Plural, Classifier, and the role of division in a Classifier language

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Borer (2005) proposed that, in order to be counted via the Num(ber) head, a noun must be ‘divided’ via a Div(ision) head. Div can be realized by the plural marker (PL) as in English or by a numeral classifier (CL) as in Chinese.

In languages such as Korean that have both PL and CL, however, the question is what is responsible for the role of division. We argue that it is not PL but CL that plays the role of Div (see (1)) in both measure and container readings. We show that PL is a modifier that adjoins to NP below Div (see (1)). The proposed analysis provides a support for a view that in the absence of plural in DivP, CL (not PL) universally originates under Div in a measure reading (Mathieu and Zareikar 2015, also similar ideas in Chierchia 1998, Acquaviva 2008). Moreover, this paper contributes to cross-linguistic variation on an element of Div in a container reading: in a language whose PL is absent in the DivP domain, CL can play the role of Div.

(1) [NC [SP [NP soup] -PL] [DivP five [Div CL.bowl ... ]]]

(2) kuk(-tul) tases (*kulus) soup(-PL) five CL.bowl
   (i) ‘five bowlfuls of soup’ (Measure reading); (ii) ‘five bowls full of soup’ (Container reading)

We argue that the PL marker –tul in Korean cannot play the role of division, but it is a modifier of NP. We provide three pieces of evidence building on Witlschko’s (2008) modifying plural and Kramer’s (2015) diagnostics for NP plurals: (i) PL is optional as shown with a mass noun (2) and with a count noun (3): nouns can be interpreted as plural without –tul, (ii) PL is non-inflectional: it doesn’t trigger agreement with a demonstrative ku ‘this’ (3) (Kang 1994), and (iii) PL shows semantic idiosyncrasy (i.e., dis-preferred or not always compatible with some animates, e.g., *kikkili-tul ‘elephant-PL’ (Suh 2005, Kang 2007). These properties suggest that –tul is not a grammatical PL.

(3) ku salam(-tul) se (*myeng) that.NG human(-PL) three CL
   ‘those three people’

In contrast, CL behaves like a grammatical PL. First, CL is obligatory. For example, in (3), without CL kulus, the sentence is ungrammatical in both readings. Second, CL is a higher head than PL, as it shows inflectional properties: for example, CL shows honorific agreement (4). Lastly, unlike PL –tul, CL is not idiosyncratic: it is required for any noun, regardless of features like animacy, as shown with all range of nouns, human (3 and 4), animate (5), and inanimate (2). The provided evidence collectively suggests that CL is a regular grammatical pluralizer. In the proposed analysis in which PL and CL appear in different domains of nominal structure (1), the co-occurrence of the PL and CL is borne out as evidenced by the data in (2) and (3).

(4) sensangnim twu pwun/?myeng teacher two CL.HON/CL ‘two teachers’ (Lee 2000)
(5) kokkili sey mali elephant three CL
   ‘three elephants’

In our account, in both (i) measure and (ii) container readings in (2), CL is a Div head, having a numeral in its specifier position (1): it quantizes an uncountable unit into a countable unit. In the measure reading (i), CL originates as Div (see (6)): it denotes only the amount contained in a (typical) bowl, but not the bowl itself. In the container reading (ii), CL also appears in Div, moved from the lowest noun position (see (7)); because it starts its life as N, CL in this reading retains its lexical semantics, giving rise to a ‘container’ reading. In both readings in (2), CL has to appear with a numeral; without the numeral, both readings are ungrammatical. Moreover, numeral and CL cannot be interrupted by another element, e.g., an adjective: *kuk tases-khum-kulus ‘soup five-big-bowl’. These facts suggest that numeral is in the specifier of DivP (1), as in e.g., Cheng and Sybesma (1998), Watanabe (2008).

In the measure reading (i), in the absence of PL in CL domain, CL as Div portions out its complement noun ‘soup’, thereby allowing it to be counted. This account captures the presence of a numeral only if CL is present. Our account for the measure reading is different from Cheng and Sybesma (1998) for Chinese and Mathieu and Zareikar (2015) for Azeri-type languages, as illustrated in (6): a measured noun in Korean moves out of NP to the specifier of a nominal small clause (NC).
Measure reading

![Image]

In particular, the measured noun in (6) undergoes an obligatory movement, similar to Simpson (2005) or Watanabe (2006). Taking one step further than these studies, we argue that the measured noun obligatorily moves to check a focus EPP feature at the left edge of NC. Initial support comes from the fact that the only word order allowed in Korean is N-NmL-CL, and this order is employed in presentational situation where the information of the noun is presented before the information of measure, e.g., as in the use of itemized lists (for shopping) in Asian languages (Simpson 2005).

In contrast to Chinese which allows an additional order of NmL-CL-N for a container reading, in Korean this order is impossible, but the order N-NmL-CL can have an additional container reading. In this reading in Korean, we argue that CL also plays the role of Div, as in a measure reading. However, we claim that in the container reading in Korean, CL (e.g., ‘bowl’) originates under N and moves to Div as illustrated in (7).

Container reading

Support comes from the fact that CL with a container reading is a lexical noun; e.g., kulus ‘bowl’ in (2), pyeng ‘bottle’, or sangca ‘box’ and so on, similar to Chinese massifiers (Cheng and Sybesma 1999). A CL such as myeng for counting a human in (3) or kay for counting an object (chayk two key ‘books two CL’) that originates as Div (see (6)) cannot have a container reading. The fact that CL in (7) started life as N results in the ‘container’ reading where a container N is physically present. On the other hand, CL in the measure construction is generated as Div, not lexical N (6): consequently, there is no lexical contribution of CL to the interpretation, and CL functions as a divider only. As with the measure reading, the lowest N ‘soup’ in the container reading (7) moves to the left edge position checking a focus EPP feature: the information of the noun precedes the information of the container.

Our proposal for a container reading is different from Mathieu and Zareikar (2015) for English or Azeri type languages where PL is available in Div domain and it plays a role of Div. As proposed in this paper (see (1)), PL in Korean is an NP modifier that appears below Div, which suggests that PL is absent in DivP. In the absence of PL in the Div domain, the only available Div in a Korean-type language is CL. The proposed account also differs from Cheng and Sybesma (1999) for a container reading in Chinese. As noted earlier, in Chinese, word order between N and NmL-CL manipulates different readings: in a container reading, there is no movement of N, contrary to Korean (7). Thus, under our account, Korean differs from Chinese in that information about N in Korean is always presented before measure or container information, while in Chinese there is an option to present which information first in a different reading.

This paper proposes that in a Korean-type language, CL, not the PL, plays the role of Div; PL is a modifier below Div. CL in this type of language differs from English or Azeri-type languages in that in the container reading it is also CL, not PL, that is in ‘Div’, due to the lack of PL in the Div domain. Our analysis indicates that in a classifier language CL plays the role of division all the way, regardless of the presence of PL which has been treated as a Div similar to English (e.g., Kim 2005, Suh 2008.). Moreover, the proposed account provides novel support for the growing view that plurals can come in different flavors (e.g., Wiltschko 2008, Kramer 2005, 2015, Mathieu 2012). Lastly, it suggests that in the absence of gender and English-type plural –s, a classifier language has the roles of classification and number distributed across different heads and modifiers in the nominal extended projection.

Selected References: