

Number Category in Language Varieties of Some Cities in Kerman Province: A Typological Study

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Abstract

At first glance, “number” is considered as a very simple grammatical category. However, in fact, it is a complex matter in languages and it causes varieties in world languages. The present study aims at examining the plurality and number category in language varieties of some cities in Kerman province based on typological approach. The survey’s corpus is extracted from Iran Linguistic Atlas’s database (ILA) a project compiling in Research Center of Cultural Heritage and Tourism. The research results show that, the value of number category in the studied language varieties is just singular and plural. The singular nouns are encoded without marker and the plural nouns are marked. The plural markers attach to singular nouns in suffix form, therefore the strategy for plurality in the studied language varieties is morphology, which is the most common one in the world languages. The data analysis indicates that syntactic strategy is used for encoding the number category along with morphological one.

Keywords: Number category, typology, Iran Linguistic Atlas, Language varieties in Kerman province

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1. Introduction

At first glance, “number” is considered as a very simple grammatical category and it is simply considered for distinguishing between singularity and plurality. However, in fact, it is not a simple matter in languages and the analysis of number and plurality in languages may be a complex matter. The way number is expressed in languages are different. In this study, number category and the way for encoding it, is examined in the language varieties of some cities in Kerman province based on typological approach. Also, plural markers in the studied language varieties are introduced. For analyzing the data, Corbet (2004), Dryer (1998 & 2005) and Haspelmat (2005) are used as theoretical frameworks. The corpus of this study has been extracted from the Iran Language Atlas (ILA) database. ILA is a linguistic project of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism (RICHT). It aims at recording the usage of words, phrases and sentences of every regional spoken dialect of Iran’s rural areas based on a questionnaire consists of 105 words and phrases and 36 sentences. Recorded data of spoken language of 30 varieties of the said province included in ILA’s database.

Research questions:

1. What is (are) the strategy(s) of encoding the "number" category in the studied language varieties?
2. Which forms of number (singular/plural) are marked and is the presence of marker on noun obligatory?
3. What kinds of number values do exist in the studied language varieties?

2. Literature Review

According to traditional grammar, there are singular and plural number in Persian. Singular in contrast with plural refers to one person or object in real world. There are two markers for plural nouns in Persian /-ha/ and /an/ which are attached as a suffix to the end of the singular nouns (Anvari and

Ahmadi Givi 2008:85). Singular nouns are zero-marked in Persian. Lazard (2010) and Mahutian (2008) mentioned that /-ha/ is used in both spoken and written styles and /-an/ which is changed to /-un/ in spoken language. Windfuhr and Perry (2009) believes that /-an/ is less frequent, denoting animates, paired parts of body, and a few other words. Paul (2019:585-586) states that /-an/ goes back to the Middle Persian and it was used for plural nouns in oblique case. In standard modern Persian, this plural suffix denotes the plural of animate nouns. He adds that in Modern Persian /-an/ is almost replaced by /-ha/. But sometimes the usage of /-ha/ instead of /-an/ causes difference in meaning of words. Shaghaghi (2007:55, 71) states that the plural markers in Persian are inflectional, because they do not produce a new word. However according to Ghomeshi (2003:56-57) they are derivational as they are variants based on different registers. Roshan and Ghadiri (2015) have mentioned that the suffix /-ha/ in Persian with time words refers to the meaning of repetition, along with plurality. Darzi and Ghadiri (2011) have studied the quantitative features of /-ha/ in Persian. They believe that this suffix with some time words shows quantitative features. Jam (2020) has examined the pronunciation of /-ha/ in Persian based on the theory of optimality. Different semantic functions of the suffix /-ha/ based on typological approach are studied by Bahrami (2018). According to Givon (2001) singularity is unmarked in the world languages but plurality is morphologically marked. He believes that in some languages plural forms are used just for animate nouns. Croft (2003) has mentioned that different languages show various behaviors in plurality. In some languages singular nouns are without marker but plural ones have markers on them. In some other languages both singular and plural nouns are with different markers. Also, there are a few languages in which none of the singular and plural nouns have markers on them. Some of the Iranian scholars like Rezai Baghbidi & Mahmoodi Bakhtiari (2005), Sharifi & Akhlaghi (2012), Karimi & Fallahi (2012) and Faalhi & Karimi (2015) have studied number category in some Iranian languages.

