Abstract:
The interpretation of measure phrases varies systematically with their syntactic position within the nominal phrase: the pseudo-partitive "two pounds of boxes" expresses a measure of total weight, whereas the attributive "two-pound boxes" concerns distributed weight (Schwarzschild 2006). The syntactically regulated property of the dimension of measurement (here, weight) is (non-)monotonicity on the part-whole relation in the domain given by the noun phrase. Because their syntax imposes a monotonic interpretation, pseudo-partitive measure phrases cannot combine with singular count nouns: "*two pounds of box", as these nouns do not have extensions with a part-whole relation among their elements. Cardinality measure expressions conform to this generalization and also prohibit singular count nouns: "*many box", "*two box", requiring plural nouns instead: "many boxes", "two boxes".

Yet, numerically-quantified noun phrases show variation in number marking, cross-linguistically and within one and the same language, posing an apparent challenge to the monotonicity generalization. Existing analyses have not addressed the challenge
specifically, and have provided different answers to the questions of (i) whether numerals need to combine with predicates of singularities or pluralities, (ii) whether number features on nouns are interpreted or simply the result of (uninterpretable) agreement.

I present evidence from Bulgarian that (i) numerals can combine with semantically singular noun phrases, (ii) the singular or plural nominal number features are interpretable. The arguments involve a reanalysis of one type of number inflection for masculine nouns (the ‘count’ form), which has traditionally been considered a form of plural agreement. The analysis places Bulgarian among an understudied group of languages, where singular vs. plural nominal number in numerically-quantified noun phrases varies by noun class. I then show that Russian noun phrases combining with paucal numerals can also be analyzed as being singular-marked, refuting the need for positing a paucal number in that language. I end with a suggestion that what underlies variation in number marking across and within languages is that there are two routes to obtaining cardinality measures, each satisfying the spirit of the monotonicity generalization.