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VERY COMPLEX AFFIXATION

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1 RUSSIAN AUGMENTED PLURALS

Standard Russian: only [–feminine] nouns can have plurals in *-a-*

Zaliznjak 1967:2331 notes substandard [a]-plurals for third-declension nouns, e.g., *kroviá* ‘blood.PL’

Bromley & Bulatova 1972:102-103, Iordanidi 2020: dialectally, all classes of nouns may have plurals in *-a-*

The plural *-a-* is **accented with neuter nouns**:

- (1) a. *ognívo* ‘(fire) steel’ *ogníva* ‘steels’ *ognívami* ‘steels.INS’ accented stem
b. *móre* ‘sea’ *morá* ‘seas’ *moríami* ‘seas.INS’ unaccented stem

The plural *-a-* is **both accented and dominant with non-neuter nouns** (Coats 1976, Zaliznjak 1985, Alderete 1999:166, Timberlake 2004:136, Munteanu 2021, Iordanidi 2020):

- (2) a. *proféssor* ‘professor.NOM’ b. *professorá* ‘professor.PL.NOM’
proféssora ‘professor.GEN’ *professorámi* ‘professor.PL.INS’

There exist no non-neuter *a*-plurals that have stress on the stem

Two exceptions: the “baby-diminutive” suffix *-ínŭk-* (surface [jónok]/[jónk]), suppletive plural form *-ínt-* [jat], see Gouskova & Bobaljik 2022, and **augmented plurals in *-ěj-***:

- (3) a. *brat/brátja* ‘brother.SG/PL’ masculine, stem-final stress
b. *kn’azi/kn’azjá* ‘prince.SG/PL’ masculine, inflectional stress
c. *déveri/deverjá* ‘husband’s brother.SG/PL’ masculine, inflectional stress
d. *kólos/kolósja* ‘ear (of a cereal).SG/PL’ masculine, stem-final stress
e. *dérevol/derévja* ‘tree.SG/PL’ neuter, stem-final stress
f. *kriló/krílja* ‘wing.SG/PL’ neuter, stem-final stress

While the dominance of the accented nominative plural *-a* depends on gender, **the position of the stress in plurals formed with the augment *-ěj-* depends on animacy**:

- stem-final stress for all inanimate nouns irrespective of their gender or the position of the stress in the singular (e.g., *kólos/kolósja* ‘ear (of a cereal).SG/PL’) all *pluralia tantum* in *-ěj-* (e.g., *ugólja* ‘embers’) are inanimate and stress is stem-final
- stem-final stress for one animate noun (*brat/brátja* ‘brother.SG/PL’)
- inflectional stress for all remaining animate nouns (e.g., *déveri/deverjá* ‘husband’s brother.SG/PL’)

Important: except for *pluralia tantum*, **these are real plurals**: they can combine with cardinals and there is no alternative plural realization for these nouns

Two questions: (1) what is the augment for and (2) why is its accentuation different in function of animacy?

Proposal:

- augmentation because this class of nouns are *singularia tantum*
- complex affix formation for animate nouns because Russian does not allow animate neuters

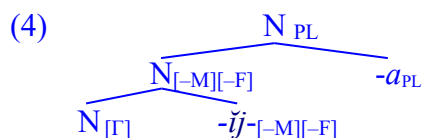
Crucial phonological presupposition: **the augment *-ěj-* introduces an accent but cannot bear it** (because a yer cannot be stressed)

Russian augmented plurals present evidence for complex affixes in inflection

1.1 Russian inanimate augmented plurals (ca. 40 nouns incl. *pluralia tantum*)

Basic assumption: a class of Russian nouns cannot combine with regular plural markers directly
 The augment *-ǐj-* is introduced to enable plural marking, and, like most suffixes of Russian, it is specified for phi-features

If the augment *-ǐj-* is lexically specified as [-M][-F] (i.e., as neuter), *-ǐj-* augmented stems would not be masculine



The gender of the nominal stem (Γ) does not matter

The nominative plural suffix is not accentually dominant because the stem it combines with is neuter rather than masculine

