On the plural of the singulative*

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SUMMARY

In this paper I discuss the various forms that the plural can take in Arabic. In particular, I address Borer & Ouwayda's (2010) recent proposal that the plural of the singulative is not a real plural, but mere agreement (with a numeral). Since in Borer (2005) the plural is a divider of undivided mass and since the singulative performs division as well, it somehow comes as a surprise a priori that singulative nouns can be pluralized. Contra Borer & Ouwayda (2010), I argue that the plural of the singulative is a real plural — albeit a "counting" rather than a "dividing" plural — and not mere agreement: we must distinguish the dividing plural from the counting plural, the latter being closer to the folk view and to the traditional perspective of the plural.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article passe en revue les diverses formes que le pluriel peut prendre dans la langue arabe. Nous analysons, en particulier, la récente proposition de Borer & Ouwayda (2010) dont la thèse centrale est que le pluriel du singulatif n'est pas un véritable pluriel, mais une simple forme d'accord (avec un numéral). Puisque selon Borer (2005), le rôle du pluriel est de diviser une masse non-divisée et puisque le singulatif performe la même action, il est surprenant a priori que les noms singulatifs puissent avoir une forme du pluriel. Contre l'hypothèse proposée par Borer & Ouwayda (2010), je propose que le pluriel du singulatif est un véritable pluriel — bien qu'un pluriel « comptable » plutôt qu'un pluriel « diviseur » — et non une simple marque d'accord : il nous faut distinguer le pluriel dont le rôle est de diviser (de créer des individus) du pluriel comptable, ce dernier étant plus proche de la conception populaire et la notion traditionnelle du pluriel.

1 Introduction

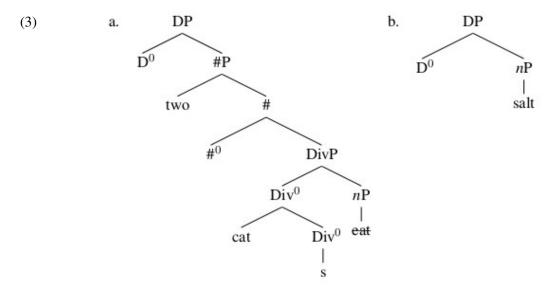
Borer (2005) takes the data in (1) and (2) (originally from Krifka 1989) to suggest that the plural

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is not an operation on singulars. Instead, the role of the plural is to portion out undivided mass. (1b) is perfectly acceptable as an answer to the question in (1a) despite the fact that there is only one (full) individual involved. In fact, as the answer in (2b) to the question (2a) shows, the plural need not even refer to individuals at all, since in this case not even *one* child is being referred to.

- (1) a. What is the average number of children at home per family in your country?
 - b. 1.3 children.
- (2) a. What is the average number of children at home per family in your country?
 - b. 0.3 children.

Data such as these have motivated a theory of number where nouns enter the derivation as neither count nor mass, but become count by the addition of structure (neo-constructionist view). In particular, according to Borer (2005), the addition of the plural has an individuating effect. Once mass has been portioned out, the counting function can operate. This is the locus of a higher phrase, namely #P, whose specifier is occupied by numerals that specify how many individuals there are in a given context. On this view, the plural functions as a classifier and the two are in complementary distribution. The plural is generated under Div⁰, the head being responsible for individuation. The structure in (3a) gives the representation for *two cats* (count noun) while the tree diagram in (3b) gives the representation for *salt* (mass term). In (3a) the noun raises to Div⁰ via head movement (the plural is an affix) and the numeral *two* is added as a counter in Spec#P.¹

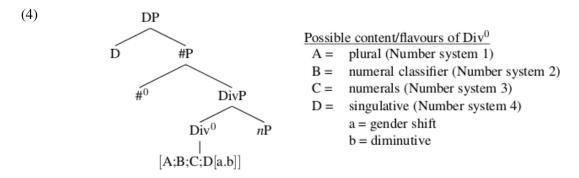


In Mathieu (2012a,b), I show that the degree to which the content of Div^0 varies is higher than previously thought – see Ritter and Wiltschko (2009) for the idea that the content of functional categories can vary cross-linguistically. The plural, numeral classifiers, and atomizing numerals are all different flavors that Div^0 can take, but we must add the singulative. The content of the singulative itself varies: for instance, in Ojibwe (an Algonquian language) it comes in the

¹ For the numeral 'one', singular (atomic) interpretation emerges from the strict identity of Div and #.

form of gender shift or in the form of the diminutive.² Cross-linguistically, gender shift comes in two sub-flavors: shift from masculine to feminine in Breton, Welsh, Somali and Arabic, but shift from inanimate to animate in Algonquian.

