LEXICAL PLURALS FOR AGGREGATES OF DISCRETE ENTITIES IN ENGLISH: why plural, yet non-count, nouns?

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Introduction

Within the notoriously heterogeneous[1] category of lexical plurals and, among them, of plural-only nouns[2], a small number denote aggregates of discrete entities (e.g. *clothes*). They will be the focus of the present study; the aim is more specifically to account for the combination of the [+plural] and [-count] features in that particular set of nouns, because the combination seems paradoxical at first sight. First consider the [+plural] feature. Acquaviva (2004, 2008) has shown that although for these nouns, the plural is not an affix added to a singular base[3], it still contributes its own meaning, that of a manifold complex (2004, p. 399), of 'more than one' (2008, p. 46, 79). In other words, if we consider *clothes*, the plural number highlights the idea of a plurality of parts, and because the noun denotes an aggregate of discrete entities, each part is a clearly delimitable, discrete item – unlike other types of lexical plurals, such as *waters*, for which there is no individuality of parts (Acquaviva, 2004, p. 398). But if the plurality of parts is foregrounded by the plural and if the parts are discrete, why carry a [-count] feature, that is, why not allow counting (e.g. **three clothes*, although a non-numeral quantifier is tolerated by some speakers, e.g. *a few clothes* – see Acquaviva, 2004, p. 390, and Allan, 1980)? Why not resort instead to superordinate count nouns, which are common in English (e.g. *garment(s)* in the clothes domain; and English has many highly superordinate nouns, such as *thing(s)*, *item(s)*, etc.)?

Starting from the other feature, [-count], similarly makes the combination with [+plural] anything but straightforward: if a non-count feature is wanted, why not have *singular* non-count[4] nouns (cf. *furniture*), which are much more common than plural ones? The question is all the more important as a number of plural non-count nouns, despite their plural morphology, are sometimes treated as singulars by speakers. It is the case, for instance, of *memorabilia*:

(1) (Google Books) *Memorabilia <u>are</u> items that evoke memories of important events or special times.*

[1] See for instance Lauwers (2014, p. 117-132) for French, Acquaviva (2008, p. 16) for English.

[2] Following Acquaviva (2008), a lexical plural is understood here as a plural that cannot be analysed as a stem + a plural inflection. Among these, plural-only nouns (*pluralia tantum*) are nouns for which there is no corresponding stem without a mark of plurality (see Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 340). Lexical plurals also include words with such a stem, but for which the plural form cannot be analysed as a sum (e.g. *brains*, as in *he does not have much brains*, which cannot be analysed as 'a brain + a brain + a brain…').

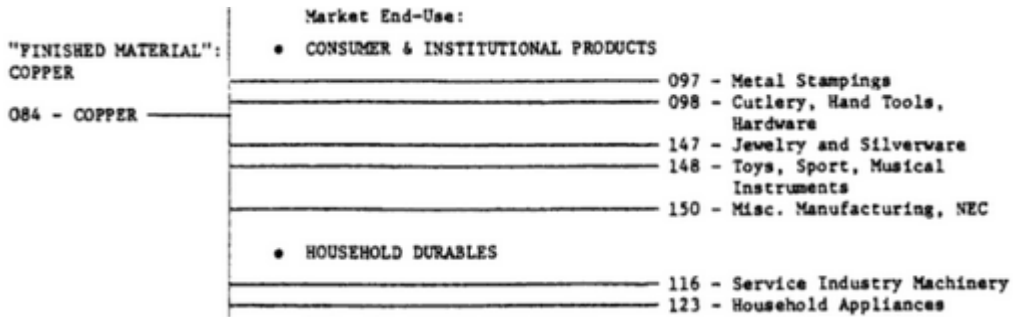
[3] Rather, the plural is part of the lexical competence that the speaker must acquire for the word as a whole (Acquaviva, 2008, p. 1). While with a count noun, the plural corresponds to a bottom-up perspective (1 book + 1 book + etc. = books), lexical plurals reflect a top-down perspective: the plural directly construes the referent (i.e. the plurality) as a manifold complex, without considering each part first (Acquaviva, 2004, p. 397).

[4] 'Non-count nouns' is understood as nouns that denote entities which cannot be counted (e.g. Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 334). In other words, they do not license numerals. The term is preferred here to that of 'mass nouns', which may imply a denotation ('mass') rather than just a grammatical feature (the fact that the nouns cannot occur with numerals).

