

## Morphosyntactic identity of count plural and mass N(P)s

M. Rita Manzini -Firenze

**1. Outline.** Mass and count plural nouns share the important property of divisibility, which opposes them to count singulars, which have an atomic denotation (e.g. Rijkhoff 1991). The morphology of English groups together mass and count singular nouns as opposed to count plurals (1a). However we expect it to be at least possible for a morphological system to group together plural count and mass nouns as opposed to count singular, as in (1b). In this paper, we argue that this expectation is fulfilled by Albanian.

- |     |                           |    |               |               |
|-----|---------------------------|----|---------------|---------------|
| (1) | a. divisible set          | vs | mass & atomic | e.g. English  |
|     | b. divisible (set & mass) | vs | atomic        | e.g. Albanian |

The phenomenon we discuss is syntactic since it involves syntactic Agree. We propose to account for it on the basis of a property [Part] encompassing subset and part/whole divisibility.

**2. Albanian evidence.** The traditional neuter of standard Albanian is in reality a mass nominal class. Contrary to standard Albanian (Camaj 1984: §14), it is still productive in Italo-Albanian (Arbëresh) varieties (not standardized, hence rendered here in a broad IPA). For the sake of presentation, we exemplify direct case forms for which we assume that only gender, number and definiteness are relevant. In the definite declension, the *-t* definite ending only occurs in the plural of count Ns (3a) and in the so-called neuter with mass nouns (3b). The masculine singular (3a) has *-i*, the feminine singular (3d) has *-a*. This is not a matter of morphological syncretism or of lexical derivation, since it triggers phrasal agreement. Under Agree, the *ata* demonstrative in (2) also singles out plural and mass/neuter forms – and so does the *tə* Lkr in front of adjectives (3a), cf. (5b) below.

- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| (2) | a. <i>at-a diaθ</i><br>that-N cheese<br>'that cheese'                    | b. <i>at-a burr-a/gra:</i><br>that-PL man-PL/woman.PL<br>'those men/women' |
| (3) | a. <i>diaθ-t tə barð</i><br>cheese-N.DEF LKR white<br>'the white cheese' | b. <i>burr-a-t/ gra:-t</i><br>men-PL-DEF/ woman-PL.DEF<br>'the men/women'  |
|     | c. <i>burr-(i)</i><br>man-M.SG.DEF<br>'(the) man'                        | d. <i>vajz-a/-a</i><br>girl-F.SG/-F.SG.DEF<br>'(the) girl'                 |

On the other hand, while neuter/mass DPs are indistinguishable from count plurals within the DP, they agree with the verb in the singular as in (4) – cf. (5b) for the contrast with count plurals.

- (4) *diaθ-t əft tə barð*  
cheese-PL.DEF is LKR white  
'The cheese is white'

Note that no count interpretation is available for the neuter/mass class. In the singular, the count interpretation is available with the ordinary masculine declension (5a). The count plural of the relevant lexical bases requires a plural infix *-ər-*, to which the *-t* plural inflection is suffixed (5b).

- (5) a. *diaθ-i*  
cheese-M.SG.DEF  
'the block/wheel/type etc. of cheese'
- b. *diaθ-ər-at jan tə shkalmuar-a*  
cheese-PL-PL.DEF are LKR spoiled-PL  
'The cheeses are spoiled'

**3. Morphological analysis.** We adopt a classical tripartite structure for N (e.g. Halle & Vaux 1998, Piccallo 2008) consisting of an (acategorical) root, a (categorizing) N/Class node and a third slot given over to Number and/or Case. As anticipated, only Num is relevant for the present discussion. Plural can be represented both as Class or as Num. Thus in Spanish (6a) there is a dedicated *-s* exponent of Num which adds to the exponent of Class (gender). However in minimally different Italian (6b), there

is a single exponent for gender and number, corresponding to the lowest Class slot of the structure.

- (6)
- |        |              | M                  | M PL                               | F                  | F PL                               |
|--------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. Sp. | <i>niñ-</i>  | [- <i>o</i> Class] | [- <i>o</i> Class] - <i>s</i> Num] | [- <i>a</i> Class] | [- <i>a</i> Class] - <i>s</i> Num] |
| b. It. | <i>bimb-</i> | [- <i>o</i> Class] | [- <i>i</i> Class]                 | [- <i>a</i> Class] | [- <i>e</i> Class]                 |

As a consequence, some languages may have a double exponence for number, which is verified by Albanian/Arbëresh. For instance in the indefinite plural (7a), the *-a* inflection in Class is specialized for plural, alternating with feminine *-ə* (3d) and masculine  $\emptyset$  (3c). In the definite plural, the *-t* inflection in Num is again specialized for plural, not appearing in the singular (3c-d).

