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# Annotating the Countability of English Nouns on a large Scale

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Resources containing detailed information on the lexical countability of English nouns are scarce. While only a few nouns and their most likely countability class are cited as examples in the literature on the count-mass distinction quite frequently, a larger lexicon with high quality annotations does not exist.

To close this gap, a reliable manual annotation of the lexical countability of nouns is necessary. Several test settings for the determination of the countability of English or German nouns were constructed. They are designed to eliminate distracting contextual influences like the universal-sorter (Bunt, 1985) or the universal-grinder (Pelletier, 1975). Using these tests and corresponding annotation guidelines, four native speakers of English identified the lexical countability of several thousand English nouns. High values achieved in an inter-annotator agreement for the annotation suggest the overall feasibility of the tests.

Annotators for example shall determine whether or not a noun in question can

- i. show a mass-reading without the need for an universal-grinder context:
  - a) *She ate more cake than him.*
  - b) *\*She owns more skyscraper than him.*
- ii. appear in plural and hereby establishes a hidden universal-sorter or -packager:
  - a) *She owns more cars than him.*
  - b) *She owns more wines than him.* (Hidden universal-sorter or -packager)
  - c) *\*She ate more rices than him.*
- iii. appear with the indefinite article:
  - a) *A cat is a mammal.*
  - b) *\*A steel is an alloy.*
- iv. appear without an (indefinite) article:
  - a) *Fear is an emotion.*
  - b) *\*Bike is a means of transportation.*

While some issues concerning the annotation process, e.g. the classification of certain types of nominalizations, still remain to be solved, we took a step further in creating a high quality large scale resource on the countability of English nouns, which ultimately will allow further data-driven research on this topic.

## References

- Bunt, H. C. (1985). *Mass Terms and Model-Theoretic Semantics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pelletier, F. J. (1975). *Non-Singular Reference: Some Preliminaries*. In *Philosophia*, 5(4), p. 451-465.