(2) (Google Books) *But the prices for <u>much</u> of the UDA memorabilia are staggering.*

In order to answer these questions, for which the existing literature only offers partial explanations, the study will be based on documents which list groups of objects, viz. the tables of contents of guides to collectibles (Maloney, 2003, which has over 3,200 categories; Bradley, 2015; Moran, 2011; Brownell, 2010; Graf, 2006), augmented, for a broader scope, with Doggett et al. (1980)'s taxonomic codes and with the sales categories on the Debenham's website (2016). The reason for this choice of sources is that they provide a broad, though not exhaustive, sample of lexical plurals for aggregates of entities, but also, more importantly, that they show these nouns together with singular non-count nouns and superordinate count nouns in the plural, all in a similar context of references to aggregates of discrete entities, thus allowing for a comparative approach. This recurring juxtaposition of the three types of nouns is illustrated for instance by the following random extract:

(3) (Doggett et al., 1980, p. 131)



The study will first describe the methodology and data. It will then compare lexical plurals with count nouns in the plural (section 2) and with non-count singular nouns (section 3).

1. Data collection and description

The corpus contains all the relevant nouns found in the documents cited above. The following nouns were discarded:
- those that do not name an aggregate of objects (e.g. category *Uncle Sam*),
- summation plurals (e.g. *trousers*): as they may denote a single pair, they were considered lexical plurals of a different kind,
- basic-level count nouns (e.g. *shoes*): because all non-count nouns in the corpus were superordinates, only superordinate count nouns were retained.

All the nouns were then searched for in the Google Books Corpus, which has a unique range of economic and collectibles-related texts, and therefore provided a high number of occurrences. The aim was to check whether the plural nouns in the corpus had a singular form and, when they did not, whether they licensed singular and/or plural agreement (e.g. for *memorabilia*, the queries were '*these memorabilia'*, '*this memorabilia'*, '*memorabilia are'*, '*memorabilia is'*).

An initial finding is that at superordinate level, aggregates of discrete entities are denoted overwhelmingly with count nouns. For instance, Maloney (2003) has only 21 non-count nouns out of over 3,000 categories. The *variety* of count nouns, however, is comparatively very limited (21 against more than 50). The corpus is as follows:

(4) 21 superordinate count nouns in the plural:
accessories (on its own or pre-modified, e.g. *home* ~)
appliances (*household* ~)
artefacts (*Civil War* ~) / *artifacts (Asian* ~)
beverages
collectibles (on its own or pre-modified, e.g. *Disney* ~)
commemoratives
devices (*coin-operated* ~)
firearms
gadgets
gifts
instruments (pre-modified, e.g. *musical* ~)
items (pre-modified, e.g. *astronomical* ~)
objects (*decorated* ~)
*products (*pre-modified, e.g. *graphite ~)*
projectiles
souvenirs
things (*children's ~)*
tools (*food preparation ~)*
toys (on its own or pre-modified, e.g. *soft* ~)
utensils (*kitchen* ~)
vehicles

Collectibles and *items* stand out as extremely common.

(5) 36 singular-only non-count nouns:
ammunition
bedding
clothing
furniture
+ *-ana: americana, barberiana, breweriana, hawaiiana, petroliana*
+ *-ery*: *cutlery, jewel(le)ry, lingerie, machinery, pottery, stationery*
+ *-ia* (though historically a plural ending): *automobilia, paraphernalia*
+ *-ica*: *photographica*
+ *-ware: cookware, dinnerware, giftware, flatware, hardware, hollow-ware, graniteware, silverware, spongeware, spatterware, picnicware*
+ *-wear*: *beachwear, knitwear, nightwear, occasionwear, shapewear, swimwear, workwear*

(6) 5 (possibly 6) plural-only non-count nouns:
clothes – notes: 1) 4 occurrences of 'five clothes' in Google Books. 2) historically, *clothes* is the regular plural of count *cloth*.
durables – a few occurrences of 'one durable'[5] in Google Books
figurals
furnishings – 2 occurrences of 'one furnishing' in Google Books
supplies – 'a supply' (meaning 'one element supplied') used to exist (source: OED)
+ ? *arrivals* (pre-modified: *new* ~): *arrival(s)* itself is count, but *a new arrival* only seems to be used about a person.

[5] For the nouns in (6), the singular is so rare that the label 'plural-only nouns' was retained.

(7) 5 nouns with morphological variation:

- historically non-count singular:

kitchenware(s), woodenware(s) – 1) the OED only records the singular. 2) both forms are non-count. 3) the *-ware* compounds in (5) do not exist with *-s*.

- historically non-count plural:

insignia – reanalysed as a count singular by some, with corresponding plural *insignias* (sources: Google Books data, Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 345)[6]

goods – in economics (only), regularly used as a count noun, with singular *a good* (sources: Google Books data, OED)

- either non-count or count:

equipment – non-count singular in the corpus, but Google Books also has count occurrences (e.g. *forty electric equipments which will be installed in main-line locomotives*). The OED records both uses.