- (7)
- |    |   |       |
|----|---|-------|
| a. | [[[ <i>burr</i> ] - <i>a</i> Class]                 | (=2b) |
| b. | [[[ <i>burr</i> ] - <i>a</i> Class] - <i>t</i> Num] | (=3b) |

**4. Syntactic analysis.** However we may want to characterize it, the neuter/mass property of Albanian is syntactically relevant, since Agree is sensitive to it. We propose that in addition to [pl], a property [mass] is also morphosyntactically encoded in Albanian. The two features can be roughly defined as in (8). As indicated, both introduce a partition operator and therefore define a natural class [Part].

- (8)
- |    |  |
|----|--|
| a. | [man] [Part: pl] →   |
|    | ‘there is an x such that x is a subset of the set ‘man’    |
| b. | [cheese] [Part: mass] →                                    |
|    | ‘there is an x such that x is a part of the whole ‘cheese’ |

We propose that the Class and Num morphology of Albanian is sensitive to [Part]. Therefore Albanian realizes [Part] morphology, in particular the Num suffix *-t*, both on plural Ns (7b) and on mass Ns (9). Note that there is no evidence that different features are cartographically mapped to different heads – or adjoined vs heads (Wiltschko 2008).

- (9) [[*diaθ*] -*t* Num] (=3a)

The fact that Class and Num morphology externalizes the superclass [Part] further means that plural and mass NPs are also identical under Agree, for instance between N and AP (LkrP) in (10).

- (10) [<sub>NP</sub> *diaθt*<sub>[Part]</sub> [<sub>LKRP</sub> *tθ*<sub>[Part]</sub> [<sub>AP</sub> ...] (=3a)

Contrary to N morphology and NP-internal Agree in (9)-(10), which are sensitive to the [Part] superclass, the Albanian finite verb is English-like in that it is sensitive only to [pl]. In other words, even though nominal morphology externalizes the superclass [Part], the full feature specification remains visible to Agree, including [pl], as in (11), with respect to which the verb agrees.

- (11) [<sub>NP</sub> *diaθərat*<sub>[Part:pl]</sub> [<sub>IP</sub> *jan*<sub>[Part:pl]</sub> ...] =(5b)

**5. Crosslinguistic comparisons.** The morphosyntactic expression of count and mass encompasses considerable crosslinguistic variation (e.g. Massam ed. 2012). The Semitic languages also have plural DPs which may not trigger plural agreement on the verb (12). Subject-verb agreement in the plural implies the same readings as in English, i.e. a single event with multiple participants or multiple events, not necessarily with multiple participants (the distributive reading). Subject-verb agreement in the singular forces the single event reading. Extending the analysis of Albanian, one would say that Semitic irregular plural morphology in fact encode a [Part] superclass which in itself is compatible both with singular agreement (group/single event) and with plural agreement (ambiguous).

- (12)
- |    |   |                  |                            |  |
|----|---|------------------|----------------------------|--|
| a. | <i>Atakilt-u</i>                              | <i>därräs-u/</i> | <i>därräs-ä.</i>           |  |
|    | plant.PL-DEF                                  | arrived-PL /     | arrived-M.SG               |  |
|    | ‘The vegetables have/the produce has arrived’ |                  |                            | (Amharic, Kramer 2016)                 |
| b. | <i>El rjel</i>                                | <i>xerj-u</i>    | <i>wehed wehed/xerj-et</i> | (* <i>wehed wehed</i> )                |
|    | DEF man.PL                                    | exited-M.PL      | one one/                   | exited-F.SG one one                    |
|    | ‘The men went out (one by one)’               |                  |                            | (Tunisian Arabic, Dali & Mathieu 2016) |

We discuss the further emergence of feminine agreement on the verb in Arabic (12) (cf. Fassi Fehri 2018). Similarly, in progressive dialects of Arbëresh (Baldi & Savoia 2018) what we have characterized as [Part] morphology on N triggers feminine singular agreement on determiners and modifiers. This seems to show that group/mass specifications trigger their own gender.

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