(4) summarizes the different flavours of Div⁰ can take. Number system 1 corresponds to English, French, etc., Number system 2 corresponds to Chinese, Number system 3 corresponds to Hungarian (where numerals can appear directly with nominals that morphologically look like singulars), Number system 4 corresponds to singulative languages. In some singulative languages, it is possible for the diminutive to be used as the individuating function (note that a language can potentially have more than one Number system available in its grammar – the dividing heads will be in complementary distribution).



Since there is evidence that singulative forms can be pluralized (Mathieu 2012a,b), and that they are interpreted exclusively, my claim is that division is not the sole function of the plural (contra Borer 2005), but that it can also simply be used as a counter, as taken for granted by traditional grammars and common wisdom. Following Borer (2005), I propose that the classifying plural surfaces under Div⁰ (its function is to divide, and to classify), but that the counting plural surfaces higher in the structure, i.e. under #⁰.

We do not expect complementary distribution between cardinals and the counting plurals, because cardinals are in Spec- $\#^0$ (as in Borer 2005) and counting plurals appear under the head $\#^0$ (counting plurals are affixes). Once the singulative has been realized under Div 0 the counting plural can target that singulative. In Arabic, broken and sound plurals are both realized under Div 0 . They are thus no different from the English plural, i.e. the classifying plural. But the plural of the singulative is a higher plural, sitting in $\#^0$.

In this paper, I address Borer and Ouwayda's (2010) recent proposal about the plural of the singulative in Arabic whose main idea is that the only function of the plural is that of classifying (Borer 2005). The plural of the singulative is not treated as a real plural, but as an agreement marker. I argue against this claim. Section 2 introduces the different forms the plural can take in Arabic. Section 3 discusses the plural of the singulative and argues that it is a counting plural and not an agreement marker, and Section 4 concludes.

2 MANY A PLURAL

Arabic has not one, but many plurals. The first kind is the sound plural. The examples in Table 1 and Table 2 show that this pluralisation process in Arabic is similar to the one in English: the

² In this paper, I will not be discussing the diminutive.

singular is morphologically marked while the plural is morphologically unmarked and a plural form is added to a stem. The forms given in Table 1 are masculine (nominative and accusative/genitive) and the forms given in Table 2 are feminine (nominative/accusative/genitive).

Singular		translation	
	Nominative Accusative and genitive		
mudarris-	mudarris-uun	mudarris-een	teacher/s
muhandis-	muhandis-uun	muhandis-een	engineer/s
kaatib-	kaatib-uun	kaatib-een	typist/s – writer/s
qaaṭin-	qaaṭin-uun	qaaṭin-een	inhabitant/s
saa?iq-	saa?iq-uun	saa?iq-een	driver/s

Table 1: Masculine nouns

Table 2: Feminine nouns

Singular	Plural	translation
	Nominative / Accusative and genitive	
mudarrisa(h)	mudarrisaat-un/in	teacher/s
muhandisa(h)	muhandisaat-un/in	engineer/s
kaatiba(h)	kaatibaat-un/in	typist/s – writer/s
qaaṭina(h)	qaaṭinaat-un/in	inhabitant/s
saa?iqa(h)	saa?iqaat-un/in	driver/s

There is a second type of plural called the broken plural. Broken plurals undergo a change of the stem to indicate plurality, in which case there is no additional suffix. Although it is tempting to view broken plurals as irregular forms (the morphological change is stem internal and the noun systematically surfaces as feminine when the input noun can often be masculine), it has been shown that they are, in fact, quite regular morphologically (see Acquaviva 2008 for discussion) and that, in addition, they do not carry special meanings.