3. Methodology

This research is descriptive-analytical and is a field study, based on an original survey on natural linguistic data of the studied languages. Through this research, the singular nouns and their plural forms have been extracted from database and then analyzed according to the research theoretical frameworks. The data are from ILA database of Kerman province. In this study all 30 language varieties which are available in ILA database of Kerman province, are examined based on theoretical frameworks. The research corpus consists of 328 plural nouns and noun phrases.

4. Results

The Research aims at studying the “number” category in language varieties of some cities of Kerman Province based on typological approach. The data are from ILA database. Results show that the number system values are singular and plural in the whole analyzed research data. The singular nouns are zero-marked, but the plural ones have markers which are obligatory. The plural markers are in suffix forms attached to the singular nouns. The strategies of number category in all studied language varieties are morphological and syntactic ones.

Table 1.
Plural markers in Kerman province language varieties

	Language variety	Plural Marker				Example	Tranlation
		-a	-ha	-an/ -un	-lær/ -nær		
1	Persian	+	+	+	-	deræχt-a χorus-ha-j-e sija nʔa zæn-an deræχt-un	trees black cocks those women trees
2	Abgarmi	+	-	-	-	χorus-a sija	black cocks
3	Eshkur	+	-	-	-	doχtær -a χub	good girls

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4	Barfe	+	+	-	-	χorus-a sija ʔu zejfe-ha	black cocks thoes women
5	Baluchi	-	+	+	-	deræχt-ha ʔan dʒæn-an	trees thoes women
6	Turkic	-	-	-	+	jaχʃe Gez-lær jaχʃe oylan- nær	good girls good boys
7	Heydarabadi	+	-	-	-	ʔu mærd-k-a	those men
8	Dehaji	+	-	-	-	deræχt-a	trees
9	Ruzbehabad	+	-	+	-	morq-a-j-e sija pesær-an-e χub	blach hens good boys
10	Zangiabadi	+	-	-	-	doχtær-u-w-a χub	good girls
11	Sohrab	+	-	-	-	deræχt-a	trees
12	Sharikabad	+	-	+	-	jilim-a pesær-an-e χub	rugs good boys
13	Shambuie	+	+	+	-	jilim-a deræχt-ha morj-un-e sija	rugs trees black hens
14	Shamili	+	+	+	-	χorus -a-j-e sija deræχt-ha jilim-un ʔon mærd-an	black cocks trees carets those men
15	Aliabadi	+	-	+	-	deræχt-a pesær-an-e χub	trees good boys
16	Ghaleasgari	+	-	-	-	doχtær-a χub	good girls
17	Keykhosravi	+	-	-	-	jilim-a	rugs
18	Rudbari	-	+	+	-	deræχt-ha χorus-un-e sija	trees black cocks
19	Lalezari	+	-	-	-	deræχt-a	trees
20	Rashki	-	-	+	-	ʔa zæn-un	those women
21	Faryab	+	-	+	-	morq-a-j-e sija dot-un-e χub	black hens good girls

22	Kahnuji	-	-	+	-	doχtær-un-e χub	good girls
23	Maarazi	-	-	+	-	dot-un-e χub	good girls
24	Manujani	-	-	+	-	ʃok-un -e xub	good boys
25	Mazare	+	-	-	-	deræχt-a	trees
26	Mamuli	+	-	-	-	deræχt-a	trees
27	Mehrabadi	+	-	-	-	morq-a sija	black hens
28	Meymand	+	-	-	-	ʔan mært - æke-a	those men
29	Medvari	+	-	-	-	ʔan zen-æk-a	those women
30	Garmsiri	-	+	+	-	naʔ zæn-un deræχt-ə-ha	thoes women trees

+ Used in this language varieties
- Not used in this language varieties

The figure 1 shows that among the plural markers used in Kerman province language varieties, the usage frequency of /-a/ is the highest and /-lær/ or /-nær/ are the lowest ones. Sometimes the informants do not use the plural forms by mistakes under negative interview circumstances. The last column in figure 1 indicates its frequency.

Figure 1.
The frequency of plural markers usage in the studied language varieties