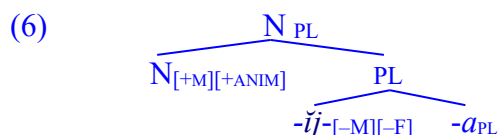
The accent that *-ǐj-* introduces will surface on the preceding syllable (because *-ǐj-* cannot bear stress)

1.2 Russian animate augmented plurals (10 nouns)

Nine *-ǐj-* augmented animate nouns surface with **post-stem stress in the plural** (5a), one does not have post-stem stress in the plural (5b):

- (5) a. *z'iat'i/z'iat'jǎ* 'daughter's husband.SG/PL' regular animate augmented
 b. *brat'brǎt'ja* 'brother.SG/PL' stem-stress animate augmented

Proposal: a structure different from (4): complex suffix formation:



The plural suffix combines with a non-masculine node, so it is not dominant (but still accented)

The complex PL node is a phonological cycle

Both suffixes are underlyingly accented, but a yer cannot bear stress, so **the accent shifts to the case ending** (nowhere else to go):

(7) $\underline{\text{ǐj}} + \underline{\text{a}} \rightarrow \text{ǐj}\acute{\text{a}}$

The accent of the augment is either deleted or coalesces with the plural accent

If the stem is accented (5b), stress surfaces on the stem, otherwise after the suffix

1.3 Complex suffix formation as a last-resort operation

Why must such a complex suffix be formed?

And why only with animates?

Proposal: the suffix *-ěj-* is incompatible with animate stems:

- (8) *
$$\begin{array}{c} \text{N}_{[-M][+F][+ANIM]} \\ \swarrow \quad \searrow \\ \text{N}_{[+ANIM]} \quad -ěj-[-M][-F] \end{array}$$

The neuter specification of *-ěj-* should override the gender specification of the nominal stem (cf. the German diminutive suffix *-chen*)

But **neuter animates are not allowed in Russian** (e.g., the semantically animate *čudóvišče* ‘monster’ is grammatically inanimate (in the singular; in the plural it is animate))

The formation of the complex suffix *-ěj-a-* enables pluralization of animate *singularia tantum* stems without creating a neuter animate:

- Stankiewicz 1968:39, Timberlake 2004:130, Wiese 2004:352, Pertsova 2015:231, etc.: Russian has no gender distinctions in the plural
- Gender features are impoverished in the context of [+ plural], so the complex PL node is not specified for gender and **there is no conflict with animacy any more**

The complex suffix *-ěj-a-* can combine with an animate stem

The masculine stem will not render the plural suffix *-a* dominant because they are not local enough with respect to each other

For further details see Matushansky 2025

2 AMHARIC DOUBLE PLURALS

Leslau 1995, Kramer 2016, Mulugeta 2017, etc.: ways of forming a plural in Amharic

- (9) external plural, **regular** (suffix *-očč-* ([otʃtʃə]))

- a. *līj* ‘child’ → *līj-očč* ‘children’ Kramer 2016:528
- b. *k’ābāle* ‘district’ → *k’ābāle-wočč* ‘districts’
- c. *bet* ‘house’ → *bet-očč* ‘houses’

Irregular plurals can be formed by affixation, melodic change, partial reduplication, etc. (see Hirut 1998 for an autosegmental analysis of irregular plural markers)

- (10) external plural, **irregular** (suffixes *-an-* (M only) and *-at-* (F and M, Leslau 1995:171))

- a. *māmhīr-an* ‘teachers’ Kramer 2016:528
- b. *t’ābib-an* ‘wise people’
- c. *ityop’p’īyawiy-an* ‘Ethiopians’
- d. *hīs’an-at* ‘babies’
- e. *amāt-at* ‘years’
- f. *k’al-at* ‘words’

- (11) internal (non-segmental) plural, **irregular**, with and without suffixation Kramer 2016:529

