

## Nibbling is not many bitings in French and Italian: A morphosemantic analysis of internal plurality

**The issue** Internal pluractionality is a plurality of phases that make up one single event. Building on Cusic (1981), Lasersohn (1995) treats external and internal pluractionality alike, reducing the difference to a constraint on the instantiation of the predicate variable for the subevents of the event. This paper provides semantic and morphological arguments to show that a plurality of phases cannot be arrived at in the same way as a plurality of events.

**Morphological evidence** French and Italian include a sizeable number of verbs expressing internal pluractionality, such as F *mordiller* and I *mordicchiare*, both meaning to ‘nibble’, next to nonpluractional F *mordre* / I *mordere* ‘to bite’. Despite appearances, these verbs cannot be considered deverbal verbs for the following reasons: i) many of them have no simple counterparts, e.g. F *gigoter* ‘to fidget’ (\**giguer*), I *balbettare* ‘to stammer’ (\**balbare*); ii) the endings they have in common are too numerous for derivational morphemes: at least 9 in French, 14 in Italian, with no rationale for selection on individual verbs, although native speakers have clear-cut well-formedness judgments; iii) Romance deverbal derivation is prefixal; iv) all these verbs belong to the 1<sup>st</sup> conjugation class, whereas paired nonpluractionals (if any) belong to any class, and conjugation class is a property of the stem.

**Semantic evidence** Empirical evidence against an identical treatment of event external and internal pluralities comes, first, from the fact that the latter requires argument identity across phases, the former doesn’t. In (1a), one or two cuts per apple won’t do even if there are many apples, hence many cuts in total. Each affected apple must be cut several times, contrary to what can hold in (1b). Second, phases cannot be ordered in time, nor is it possible to check that the intervals they occur in are disjoint (2), as their running time cannot be specified individually. They also cannot be counted (3) or compared in number (4).

- (1) a I Ha tagliuzzato le mele (S/he chopped the apples)  
 b I Ha tagliato le mele (S/he cut the apples)  
 (2) I Il colpo di fucile ha bucherellato l’otre (The gunshot made several holes in the waterskin)  
 (3) a I Ha mordicchiato due volte la penna <sup>ok</sup>2 events, \*2 phases (S/he nibbled the pen twice)  
 b I Ha morso due volte la penna <sup>ok</sup>2 events (S/he bit the pen twice)  
 (4) I Ha mordicchiato la penna più di Lea (S/he nibbled the pen <sup>ok</sup>longer/\*more times than Lea)

**Analysis** We analyse these verbs as involving simple stems, and the endings as submorphs analogous to the initial /sl/ of English *slip*, *slide*, *slobber*, etc. (see Dressler 1990). It is the presence of these submorphs that imbues the whole stem with the special pluractional meaning. As for semantics, phases are the manifestation that the threshold of resolution for perception that allows a grouping has been crossed. The threshold corresponds to the point from where the type of the description is no longer valid. We take up Landman’s (2000) idea that distributivity is a form of plurality. The pluractional submorpheme encodes two operations of decomposition, i) the event is decomposed into a plurality of phases and ii) at least one participant in decomposed into parts and the phases are subevents affecting parts of such a participant. Fragmenting the participant requires a grind operation that associates the domain of mass with the domain of atoms. In (2) the water skin is viewed as an atom, but the *bucherellare* affects it part by part. The plural predicate does not necessarily distribute all over the entity and parts may overlap, i.e. it is a cover. The entry of the verb is as in (5).

- (5)  $\lambda x \lambda y \lambda e [(BUCHERELLARE(e) \ \& \ Ag(e,y) \ \& \ Pat(e,x))] \Leftrightarrow$   
 $\exists e' (e = \uparrow *BUCAREPART(e') \ \& \ *Ag(e,y) \ \& \ g(x) = u(\{g(z) | z \in AT(*Pat(e'))\}))]$

In words, an event *e* of *bucherellare* with *y* as agent and *x* as patient is viewed as (is equivalent to) the groupification of the plural event *e'* which involves the same agent *y* and the sum of the parts of the same patient *x*. Connectedness properties follows from the fact that the plurality of phases making up *e'* is the single event *e*. Finally, the grinding operation on the patient entity into possibly overlapping cells means that the entity can no longer measure out the event (Krifka 1998), therefore the change from telic *mangiare la mela* ‘eat the apple’ into atelic pluractional *mangiucchiare la mela* ‘peck at the apple’ is also expected.

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