Speech, a set of criteria that can be consistently applied. " (ibid, 1952: 69).

Fries defined the Parts of Speech by postulating that "all words that could occupy the same set of positions in the patterns of English, single free utterances, must belong to the same Part of Speech. (ibid: 74). He assumed that words found in his corpus which could satisfactorily fill a particular slot in a sentence belonged to one class or 'form'.

I. ii. Some less rigorous approaches:

If Fries' classification of the Parts of Speech was rigorously formal, others were less so.

Even early grammarians had been aware of the deficiencies in notional definitions. As early as 1892, Henry Sweet had observed : "It is easy to see that there is no difference of meaning between "*Whiteness* is an attribute of snow " and snow is *white.*' "The difference between' white' and the noun 'whiteness' is purely formal and functional- grammatical, not logical". (Sweet: 1892:36)

Later Gleason reviewed the variety of solutions that have been proposed to the problem of defining Parts of Speech, "There are several bases on which definitions can be made. The traditional definition of the Adverb is in terms of syntactic use: an adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjec-

MASS AND COUNTABILITY IN ENGLISH NOUNS

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to elucidate and substantiate the points that there is a referential validity underlying nouns in English and that this validity is more apparent and consistent in concrete than in abstract nouns; also that abstract nouns, too , broadly follow the general patterns of concrete nouns. The study has been made in three parts:

I.A brief review of the criteria generally applied in defining English nouns.

ii. A study of the distinction between mass and count in concrete nouns employing referentiality as the basis.

iii. A study of dual membership, viz . the occurrance of one noun as both count (concrete and abstract) and mass (concrete and abstract).

DISCUSSION

I. Nouns: Definition

Nouns in English are normally defined with reference to their conformity to a number of criteria: morphological/ formal, referential /notional, functional/ syntactic or positional.

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