- a. *kānfār* → *kānafīr* ‘lips’ melodic change only
- b. *wāyzāro* → *wāyzazirt* ‘ladies’ melodic change + partial reduplication + suffixation
- c. *ganen* → *aganint* ‘demons’ prefixation + melodic change + suffixation
- d. *nigus* → *nāgāst* ‘kings’ melodic change + suffixation
- e. *higg* → *higgigat* ‘laws’ (melodic change +) partial reduplication + suffixation
- f. *mās’haf* → *mās’ahift* ‘books’ melodic change + suffixation

Only a subset of nouns (mostly borrowings from Geez) have irregular plurals (cf. *locus/loci* in English)

Some nouns have both a regular and an irregular plural:

(12)	singular	irregular plural	regular plural	gloss
a.	mämhir	mämhir-an	mämhir-očč	‘teacher’
b.	k'al	k'al-at	k'al-očč	‘word’
c.	mäs'haf	mäs'ahift	mäs'haf-očč	‘book’

Moreover, some nouns have **double plurals**:

(13)	singular	irregular plural	double plural	gloss
a.	mämhir	mämhir-an	mämhir-an-očč	‘teacher’
b.	k'al	k'al-at	k'al-at-očč	‘word’
c.	mäs'haf	mäs'ahift	mäs'ahift-očč	‘book’

Kramer 2016: **the choice of the plural form is not correlated with any meaning difference:**

- all of them are compatible with cardinals (hence, none of them denote collectives (in the sense of “mass nouns”))
- all types of plurals permit both distributive and collective readings
- none of them are interpreted as paucals, affective, plurals of abundance, etc.

The different types of plurals **are not in competition** for insertion

Kramer 2009, 2016 notes that irregular plurals are associated with a more formal register (see also Titov 1971:53, Zavadskaja 2007:34, Titov & Bulakh 2013:328, Mulugeta 2017, Amberber 2023 for the same intuition) but the effect is not altogether consistent

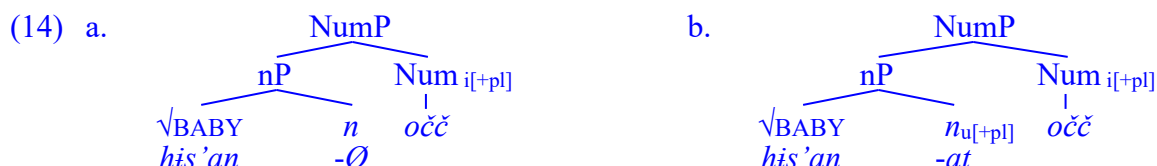
2.1 Kramer’s analysis

Different status of the two types of plural markers: irregular plural markers realize a [+plural] *n*, the regular one realizes Num (cf. Acquaviva 2008, Wiltschko 2008, 2021, Alexiadou 2011, 2021, 2024, among many others)

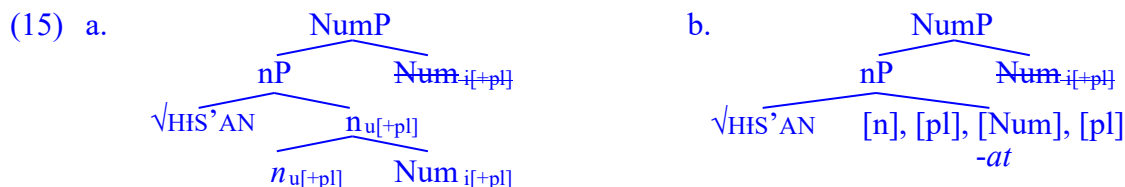
In other words, irregular plural markers are nominalizers forming **lexical plurals**

The plural feature on *n* is systematically uninterpretable

When a plural Num combines with an unmarked stem, a regular plural is generated, otherwise, a double one is:



The irregular plural is derived by Lowering, followed by Fusion:



Lowering should be optional, while Fusion should be obligatory

2.2 Issues with Kramer's analysis

The irregular plural suffix also pluralizes adjectives, including all adjectives derived with the suffix *-awi-* (Leslau 1995:171)

The use of *-at* as the feminine plural marker, as in Geez, belongs to the high formal register; spoken contemporary Amharic uses the same marker for both genders (Mulusew Asratie, p.c.)

