Size Adjectives and Clusters: The Case of *melkij*

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Object mass nouns like *furniture*, granular aggregates such as *rice* and collective nouns such as the Russian *klubnika* 'strawberry' have grammatical properties of mass nouns, despite being conceptually associated with clearly defined natural units (NU, Krifka 1989), e.g., a chair, a grain of rice, and a single berry. These NU can be accessed by stubbornly distributive adjectives, including adjectives of size and shape (Schwarzschild 2011). For instance, the expression *big furniture* specifies that **the pieces of furniture** are big.

Diverging from this documented observation, the Russian default size adjectives *malen'kij* 'small' and *bol'šoj* 'large' cannot be used with nouns like *ris* 'rice' or *pesok* 'sand'. Instead, Russian uses **specialized (SP)** size adjectives *melkij* 'small', 'fine' and *krupnyj* 'large' (1).

(1)	melkij/???malen'kij	gravij / pesok	krupnyj/???bol'šoj	grad / ris
	small_{SP} small	gravel sand	large_{SP} large	hail rice

The goal of the present research is to investigate specialized size adjectives, concentrating on *melkij*. The data is based on corpus search (Russian National Corpus) and native speaker judgments elicited via questionnaires.

Under its prototypical physical size meaning (small), *melkij* is compatible with the following noun types. **Mass nouns**: **Granular aggregates** *gravij* 'gravel', *pesok* 'sand', *ris* 'rice' • **collective nouns** *kartofel'* 'potato', *žemčug* 'pearl' • **object mass nouns** *musor* 'garbage', *kuxonnaja utvar'* 'kitchenware'.

Count plural nouns: **nouns denoting parts/fragments** *kusočki* 'parts (diminutive)', *oskolki* 'splinters' • **nouns whose denotata come in clusters** *stežki* 'stitches', *rëbryški* 'ribs (diminutive)'.

Count singular nouns conceptualized as consisting of multiple homogenous parts: *dožd'* 'rain', *šov* 'seam', *počerk* 'handwriting'. For instance, rain is conceptualized as consisting of multiple water droplets; *melkij dožd'* 'drizzle' specifies that the drops are small.

We can generalize that *melkij* applies to nouns denoting collections of entities and specifies that individual members of these collections (not the collections themselves) are small. As long as the collection condition is satisfied, it is compatible with both mass and count nouns (e.g. *gravij* 'gravel' and *dožd'* 'rain'); within the count domain, it combines with both singular and plural nouns.

I propose that *melkij* applies to nominals that denote **spatial clusters** in the sense of Grimm (2012) and Wągiel (2021). That aggregate nouns, object mass nouns and collectives (may) denote clusters has been proposed by Grimm (2012), Wągiel and Shlikhutka (2023) and Kagan (2024). Count singular nouns like *dožd'* 'rain' denote clusters by virtue of their lexical semantics. Count plurals like *kusočki* 'pieces' tend to denote clusters by virtue of their **plurality** in combination with **parthood** meaning. With all these noun types except count plurals, members of clusters are not linguistically accessible unless special operators are applied. *Melkij* is exactly such an operator. It applies to a cluster-denoting nominal and specifies that each indiviual member of the cluster is small in size relative to the contextually specified standard of comparison (e.g. Kennedy 1999, 2007, Fortin 2011).

(2) $[[\text{melkij}]] = \lambda P \lambda x: \text{CLSTR}_{SP}(P)(x).\ \forall y\ [(\text{NU}(P)(y)\ \&\ y < x) \rightarrow \text{size}(y) < \text{STND}]$

In contrast, *malen'kij* cannot "extract" otherwise inaccessible NU; it simply applies to a property *P* and specifies that *P*-individuals are small:

(3) $[[\text{malen'kij}]] = \lambda P \lambda x.\ P(x)\ \&\ \text{size}(x) < \text{STND}$