(8) 7 morphologically plural nouns treated alternatively as plural or singular non-count (without morphological change, unlike *insignia* in [7]):
-a: ephemera
-ia: exonumia, memorabilia, militaria
-ica: erotica, hebraica, judaica

These lists show that the number of non-count plurals is very low compared to non-count singulars, and that most lexical plurals in the corpus are unstable, whether for some areas of expertise (economics for *goods*) or over time. Some lexical plurals in -s tend to be reanalysed as count nouns, through a reanalysis of the -s as a morphological plural; as the nouns denote aggregates of discrete entities, the plurality of items comes to be viewed as a sum. Latin plurals tend to be reanalysed as non-count singulars, most probably because they cannot be split into *stem + plural inflection*, and because non-count singulars are a stable grammatical category for aggregates of discrete entities: the list in (5) has no less than 36 nouns, and there are hardly any shifts from singular to plural uses, or from singular non-count to count uses.

We now turn to a comparison of the three types of nouns, starting with lexical plurals and count nouns in the plural.

2. Lexical plurals vs. count nouns in the plural

Lexical plurals and count nouns in the plural share a number of features. They can only be used for a plurality, and in Jackendoff (1991)'s classification of material entities, they belong to the same type, that of 'aggregates' (9 below): they do not entail boundedness (that is, they may be divided or augmented with more objects of the same kinds, while retaining their identity) and they have internal structure (meaning that they are made up of separate individuals) (Murphy, 2010, p. 153).

(9) (Jackendoff, 1991, p. 20)

- individuals:	[+ bounded]	[-internal structure]	e.g. *a pig*
- groups:	[+ bounded]	[+internal structure]	e.g. *a committee*
- substances:	[- bounded]	[-internal structure]	e.g. *water*
- aggregates:	[- bounded]	[+internal structure]	e.g. *buses, cattle*

[6] Reanalysis also occurs for some Latin plurals which do not denote aggregates of discrete entities (e.g. *algae, data*, ibid.).

Moreover, both categories contain superordinates. At that level, the objects are grouped together under one label for easy handling, but there are few family resemblances; the categories highlight salient, mostly functional, attributes (Ungerer & Schmid, 1996, p. 77-79). Lexical plurals and count nouns in the plural may denote as heterogeneous categories, so that for both types, it is often impossible to draw a more or less exhaustive list of hyponyms (e.g. count *accessories*, non-count *durables*)[7].

Lexical plurals and count nouns in the plural diverge by their [+/-count] feature, with a corresponding difference in construal. The inflectional plural is added to a stem, so that a count noun in the plural denotes a sum (e.g. *a collectible / collectibles*). This is impossible with a lexical plural (e.g. a skirt is not **a clothes*): although the lexical plural recognises a plurality of objects, an individual unit is not meant to be isolated from the aggregate.

This major difference in conceptualisation raises the issue of motivation: why lexical plurals for the nouns in (6)-(8), and not in (4)-(5)? Wierzbicka (1985, p. 322; 1988, p. 512), based on Frege (1950), puts forward the notion of *kind*: for entities to be counted, they must be discrete, but also construed as being of the same kind[8]. For example, although *collectibles* include very different items, these items are subsumed under a single kind thanks to the feature [+collectible]. Conversely, the [-count] feature signals that the noun refers to 'a collection of things of different kinds, thought of as things of different kinds' (Wierzbicka, 1988, p. 543).

But why do some aggregates construe a single kind, while others do not? As seen above, this is not due to an objective difference in the degree of heterogeneity of the items. Wierzbicka (1988, p. 543) suggests that with lexical plurals (which she compares with other non-count nouns; see section 3 below for further detail), the entities are construed as having 'a common place', and as being there 'for the same reason'. For instance, *furnishings* will be those of a given room or house. Does a common place, then, *motivate* the [-count] feature? Partly, but not always. *Durables* and *figurals* do not necessarily share a common place; and while *figurals* or *ephemera* (paper collectibles), for instance, can be found in the same place (e.g. an auction catalogue), this is also true of count *collectibles* or *accessories*.

I propose that lexical plurals are in fact the result of two parameters: a semantic one (related to our experience of the entities), and a morphological one. In addition, there might be an element of arbitrariness sometimes (as with cross-linguistic differences), as well as word-specific evolutions.

As regards the semantic parameter, I suggest that lexical plurals exist to talk specifically about heterogeneous groupings, because in context, the individual items are not important; what matters is the resulting aggregate. There are at least two reasons for this construal:

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[7] These features also hold for non-count singulars, but the latter may refer to a single object (e.g. *a chair is furniture*).