To illustrate, the singular *siwar* 'bracelet' has a broken plural, *?aswira(h)* 'bracelets'. Interestingly, that plural can be pluralized: *?asaawir* 'bracelets'. Broken plurals are often interpreted as ranging over groups. In that way, they are like collectives – see below. For the similarities between the collectives and bare plurals, see Wright (1963).

Arabic has yet another plural: the plural of the singulative. The singulative is a property of Celtic, Semitic, Gur (Niger-Congo) and some North-American aboriginal languages (Mathieu 2009, 2012a,b). It has been greatly discussed in the typological literature, but has, until recently, somehow been ignored in the theoretical literature.

Arabic is a language with a productive singulative operation in its grammar. It has a series of

5 ÉRIC MATHIEU

collective nouns denoting groups that can be turned into individuals via the use of the singulative.³

The singulative is a morpheme -t added to a root noun that involves gender shift: the collective noun is masculine while the singulative is a feminine form (identical to the feminine morpheme -t). This is shown in (5). It must be noted that when in final position the morpheme is pronounced -t whereas when it is followed by a Case marker and/or nunation or linked to the following word it is pronounced -t. The singulative only refers to atoms (it can never refer to sums). Collective nouns bear no plural morphology but are definitely interpreted as sums, since they refer to a collection of individuals.⁴

(5)	a.	burtogaal	'oranges'	~	burtogaala(h)	'an orange'
	b.	baqar	'cows'	~	baqara(h)	'a cow'
	c.	tamer	'dates'	~	tamra(h)	'a date'
	d.	jammer	'embers'	~	jammra(h)	'an ember'
	e.	šajar	'trees'	~	šajara(h)	'a tree'
	f.	naxal	'palm trees'	~	naxla(h)	'a palm tree'
	g.	beyed ^s	'eggs'	~	beyd ^s a(h)	ʻan egg'
	h.	nooq	'fm. camels'	~	naqa(h)	'a fm. camel'
	i.	zabeeb	'raisin'	~	zabeba(h)	'a raisin'
	j.	ħajar	'stones'	~	ħajara(h)	'a stone'

For sake of completeness, it must be noted that the singulative also targets mass nouns, as shown in (6) and (7), but I will not discuss these in any details, focusing on collectives (the semantics of mass nouns is slightly different from that of collectives – the proposal in Section 3 can nevertheless apply to these and there is no reason to treat them differently, see Mathieu 2012b for a discussion of these in Algonquian and Celtic).

(6)	a.	țeen	'mud'	~	țeena(h)	'chunk of mud'
	b.	ramaad	'ash'	~	ramaada(h)	'amount of ash'
	c.	laben	'buttermilk'	~	labana(h)	'portion of buttermilk'
	d.	zubbd	'butter'	~	zubda(h)	'portion of butter'
	e.	xamer	'wine'	~	xamra(h)	'portion of wine'

³ As pointed out by Gil (1996), there are many uses of the term 'collective' in the literature, hence the term is confusing. By 'collective', I mean herein a singular form with plural reference in a singulative language. Collectives in such languages are not unlike 'collectives' such as furniture in English. They might have the same semantics, namely their denotation has the structure of a semilattice. However, there are many differences between the two kinds of collectives. Furniture-type collectives cannot appear with numerals directly and although this is true for Arabic collectives for numbers ranging from 2 to 10, numbers above 10 in Arabic surface with numerals directly. From that point of view, Arabic collectives behave more like general number - in the sense of Corbett (2000).

⁴ In Classical Arabic, the tradition distinguishes two kinds of collectives: nouns of collections (applies to sentient beings), like herd and company and nouns of collective kinds. The latter applies to animals, plants and inanimate objects and comprises many nouns denoting fruits, vegetables, flowers, grains, insects, and birds. These forms serve as the basis for the derivation of singulatives (unit nouns), which in turn can be pluralized.

