ABSTRACT
We investigated the agreement properties of conjoined noun phrases using corpora and a verb elicitation task. The corpus analysis revealed that singular verb usage varied as a function of conjunct type, where singular verbs were more likely after simple mass and deverbal conjuncts than after count conjuncts. In the verb elicitation task, participants produced verbs after different conjunct types including simple mass and count and deverbal mass and count conjuncts. The rate of singular verb usage patterned after apparent notional differences of the conjuncts, suggesting a role for number meaning in conjunct-verb agreement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
• What happens when there’s no single, apparent agreement controller?
• Are mass nouns singularly marked?
• Is conjunct-verb agreement variability attributable to notional properties?

VERB ELICITATION TASK
PROCEDURE
64 participants
Sentence Completion task (Bock & Miller, 1991)
• Hear preamble
• Repeat preamble and complete sentence, telling us “where things are”

MANIPULATION
4 types of conjoined noun phrases (all singular nouns)
• Simple count “the name and address”
• Simple mass “the tea and coffee”
• Deverbal count “the operation and recovery”
• Deverbal mass “the singing and dancing”

HYPOTHESES
1. Notional: Simple mass nouns are less enumerable than simple count
• Prediction: Expect more singular verbs after simple mass nouns than simple count
2. Lexical: Mass nouns do not bear singular lexical specification (Middleton & Bock, 2006)
• Prediction: Deverbal mass and deverbal count nouns (assuming equivalent notional number properties) should not differ in rate of singular verb agreement

CONCLUSIONS
• Simple mass conjuncts elicited more singular verbs than simple count conjuncts.
• Deverbal conjuncts led to significantly more singular verbs than simple count and simple mass conjuncts, but deverbal count and deverbal mass behaved similarly.
• Overall, the results suggest the existence of a notional contribution to conjunct-verb number agreement in English and support the view that mass nouns are not specified singular in the lexicon.

REFERENCES

FUTURE WORK
• Vary position of subject relative to the verb
• Compare with first conjunct agreement phenomena
• Explore agreement with events versus objects
• Analyze acoustic differences in lexical stress patterns