[8] Frege (1950, p. 62, cited in Wierzbicka, 1988, p. 512) actually uses the notion of *genus* rather than *kind*, in the following comment on a statement by Spinoza: 'we only think of things in terms of number after they have been reduced to a common genus. For example, a man who holds in his hand a sesterce and a dollar will not think of the number two unless he can cover his sesterce and his dollar with one and the same, viz., piece of silver, or coin; then he can affirm that he has two pieces of silver, or two coins; since he designates by the name piece of silver or coin not only the sesterce but also the dollar.' For the point made here about the criterion for countability, both *genus* and *kind* appear satisfactory, as in the OED's definitions, both words emphasize the idea of common attributes: (*genus*) 'A class or kind of things which includes a number of subordinate kinds (called SPECIES *n.*) as sharing in certain common attributes' / (*kind*) 'A class of individuals or objects distinguished by attributes possessed in common'. *Genus*, being explicitly connected to *species*, adds the idea of subordinate, and partly different, kinds, subsumed under the same superordinate class. Given the high impact of Wierzbicka's analyses in the field of nominal semantics, the present paper will retain her notion of *kind*.

- (cf. Wierzbicka) the entities function together in a given space: for instance, *furnishings* are what makes a room habitable as opposed to bare. *Clothes* are what makes someone dressed as opposed to naked;
- or the entities are grouped together on the basis of one quality, which does not subsume under a single kind, but which is relevant to contrast with other categories at the same level of abstraction. *Durables* constitute one of the three main categories of products, along with *consumables* and *services* (Wilmshurst & Mackay, 2002, p. 43). *Figurals* are a category of collectibles.

Due to the lack of interest in the individual entities, modifiers are very uncommon with these nouns (unlike for count nouns). When the individuality of the entities has to be taken into account, some of the nouns license *item(s) of* (e.g. *goods*), or there might be pressure towards counting (e.g. *how many supplies*, or reanalysis as a plural count noun).

The sole experience of the entities, however, is not enough to account for the grammar of lexical plurals. Otherwise, the subcategories of products mentioned above (non-count *durables*, *consumables*, and count *services*), for instance, ought to share the same grammar. An additional parameter appears to be the morphological pattern of the nouns: some impose (or exclude) lexical plurals when nouns are coined. Word formation for the lexical plurals in the corpus is as follows[9]:

a) derivation via certain suffixes:

- *-ables*, which is highly productive, as already noted in Clarke (1859, p. 82). A Google Books search yields *valuables*, *perishables*, *eatables*, *recyclables*, *movables / immovables*, *flammables*; occasional *sleepables*, *'givables' / 'ungivables'*, etc.; and British *collectables* (a lexical plural, unlike count American *collectible(s)*)
- *-ings* (*furnishings*, but also *belongings*, etc.)
- *-als*: *figurals*, and possibly *arrivals* (for goods). *Figurals* is not recorded in the OED and seems restricted to the context of collectibles.
- *-a*
- *-ia*
- *-ica*

b) compounding in *-wares*: for 2 nouns only. The fact that *ware(s)* also exists as a whole, count, noun might have been a facilitator in this use of the compound in the plural.

c) loss of countability via loss of the singular, possibly for word-specific reasons:

- *clothes* (historical plural of *a cloth*)
- *supplies* (historical plural of *a supply*, meaning 'one item supplied', OED)
- *goods*, for which *a good* used to exist (OED) and exists in the economic sector.

Some of these morphological patterns are constraining. First, some adjectival endings seem to impose lexical plurals when the adjectives are converted to nouns. This is obviously true of *-able*, and possibly of *-al*[10]. Conversely, adjectives in *-ible* and *-tive* appear to convert to count nouns – hence *(a) collectible* and *(a) commemorative*, or outside the corpus, *(a) convertible* (car) and *(a) decorative* (plant). For the resulting nouns, being a lexical plural or a count noun will be a matter of morphology as much as of semantics. This might also explain why *collectibles* is count while its British equivalent *collectables* is non-count.

A second constraint is productivity. For instance, an adjective in *-able* stands a higher chance than others of being converted to a noun. In that sense, *-able* is an 'attractor'[11] of

[9] There are other patterns (see Wierzbicka's sample in 3.1 below).

[10] For which the OED records *ephemerals* and *perennials* as plural-only. But as mentioned above, *a new arrival* is acceptable for a person.

