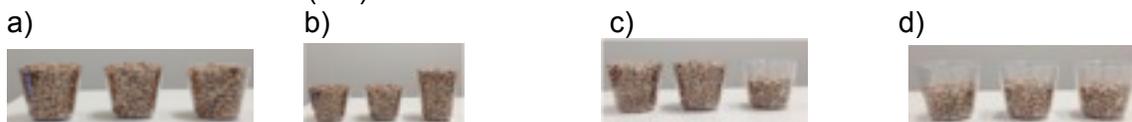


On concrete portion, individuation and measurement interpretations: interpreting container phrases

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Introduction: Container nouns (*cup*) are nouns that denote concrete objects that can be used as receptacles for substances. It has been argued that in constructions with numerals (as in ‘two glasses of water’), container phrases can be interpreted in at least two different ways (Selkirk 1977, Rothstein 2012, Partee and Borschev 2012). Firstly, a container noun can be used to denote actual containers filled with some substance; e.g. ‘glasses of water’ can denote actual glasses filled with some quantity of water (individuation). Secondly, a container noun can be used as the description of a unit of measurement. In this case, the numeral specifies a quantity on a scale whose units are described by the container noun; e.g. ‘glasses of water’ need not refer to actual glasses filled with water, but only to portions of water whose volume corresponds to the content of a glass (measurement). In this paper, based on experimental data, I will contrast the interpretation of container phrases in Brazilian Portuguese, English and Yudja based on experimental data.

The study (felicity judgment task) the Brazilian Portuguese, English and Yudja participants saw a sequence of four short videos that bias the interpretation of a measure phrase towards a measurement (Maria drank two cups of water/ poured two cups of beans) or an individuation (Mary put two bottles of milk/ bowls of rice on the table) interpretation. The four videos differed with respect to whether the containers were full and identical or not (a-d).



In measurement scenarios, we expected a “yes” answer for “Did Mary poured two cups of beans in the soup?” only if Mary poured two identical cups of beans (a-b). In individuation scenarios, when asked “Did Mary put two cups of beans on the table?” we expected a “yes” answer for all scenarios independently of the amounts of substances in the containers (as long as we had two cups on the table and that we had some amount of beans on them).

Discussion Based on the results of a felicity judgment task with children and adults with Brazilian Portuguese, English and Yudja, the goal of this paper is twofold. First, I intend to argue that individuation precedes measure. This claim is based on the results from English: while adult participants (37 adults) were sensitive to the properties that distinguish individuation from measure, children participants (33 children; 3 to 6 year olds) only start to present the same pattern as adults by 6 years of age. Before that they ignored the verb/context bias and treated measure scenarios as individuation scenarios. Second, differently from English, I intend to argue that container phrases in Yudja can be interpreted as locatives or trigger a concrete portion interpretation that is different from measure. Similar results were found for Brazilian Portuguese when the question included a prepositional phrase (*Eu bebi dois copos com água* ‘I drank two cups with water’) as opposed to pseudopartitive constructions (*Eu bebi dois copos de água* ‘I drank two cups of water’).