(7)	a.	ṭeena(h)	'chunk of mud'	~	țeenaat 'chunks of mud'
	b.	ramaada(h)	'amount of ash'	~	ramaadat 'amounts of ash'
	c.	zubda(h)	'portion of butter'	~	zubdaat 'portions of butter'
	d.	xamra(h)	'portion of wine'	~	xamraat 'portions of wine'

Once the collective has been turned into a singulative, the output can be pluralized, as shown in (8).⁵

(8)	a.	burtogaala(h)	'an orange'	~	burtogaalaat	'oranges'
	b.	baqara(h)	'a cow'	~	baqaraat	'cows'
	c.	tamra(h)	'a date'	~	tamraat	'dates'
	d.	jammra(h)	'an ember'	~	jammraat	'embers'
	e.	šajara(h)	'a tree'	~	šajaraat	'trees'
	f.	naxla(h)	'a palm tree'	~	naxlaat	'palm trees'
	g.	beyd ^s a(h)	'an egg'	~	beyd ^s aat	'eggs'
	h.	naqa(h)	'a fm. Camel'	~	naqaat	'fm. camels'
	i.	zabeba(h)	'a raisin'	~	zabebaat	'raisins'
	j.	ħajara(h)	'one stone'	~	ħajaraat	'stones'

This is the plural that is of particular interest to us, since its properties appear different from that of the sound plural or broken plural. Since the singulative performs division in the sense of Borer (2005), it is strange that it is possible to pluralize the singulative. This is because on Borer's view, the plural is the element responsible for division. We turn to this problem in the next section.

3 Plural of singulative as counting plural or mere agreement?

In this section, I would like to address Borer and Ouwayda's (2010) recent proposal. Borer and Ouwayda (2010) want to keep the idea that the only function of the plural is that of classifying (Borer 2005), and thus they treat the plural of singulative not as a real plural, but as an agreement marker. Putative evidence for their view comes from the fact that the plural of the singulative cannot appear bare; it appears to need a numeral to be licensed (Greenberg 1972: 179) as shown by the examples in (9). These examples would not be grammatical without a numeral. Thus, the idea is that the plural on the singulative noun is an agreement marker with the numeral.

⁵ It must be noted that collectives can be pluralized directly without singulativization. See next section.

7 ÉRIC MATHIEU

(9) a. ?akalt-u *(xams-a) tamraati-n fi ?aṣ-sabaaḥi.

Ate-I.NOM five-ACC dates-GEN-NUN in the-morning.GEN
'I ate five dates in the morning.'

b. Kasara *(set-a) tubaati-n

b. Kasara *(set-a) ţubaati-n.
broke-he six-ACC bricks-GEN-NUN
'He broke six bricks.'

c. qaṭaʿs-u *(thalath-a) naḥlaati-n.
cut-PAST-they three-ACC palm-trees-GEN-NUN

'They cut three palm trees.'

Compare the examples in (9) with those in (10) and (11). In the following examples, it is possible to omit the numeral in which case we have a bare noun (in this case, the noun takes the Accusative; when a numeral is present, it is the numeral that surfaces with Accusative).

(10) a. qara?t-u Sašrat-a kutub-i-n. (broken plural) read-I ten-ACC books-GEN-NUN
'I read (ten) books.'

b. qara?t-u kutub-a-n. (broken plural)

read-I books-ACC-NUN

'I read books.'

(11) a. qaabalt-u xamsat-a muderriseen. (sound plural)

met-I five-ACC teachers-GEN

'I met (five) teachers.'

b. qaabalt-u muderriseen. (sound plural)

met-I teachers-ACC

'I met teachers.'

Borer and Ouwayda (2010) take these facts to indicate that, after individuation is realized by the singulative (as in Zabbal 2002, Fassi Fehri 2003, 2010, Mathieu 2009, 2012a,b), the plural becomes a mere agreement marker (it agrees with the numeral) and that the counting function is therefore realized by the cardinals and not by the plural.

The problem with this analysis is that the agreement in question is not always necessary. In the case of the dual, no numeral is necessary (or even possible according to traditional grammars) and in the case of singulars, the numeral *one* is not necessary either. In the following examples, *fish* thus appears as a bare noun (on my view, the dual is simply a counting plural that operates after individuation has applied. The dual is not an agreement marker).

- (12) ?ištara- samakatain. he fish-DUAL 'He bought two fish.'
- (13) ?ištareiyt-u samakat-a-n. bought-I fish-ACC.NUN 'I bought a fish.'