[11] The term 'attractor' is used here in the context of word coinage; the existence of morphological attractors has also been established in various other areas of language. For instance, Stolz (2009, p. 348) finds that the

lexical plurals: in other words, it favours new nouns, and they will be lexical plurals. Other morphological 'attractors' are *-a/-ia/-ica* in the world of collectibles. They are productive (including in the late 20th century) to coin subcategories of collectibles, whether well-established (e.g. *memorabilia*, *americana*, *cricketana*), rarer (e.g. *petroliana*, *pyrobilia*, *exonumia*, *breweriana*, *barberiana* and now obsolete *piscatoriana*), or nonce words (a Google search yields *Chrismasiana*, *warholiana / Andy Warhol-iana*, *footballiana*, *baseballiana*, *alumniana*, *celticana*, *Viking-iana*, *kitchen-iana*, *Roycroftiana*). These endings are productive because they both make the 'collectible' status explicit, echoing *memorabilia*, and evoke prestige by looking Latin. These two factors, rather than sheer perception of the aggregates, appear to motivate word formation; and these endings in turn impose the [-count] feature and oscillations in number. This influence of morphology (rather than sheer construal of the aggregate) is evidenced by the fact that when authors in Google Books gloss these nouns, they invariably use a *count* noun (*collectibles*, e.g. *paper collectibles* for *ephemera*).

A third morphological constraint for lexical plurals, in the corpus, is that the stem must be a single word. This explains why so many collectibles categories have a *modifier + count noun* pattern (e.g. *Civil War artefacts*). The exact influence of the morphological factor on the grammatical features of the noun would have to be further explored using a broader sample, but it is clearly significant.

3. Non-count plurals vs. non-count singulars

Non-counts used for aggregates of discrete entities, whether singular or plural, share two features: they are superordinates, and imply diversity of kinds – so that even the singulars, except for *bedding*, license *various* (e.g. *various furniture*). As was noted, the boundary between them is not watertight: alternations exist for Latin plurals ([8] above) and two *-ware* compounds, as well as *goods* and *equipment*. To these must be added *clothes / clothing*, which share a common stem.

Non-count plurals and non-count singulars diverge as follows:
- in the corpus, non-count singulars are grammatically stable, unlike lexical plurals
- only the plurals make the plurality of items explicit (via their plural ending)
- only the plurals license *number of*
- only the singulars are acceptable for a single entity (*a chair is furniture*)
- only the singulars show frequent occurrence of *item(s)* or *piece(s) of* to access the units. For lexical plurals, these were found only with *clothes*, *furnishings* and *goods*.

These points suggest differences in construal, which we now address, starting with Wierzbicka (1988, p. 542-548)'s analysis of the pair *clothes / clothing*.

3.1. Wierzbicka's analysis of *clothes* vs. *clothing*

These words are taken as representative of a number of non-count nouns (plural and singular respectively) which all denote aggregates of entities. Wierzbicka's sample is given here because it bears on the conclusions:

> A. *clothing*, furniture, crockery, cutlery, bedlinen, footwear, underwear, lingerie, jewellery, ski-gear, kitchenware, tableware, chinaware, earthenware, fruit, equipment, etc.

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feminine suffix *-a* in Maltese attracts Italian loan words ending in *-a* towards the feminine gender (whereas those with other endings are assigned to the masculine), through a process of analogy.

B. *clothes*, goods, goodies, refreshments, groceries, leftovers, odds-and-ends, bits-and-pieces, contents, remains, belongings, supplies, trappings, trimmings, spoils, valuables, etc.

To Wierzbicka, these two sets of nouns differ by four semantic features:

a) unity of purpose: although all the items are 'thought of as being of different kinds', the singular (A) implies 'at least a unity of purpose' (e.g. *cutlery* = 'to eat with'). The plural nouns (B) lack that unity, merely grouping entities that 'have a common place' (1988, p. 543), and which are there 'at the same time' 'for the same reason' (p. 540). For instance, *goods* are kept jointly (in a shop) for sale or (in a bag) because they have been put there to be carried home.

b) boundedness[12]: only the plural nouns imply 'a definite, limited amount' of things in a given place, as in 'John's belongings' or 'the leftovers from the previous day in a particular household' (p. 544). This contrast is also found for other types of non-count plurals; e.g. *dregs*, *guts* are 'bounded in place', while *water* or *sand* are not.

c) movable units: the categories in (A) have 'fully transferrable (movable and removable) parts' (ibid.): items of *furniture* will always remain furniture. This is not true of parts of a bag's *contents*.

d) discreteness of the units: the singular nouns always imply discrete entities, whereas *goods*, for instance, may include butter.

