

Grammaticalization of Plural Suffix *-gal* in Iranian Languages

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Abstract

In Persian and most of New Western Iranian languages also known as Iranian dialects, plurality is marked by *-ān* inherited from Western Middle Iranian plural marker. This marker derives from the genitive plural ending *-ānām*, or by *-ā* from Middle Persian *-thā*, originally an abstract marker, developed as a plural marker in inanimate words. In some other languages like Talyshi, Semnani, Balochi, and Zazaki which have preserved at least a two-case system, the plural is marked by case ending which is used to distinguish not only cases but also number. There are six groups of Iranian languages that show an innovative form of the plural suffix *-gal* taken from a collective suffix. The suffix has been formed as a result of grammaticalization of a collective noun *gal* “group, bound”. The purpose of the present paper is to demonstrate how the *-gal* or its allomorphs has been formed by grammaticalization of *gal* “group, band”.

Traditionally grammaticalization refers to the increase of the range of a morpheme advancing from a lexical to a grammatical or from a less grammatical to a more grammatical status, for example, from a derivative formant to an inflectional one. But in its broadest sense, it refers to the process by which grammar is created. In other words, it offers an explanatory account of how and why grammatical categories arise and develop. Grammaticalization involves four interrelated mechanisms: 1. semantic reduction which means loss or reduction in content meaning; 2. context generalization, e.g. increase of use in new contexts; 3. decategorialization: loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of the source forms, including the loss of independent word status; 4. erosion or phonetic reduction, that is, reduction in phonetic substance. Each of these mechanisms is concerned with a different aspect of language structure or language use, respectively: (1) relates to semantics, (2) to pragmatics, (3) to morphosyntax, and (4) to phonetics. Each of these mechanisms gives rise to a development which can be described in the form of a three-stage model as follows: first stage: there is a linguistic expression that is recruited for grammaticalization; second stage: this expression acquires a second use pattern, but there is ambiguity between the former

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pattern and the new one; third stage: finally, the former pattern is lost, and is replaced by the new pattern.

After an introduction on grammaticalization, and its special use in development of plural markers derived from collective nouns, the morphological and functional features of *-gal* is examined in six groups of New Western Iranian languages, including Bakhtiari, Boirahmadi, Ashtiani, Azarani, Eastern Balochi, and Southern Kurdish that utilize the suffix *-gal* as their plural marker. Considering that there is no historical evidence of this suffix use and by comparative analysis of morphological and functional features of the suffix and its allomorphs in the given languages, the stages of historical development in the grammaticalization of the suffix is recovered. Then the semantic, phonetic, pragmatic, and morphosyntactic mechanisms related to the grammaticalization is also examined.

The suffix *-gal* and its allomorphs are found in a number of Iranian languages. In Baxtiari, a variety of Lori, *-gal/-yal* is used for animate plural nouns, such as *dorgal* “daughters”, *piyâyal* “men”; beside the former plural marker *-ōw*: *behīgōw* “brides”; while for inanimate nouns in this variety the plural marker is *-ā*: *hīvehā* “firewoods”. In Boirahmadi, another Lori variety, the plural marker has two allomorphs *-al* and *-yal* which are the only plural markers used for all nouns, for instance, *piyâyal* “men”, *dâral* “trees”. Next, Azarani, a central Iranian language, uses *-gal* for nouns ending in a vowel: *pûra-gal* “boys”, while the nouns ending in a consonant is marked by *-ûn*: *varg-ûn* “wolves”. In Ashtiani, Amora’i and Naya’i *-gal* is a general marker for plural nouns which may be combined with the plural ending *-ân* in oblique plural case: *jârgal* or *jârgalân* “children”. Still more, in Eastern Balochi *gal* is not a suffix, but it is a noun used as a morpheme of a collective meaning in combination with the noun; the compound noun is inflected in singular: *zah.galā* “kids” (OBL.SG). Finally, in Southern Kurdish, we find different varieties of the suffix as *-gal*, *-al* and *-ayl* which are the general plural markers, for example, in Kermanshahi: the word *ženayl* which means “women”.

Since no evidence of historical background for the suffix *-gal* in Iranian languages is found, to show the historical development of this suffix, we should compare the languages to cover the historical stages of its grammaticalization as much as possible. Comparative analysis of the languages demonstrates that Eastern Balochi shows the first cycle in the process, where *gal* “a number” is not used as a collective or plural suffix, but as a postnominal noun of a collective meaning in combination with the noun. In Ashtiani *-gal* is used as a plural marker but the oblique plural ending is also used after *-gal*. The next stage of grammaticalization is found in Baxtiari and Azarani, where the collective changes to plural, and *-gal* is used as plural suffix, but with degrees of optionality. The last stage is found in Boirahmadi, Southern Kurdish, Amora’i and Naya’i in which *-gal* turns into a new grammatical category, where this suffix is obligatory for all plural nouns and has developed to some allomorphs.

Keywords: Grammaticalization, Plural suffix, Iranian languages, Iranian dialects