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Gender, number and classifiers: explaining the quirks of the  
Serbo-Croatian neuter

**Wann? 06.06.2000, 16.15-17.45 Uhr**

**Wo? Dorotheenstr. 65, Raum 5.57**

*Abstract*

1. Collective forms are only productively derived from neuter gender nouns, in which case they may trigger plural agreement on the finite verb. Those from the other two genders trigger only singular.
2. Wechsler & Zlatić (2000) analyze the agreement of semantically MPI, morpho-syntactically FSg hybrid agreement nouns as NPI: where does the neuter come from?
3. Neuter nouns derived from non-neuter bases cannot inflect for plural.
4. Irrespective of the gender of the nouns and referents involved, deictic expressions, expressions with a marked person value and expressions referring to assemblies of individual atoms cannot trigger NPI agreement.

I propose a view in which the count-mass distinction corresponds to a lexical specification of a noun for the fitting classifier, i.e. the specification of the default unit of counting. Count nouns have such specification, and mass nouns lack them. I model collective nouns as nouns specified for a paucal classifier.

This lexical classifier specification can be over-written by an explicit classifier. Such cases allow for coercion: a mismatch between the type of the overt classifier and the type of the classifier the noun is lexically specified for.

In order for the lexically specified classifier to be interpreted and to compose with other grammatically specified semantic components, e.g. grammatical number, this component needs to be grammatically expressed. In Serbo-Croatian, it is grammatically expressed through the morpho-syntactic realization of gender. Neuter gender stands for the absence of gender (Kramer 2009), and hence it leads to a failure to syntactically express the incorporated classifier. I show how this explains the observations in (1-4).