Wierzbicka (1988, p. 547) also applies these differences to *clothes* and *clothing*. While they are often interchangeable (both denote 'a variety of things which people wear'), *clothing* is preferred, for example, to speak of what a company produces, *clothes* for what someone is wearing. Or 'Please send me some clothes', written by someone in jail, implies sets of clothes, whereas just scarves and hats meet the requirement 'please send them some clothing' in a charity appeal. To the author, this is because with *clothes*, the items are construed as things that occur or could co-occur in the same place (on a body), whereas *clothing*, which does not have this implication, can refer to any miscellaneous collection.

3.2. Discussion

Most of Wierzbicka's analysis is very convincing, but it does not fully apply to our plurals. Lack of unity of purpose does not work very well for *refreshments* and *furnishings*, which do have a common purpose ('to refresh' and 'to furnish a place'). The notion of 'common place' is not very satisfactory for three nouns: *durables* and *goods*, when used in nomenclatures (opposed to *consumables*, *services*, etc.), denote types of items rather than groups of entities that share a common place; and *figurals* are grouped together owing to a quality, not place. Moreover, *durables*, *goods* and *figurals* do not lose their conceptual status if moved to another context ('movable' feature). One might object that labelling objects as *goods* or *durables* does require specific contexts (e.g. economics), but this is true also of singular *knitwear*, for instance, which is not much used outside commercial contexts.

[12] Wierzbicka's definition of *boundedness* relates to the idea of 'bounded in place', that is, of being all in the same place. In this sense, it is slightly different from Jackendoff's use of the concept (see (9) above), which has to do with the possibility of adding entities to the virtual aggregate denoted by the sole noun. For instance, *the leftovers from the previous day in a particular household* denotes an aggregate to which no additional entities might be added (Wierzbicka's sense), but at the notional level, *leftovers* does not specify the number of parts that constitute the whole (Jackendoff's sense). *A pig*, on the other hand, is bounded (in Jackendoff's sense) because it may not be divided or augmented with more objects of the same kind while retaining its identity.

I suggest that part of Wierzbicka's conclusions are in fact the consequences of a more general difference in construal. Rather than a contrast between 'unity of purpose' and 'same place/same reason', I propose a divide based on the information conveyed by number:
- foregrounding of a unity of purpose (cf. Wierzbicka) for singular nouns, as singular number implies some form of unity;
- but foregrounding of the *plurality of entities* for plural nouns, due to their plural number[13].

This difference in foregrounding is largely motivated by our experience of the items, but there is also, again, a morphological parameter.

Let us first consider the pair *clothes / clothing*. *Clothing* is formed of a verb + the *-ing* suffix, which marks 'the collective designation of the substance or material employed in an action or process' (OED). *Clothing* consequently means 'that which serves to clothe'. Because it is derived from the verb, it foregrounds the purpose (*to clothe*). Because it is non-count and singular, it is applicable to a plurality or to a single entity; the entities are not explicitly separated, although from experience, we know that *clothing* is realised as a number of different articles. *Clothes*, on the other hand, being a plural, foregrounds the plurality of items; hence the possibility of *a number of clothes* (vs. **a number of clothing*). *Clothes* can be glossed as 'the items of different kinds that someone dresses (gets clothed) with'[14]. This contrast in foregrounding, I propose, accounts for the preferences noted by Wierzbicka, as well as for the following differences:

a) although the two nouns are very often interchangeable, the preferred collocations are different. In the COCA corpus (Davies 2008-), the queries *clothing / clothes + [any noun]* yield the following top results:
- *clothing*: store(s), boutique, company, manufacturer, business, factories, industry, items, sizes, allowance, brands, etc.
- *clothes*: dryer/drier, closet, hanger(s), line, washer(s), basket, hamper, shop, pegs, etc.

Clothes is clearly more concrete (the items as used in everyday life), whereas *clothing*, which foregrounds the purpose rather than the plurality of the items themselves, is more abstract, with the capacity to denote an economic sector. In some contexts, it even denotes more than the clothes proper, as in (10) below, where *clothes laws* would not be acceptable because the laws are also about the way of dressing.

