

Aspectual information impacts the countability of deverbal nouns in Brazilian Portuguese

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Much literature has explored the interpretation of object-denoting bare singulars in Brazilian Portuguese (BP) such as *bola* in “Maria tem bola” (Maria has ball(s)). An unexplored field of research is the interpretation of abstract nouns with respect to countability in BP. In this paper we explore the interpretation of nouns derived from durative and punctual verbs, in mass and count syntax (mass syntax: not pluralized noun [*Maria deu mais chute* ‘Maria did more kicking’]; count syntax: pluralized noun [*Maria deu mais chutes* ‘Maria did more kicks’]). More particularly, we address the following question: is the interpretation of bare singular deverbal nouns influenced by the aspectual information of the verb they are derived from in BP? Are punctual verbs [telic] more likely to be associated with a count interpretation than durative verbs [atelic]? **Study: Design** in a forced choice task (based on Barner and Snedeker 2008), we manipulated two conditions: the type of the event (durative or punctual) and the question form (verb [*Quem caminhou mais?* ‘Who walked more?’/*Quem pulou mais?* ‘Who jumped more?’; bare singular [*Quem fez mais caminhada?* ‘Who did more walking?’/*Quem deu mais pulo?* ‘Who did more jumping?’] or plural [*Quem fez mais caminhadas?* ‘Who did more walks?’/ *Quem deu mais pulos?* ‘Who did more jumps?’]). Participants were presented with a short context followed by a target question. The short contexts presented two characters: one that performed few, but longer events (e.g., two long walks for 2 hours each) [‘mass’ answer] and another that performed a higher number of short events (e.g., four short walks [15 minutes each]) [‘count’ answer]. **Prediction (i):** for the critical questions that included verbs, we expected that durative verbs would be more frequently associated with ‘mass’ answers; by contrast, punctual verbs were expected to be associated with ‘count’ answers. **Prediction (ii):** for the critical questions that included bare singulars, we expected that ‘count’ answers would be more likely for punctual verbs. **Prediction (iii)** if the plural morpheme blocks a mass interpretation (cf. Müller (2002) and Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein (2011) for BP), then we would expect that regardless the lexical features of the noun, pluralized nouns would strongly favor a cardinal/‘count’ answer. **Methods** 89 BP speakers were presented with 56 questions: 9 questions: durative verb/noun; 9 questions: punctual verb/noun; 36 fillers unrelated with the manipulation. **Results: Verb condition** durative events were much less likely to be associated with the ‘count’ answer in comparison with punctual events (23% and 72% of ‘count’ answers, respectively). **Bare singulars condition** the ‘count’ answer is more likely when the deverbal noun is derived from punctual events in comparison with durative events (78% and 45% of ‘count’ answers, respectively). **Plural nouns condition** Punctual and Durative events equally favor a ‘count’ answer (97%, 89%, respectively). **Discussion** the results of this study have shown that deverbal bare singulars allow count and mass interpretations, depending on the aspectual features of the verbs they are derived from. Punctual events were more likely than durative events to be associated with a cardinal/count response. Therefore, these results corroborate previous analysis of bare singulars in BP according to which bare singulars denote kinds that allow both count and mass interpretations, without necessarily favoring one of these interpretations (cf. Pires de Oliveira and Rothstein 2011). What seems to favor a mass or a count interpretation of nouns is not mass/count syntax, but rather the lexical properties of the verbs the nouns are derived from. In other words, as observed in studies in English (cf. Barner and Snedeker 2008), mass syntax does

not force an unindividuated construal. Finally, pluralized nouns necessarily trigger a cardinal interpretation, as previously attested in the literature. In this particular study, pluralization overruled a particular preference for a mass interpretation even for nouns derived from durative verbs.

References

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