The second problem for the Borer and Ouwayda (2010) view that the plural of singulatives is an agreement marker comes from cases where numbers above 10 are used. Above 10, pluratives are not used in Arabic. Rather, a special singular form (noun of specification) is used instead. Agreement is thus not necessary between a plural and a numeral in Arabic, since the form of the plural nominal above 10 is singular. Consider the following examples:

(14)?akalt-u thalaath-a ašrat-a samakat-a-n. three-MS-ACC ate- I teen-FM-ACC fish-SGL-FM-ACC-NUN 'I ate thirteen fish.' ra?eit-u xamsa-a Sašrat-a bagarat-a-n. saw-I five-MS-ACC teen-FM-ACC cow-SGL-FM-NUN 'I saw fifteen cows.' darrasa-t sitat-a Sašra taalib-a-n taught -she six-FM-ACC teen-MS-ACC student-SGL-MS-ACC 'She taught sixteen (male) students.'

The third problem is that in singulative languages other than Arabic the numeral constraint for numbers between 2 and 10 is not attested. As far as I am aware, it does not apply, for example, in Welsh, Breton or Ojibwe. Thus the constraint that Borer and Ouwayda (2010) describe for Arabic has nothing to do with the special counting function of numerals in the language. The reason why, on my view, a numeral is necessary with numbers between 2 and 10 in Arabic is because the language has a paucal/greater number distinction. As is well-known from traditional grammars, the paucal is between 2-10 and for numbers above 10, a singular form is used. Other singulative languages do not appear to have such a paucal/greater number distinction.

The fourth problem is that with broken plurals it is possible to pluralize, as seen in Section 3. On the assumption that the broken plural performs division, then the plural of that plural is in #0 but in this case no numeral is necessary. The presence of the plural morpheme cannot thus be treated as an agreement marker. A plural of plural is acceptable and when it appears in a sentence it need not, as shown in (15), appear with a numeral.

(15) Pištarat Pasaawir. (plural of plural) bought-she bracelets 'She bought bracelets.'

Finally, Mathieu (to appear) shows that while the sound plural and the broken plural are interpreted weakly in Arabic (just like the English plural) – they are interpreted as *one or more* – the plural of the singulative is interpreted strongly: it can only refer to *two or more*, without reference to *one*. The English plural is like the sound and broken plurals in that it is interpreted weakly.

- (16) How many children do you have?
 - a. I have one.
 - b. I have three.

Following Borer (2005), I propose that the classifying plural surfaces under Div^0 (its function is to divide, to classify), but that the counting plural surfaces higher in the structure, i.e. under $\#^0$. We

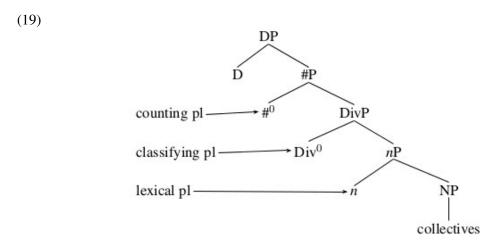
do not expect complementary distribution between cardinals and the counting plurals, because cardinals are in Spec# 0 (as in Borer 2005) and the counting plural appears under the head # 0 (the counting plural is an affix). Once the singulative has been realized under Div 0 the counting plural can target that singulative. In Arabic, broken and sound plurals are both realized under Div 0 . They are thus no different from the English plural, i.e. the classifying plural. Both are weakly referential. Finally, n is reserved for lexical/idiosyncratic/expressive plurals, many of which are introduced and discussed in Corbett (2000): the plural of modesty, the evasive plural, the emphatic plural, etc. These are not productive and are used idiosyncratically and expressively. An example of an idiosyncratic plural in English appears in (17). Although *brains* is plural in this example, it does not refer to a sum, but to an atom.

(17) He's got the brains for this job.

Under n we also find the plural of collectives. In Arabic, for example, collectives can be pluralized directly without going through the Dividing function under Div^0 . Some examples appear in (18). These plurals are sometimes called greater plurals or plurals of abundance. They imply an excessive number or else all possible instances of the referent. This plural is the one described for Halkomelem Salish .

(18)	a.	samak	'fish'	~	?asmaak	'a lot of fish'
	b.	xayl	'horses	~	xuyuul	'a lot of horses'
	c.	qawl	'saying'	~	?aqwaal	'a lot of sayings'

The diagram in (19) summarizes the different target positions that the plural can take. Distributing the plural along several heads on a syntactic spine is in the tradition of many researchers. A case in point is Ritter's (1991, 1993) proposal that, depending on the language, gender is encoded in n (N) or in Div (Num).



My proposal is different from many accounts, since many researchers group singulatives, broken plurals, pluratives, double plurals, etc. as instances of n (Acquaviva 2008). On this view, there is only one productive plural and that is the classifying plural (Borer 2005). My contention is that there is another productive plural, i.e. the counting plural.

The problem with many of the alternative proposals is that they are forced to treat n as a dividing head for the singulative (Acquaviva 2008). Thus, under their view, there are two dividing heads: n and Div^0 . By Occam's razor, it is best to have only one dividing head. Since the singulative is fairly regular in the languages that have it and since its function is that of dividing, it is only natural to place it under Div^0 . Also, if one places the regular singulative and its plural on the one hand together with lexical plurals under the same node n, one loses the major differences that exist between the first group and the second class. Also, it is not clear how one can explain that the singulative and its plural are definitely not in complementary distribution if they are placed under the same node. Finally, broken plurals are fairly regular and semantically transparent. Thus, there is no motivation for placing them under n. My account is thus much more in line of that of Zabbal (2002) and that of Fassi Fehri (2003).

In sum, although one loses Borer's (2005) generalization that the plural is always a divider and never a counter, the option of projecting two different kinds of plurals, the dividing plural, on the one hand, and the counting plural, on the other, is nevertheless preferable over having two dividing heads.

One question that arises on my analysis is why there is no plural of sound plurals. There is indeed a plural of singulatives, a plural of broken plurals, but no plural of sound plurals in Arabic. I want to argue that the gap in the paradigm follows from my account. As a classifying plural, the sound plural is not an operation on singulars but simply divides undivided stuff. On the other hand, the counting plural is an operation on singulars. This is most obvious in the case of the singulative, since the singulative, as a classifying operation, forms a singular form. If we now turn to the plurals of broken plurals, the idea is that when pluralization operates, it is an operation on a singular. As is well-known, animate referent nouns in Arabic take verbal plural agreement in the plural while inanimate referent nouns take feminine singular (defective) agreement but also, depending on whether the predicate is interpreted collectively or distributively, it is also possible for the verb to carry defective agreement even with animate referents. What I want to propose is that when a broken plural has been pluralized it has undergone a type of individuation that gives a singular instead of a plural form as output. In this case, the interpretation of the plural will be strongly referential as expected. What is interesting is the fact that it is feminine agreement that surfaces when "collective", aka defective agreement surfaces. The shift in gender corresponds to the shift in gender we see in singulativization and it cannot be a coincidence that both are the spell out of the classifying operation (see Zabbal 2002 for similar ideas). In sum, for the counting plural to operate it needs a singular form as input. The classifying plural does not provide the right type of element to undergo pluralisation since it is not singular but neutral (it is neither singular nor plural).

4 CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued against Borer & Ouwayda's (2010) recent proposal that the plural of the singulative in Arabic is a mere agreement marker. While it is understandable that they want to keep only one kind of plural in the grammar, namely the dividing plural of Borer (2005), this option is unfortunately not well-motivated. A closer look at the Arabic facts show that numerals are in no way obligatory with plurals of the singulative and many of the arguments put forward by Borer & Ouwayda (2010) have not been verified. Thus, I have argued that we should distinguish between, at least, two kinds of plurals: a lower plural, basically the dividing plural of Borer (2005), and a higher plural, a plural that I have dubbed the counting plural, since it sits

11 ÉRIC MATHIEU

under the higher counting head whose specifier is usually occupied by a numeral. This is not necessarily a different position from the one advocated by Borer & Ouwayda (2010) for this type of plural, but the crucial difference between their proposal and mine is that, on my view, the higher plural is a plural in its own right, it is not an agreement marker. The function of the counting plural is simply to count after division has already been realized. This explains why plurals of singulatives are not acceptable in environments that favour a kind reading, a situation that does not arise with other types of plurals in Arabic, like the sound plural and the broken plural (see Mathieu, to appear, for details).

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