(10) (Google Books) *Clothing laws in the 1440s forbade people to dress like those considered more important than them*.

b) *clothing* has a broader extension than *clothes*. Hence the collocation 'clothes and clothing', which implies that the two nouns are not equivalent. On shopping websites for children with disabilities (such as livingmadeeasy.org.uk), *clothing* includes sitting bags and coveralls, leg covers, bibs and aprons. *Clothes* does not seem applicable to these items. Why not? As *clothing* foregrounds purpose to the detriment of the plurality of items, it can apply to anything that is used to cover the body, whatever the size, type or arrangement. As *clothes*

[13] As pointed out by one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper, this contrast in foregrounding between singular and plural is found in other areas of the English language as well, in particular in number agreement with coordinates. For instance, the plural agreement in *Bread and butter are (*is) found in ailes 1 and 7, respectively* (cited by Zhang, 2009, p. 130) makes *bread* and *butter* two distinct items (what Zhang, following McNally, 1993, p. 363, terms 'accidental coordination'), while the singular in *Bread and butter is all we had* has a unifying effect, presenting *bread and butter* as a single dish (what Zhang terms 'natural coordination'). Similarly, one might say *3 and 5 makes 8* (natural coordination), while only the plural can be used in *3 and 5 are odd numbers* (accidental coordination) (Zhang, 2009, p. 132).

[14] As for count *garment(s)*, it may be glossed as *item(s) that someone dresses with*. The heterogeneity of kinds is backgrounded, and the plurality *garments* is viewed as a sum of individual items of the same overall kind, each of which can be singled out as *a garment*.

foregrounds the plurality of items used for dressing, it has come to apply to those that are used as in everyday life.

This analysis can be extended to the other nouns of the corpus that have an *-ing* ending. Singular *bedding* foregrounds the purpose: 'for the bed/to make a bed'. Note that when used for animals, it denotes homogeneous stuff (litter): the noun says nothing about instantiation. *Furnishings* is slightly more complex. A singular might have been expected because of the common purpose ('to furnish a place with'), and the noun did have singular uses (*furnishing*). Today, some speakers use the word in the singular, but only when it denotes the economic sector: e.g. *Ikea, the home furnishing giant* / *57% is converted into clothing, and over a third is used in home furnishing* (Google Books). Shopping websites only appear to have plural *furnishings*. There, the items are highly heterogeneous: curtains, rugs, wall stickers, house signs, decorative accessories, etc. This heterogeneity, which is much broader than in the past, might explain why the plurality of items has come to prevail over the common purpose in the construal. The noun being deverbal, the shift in meaning from the act of furnishing to the products may also have contributed to the foregrounding of the plurality of items.

A similar analysis holds for *supplies*. If one considers *office supplies*, the singular *office supply* only denotes the act of supplying offices. The shift to denoting the items could explain why the plurality of items is foregrounded, especially as a singular sense co-exists (for the sector, or as in *a supply of water*). The same goes for *refreshments*.

The difference in construal also holds for *-ware* compounds. *Ware* has two senses (OED). It may be used for vessels, as in *graniteware*, or for any articles of manufacture, as in *flatware* (cutlery and plates). In the first case, it highlights a common purpose ('to eat with', or 'for decoration', etc.). Maybe based on *kitchenware*, used in stores, *-ware* has become a highly productive compound in commercial contexts, with the sense 'anything for…': *picnicware*, *dinnerware*, *cookware*, *tableware*, *giftware* or, as found via a Google search, *homeware*, *laboratory ware* and *hospital ware*. The first element of the compound highlights the purpose.

This brings us to the contrast between *kitchenware* / *-s* and *woodenware* / *-s*. The plural is rare compared to the singular, and further investigation is needed to see whether some speakers do use both the singular and the plural. But the difference in number is compatible with the construals noted above, as reflected in (11)-(12):

(11) (Google Books) *Kitchenwares suddenly attained the status of Fetish objects in certain American circles, where you just had to have a Le Creuset casserole dish and a crepe pan the size of a manhole cover.*

(12) (Google Books) *His cooking was done on a wooden plank bearing a stove and some basic kitchenware.*

The sentence in (11) can be rephrased as *kitchenwares were suddenly Fetish objects…*, focusing on the items viewed in their plurality; whereas in (12), purpose ('to cook with') prevails in this description of a cooking technique. The plural was also found in works on archaeology, maybe because what is dug up are a few disparate items rather than a whole range.

The analysis of *-ware* compounds brings us to the morphological parameter and, again, to the notion of 'attractor'. Shops, especially to name departments, make wide use of this pattern for cooking and decorating (e.g. preferring *giftware* to *gifts*). This might be meant to emphasize unity of purpose within a department, but conversely, morphology, by making new nouns available along the same pattern, might have motivated coinage. The same holds for another highly productive ending in commercial contexts, *-wear*: the coining of a noun along this pattern may not just be a consequence of the construal of the aggregate considered in

isolation (e.g. in everyday life, the plural *beach clothes* is more widely used than *beachwear*), but also a reason why the aggregate is construed in that way.

The contrast between singular and plural construal also holds for nouns that end with the suffix *-ery*, although it is no longer productive. The suffix, of unclear origin, is found with many different meanings in borrowings from the French. For some nouns, it seems to have acquired a collective meaning (OED). The literal sense does not foreground purpose, but a common origin (e.g. *cutlery*, literally 'articles made or sold by cutlers'), domain (*machinery*) or type and material (*crockery*, 'crocks or earthen vessels collectively', OED). Yet the fact that those nouns are non-count singular (e.g. *machinery* vs. count *machines*) brings a unifying perspective, backgrounding the discrete entities and foregrounding instead a common purpose ('to eat with', 'to adorn the body', etc.), as well as variety of kinds.

This difference also applies to *equipment*(s). In (7) above, *40 electric equipments [...] will be installed* construes each equipment as independent, whereas a singular (*some electric equipment*) would foreground the common purpose and thus construe the equipment as one whole, all the items contributing together to fitting out locomotives.

Finally, the analysis also holds for Latin plurals. I chose to focus on the string '*[Latin plural]* + '*is* / *are*', which clearly shows the grammatical number of the noun. Here again, a further study would establish whether alternations are common for one given speaker, but the search yielded one case of alternation. If the phenomenon was confirmed on a larger basis, this would suggest that singular and plural convey different construals:

(13) (Google Books, expanded from [1] above) *FAMILY MEMORABILIA, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND VIDEOS* What <u>is</u> family memorabilia*? Memorabilia <u>are</u> items that evoke memories of important events or special times*.

As with *clothing / clothes*, both numbers are usually interchangeable, but the singular tends to correspond to a more abstract perspective, possibly the domain, while the plural is found when the focus is on the items themselves ('are items').

Conclusion

This corpus study has brought some insight as to why aggregates of discrete entities can be denoted by plural, yet non-count, nouns. Two parameters have been made out: semantics, but also morphology. In terms of semantics, lexical plurals imply that the entities are construed as being of different kinds (unlike count nouns), either because they share a quality that is not sufficient to subsume them under one kind, or because they are grouped together on the basis of place. Moreover, they foreground the plurality of entities in the aggregate (contrary to non-count *singular* nouns, which foreground unity of purpose). As regards morphology, the notion of 'attractor' was proposed for some patterns which at least partly motivate the grammatical features of countability and number.

A collateral finding is that in the corpus, lexical plurals are far less common than non-count singulars and count plurals, and that their plural number is largely unstable. Some lexical plurals that end with an -s tend to undergo reanalysis of the -s as a morphological plural, while Latin plurals tend to be reanalysed as (non-count) singulars. It should not be concluded that *all* lexical plurals that denote aggregates of discrete entities are grammatically unstable. The nouns under study are heads of categories in nomenclatures, and in that respect, are prone to favour some form of unity; other aggregates which totally lack unity (e.g. *odds-and-ends*, *belongings*) do remain stable plurals. But what this finding confirms is the idea that for aggregates of discrete entities at least, plural number, even when it is not inflectional, foregrounds the notion of plurality, while the singular, even when there is no corresponding

plural, foregrounds some sort of unity; and that morphology (-s vs. lack of -s), again, has an influence on the grammatical features of countability and number, this time in the reanalysis of number values.

One area that calls for further study is the number morphology of lexical plurals in compounds: the study showed both *home furnishings giant* and *home furnishing giant*; one can also cite *office supplies store / office supply store*. The instability of the final -s is well-known for some lexical plurals (e.g. *trousers* does not have a final -s in compounds, such as *trouser leg*), but the reasons are not entirely clear, and here, the same noun presents number variation in the same collocation. Count nouns could also be included in the study; for instance, *collectible*, though frequently used in the singular, seems to have a preferred compounding pattern in -s (e.g. *the collectibles market*).

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Abstract

Lexical plurals for aggregates of discrete entities in English: why plural, yet non-count, nouns?

This paper studies why, for a plurality of discrete entities, a non-count plural might be preferred over a count noun or a non-count singular. Building partly on Wierzbicka (1985, 1988), it proposes two parameters: semantics, but also morphology. With lexical plurals, the items are construed as being of different kinds (vs. count nouns) and the focus is on the plurality of items rather than on a common purpose (vs. non-count singulars). For morphology, the notion of 'attractor' is proposed for some patterns which partly motivate the [+/-count] and number features. A collateral finding is that the plural of lexical plurals can be unstable: some nouns ending with -s undergo reanalysis as morphological plurals, while Latin plurals tend to be reanalysed as singulars. It is suggested that this trend confirms the semantic values of singular and plural numbers, as well as the influence of the morphological parameter on number and construal.

Keywords: lexical plurals, aggregates, count/non-count, grammatical/lexical number, morphological attractor