- (16) a. *kəbur* 'honored, respected' → MPL: *kəburan*, FPL: *kəburat* L171
 b. *yəwwah* 'meek' → MPL: *yəwwahan*, FPL: *yəwwahat*
 c. *mānfāsawi* 'spiritual' → MPL: *mānfāsawəyan*, FPL: *mānfāsawiyat*

As these plural suffixes can pluralize adjectives, they cannot be nominalizers (*n*)

For other issues, theory-internal ones and more general, see section 4.1

2.3 The semantics of the Amharic plural

In definite NPs the plural marker *-očč* is required for plural interpretation (Kramer 2009:285)

Plural marking is claimed to be optional in indefinite NPs (Leslau 1995:210, Kramer 2009:285, Meyer 2025, etc.):

Thus the hypothesis that Amharic has general number (Appleyard 1995, Kramer 2016, Meyer 2025, etc.)

- (17) a. *hullət bet sərra* Mulugeta 2017:105
 two house build-PFV
 'He built two houses.'
 b. *bet fərräs-ä* Meyer 2025
 house be.destroyed.PFV.3MSG
 'A house is destroyed/Houses are destroyed.'

Mulusew 2026: **plural-marked indefinites are interpreted as partitive** (see section 4.2)

Strikingly, regular, irregular and double plurals do not pattern the same

2.4 The role of partitivity

Irregular plural marking is not conditioned by partitivity:

All examples and judgments in this section are from Mulusew Asratie, p.c., unless indicated otherwise

- (18) a. *bä-zih māngäd his'an all-a, raga-bil-äh aškärkir*
 by-this road child be.PRES-1SGs slowly-2MSG drive.IMP
 'There's a child/children on this road, drive slowly.'

- b. *bä-zih mǎngäd his'an-at all-u, raga-bil-äh aškärkir*
by-this road child-PL be.PRES-3PLs slowly-2MSG drive.IMP
'There are children on this road, drive slowly.'

The unmarked noun is ambiguous between the plural and the singular interpretation, the plural does not require the existence of a previously established set

The addition of the plural marker *-očč-* makes the NP partitive:

Natasha Slioussar, p.c., asks whether the relevant factor could be topicality, but this would not account for all the relevant data in section 4.2

- (19) *??bä-zih mǎngäd his'an-očč all-u, räga.bilä-h aškärkir*
by-this road child-PL be.PRES-3PLs slowly-2MSG drive.IMP
'There are some (known) children on this road, drive slowly.'

To the extent that (19) is acceptable (lexical constraint, cf. (21b)), the NP has to be partitive: the children in question must belong to some pre-established set

But the double plural is compatible with both partitive and non-partitive readings

- (20) *bä-zih mǎngäd his'an-at-očč all-u, raga.bil-äh aškärkir*
by-this road child-PL-PL be.PRES-3PLs slowly-2MSG drive.IMP
'There are (some, known) children on this road, drive slowly.'

The same effect arises in numeral NPs:

None of these examples permits a referential (wide scope) reading: ≠ are there 50 books that you haven't read?

- (21) a. *hamsa mäs'ahift al-anäbbäb-k-imm?* non-specific indefinite
fifty book.PL NEG-read.PFV-2MSGs-NEG
'Haven't you read 50 books (in general)?'
- b. *hamsa mäs'haf-očč al-anäbbäb-k-imm?* specific indefinite
fifty book-PL NEG-read.PFV-2MSGs-NEG
'Haven't you read 50 books (from the given list or collection)?'
- c. *hamsa mäs'ahift-očč al-anäbbäb-k-imm?* specific or non-specific indefinite
fifty book.PL-PL NEG-read.PFV-2MSGs-NEG
'Haven't you read 50 books?' (both readings)

The two plural markers do not have the same conditions of use/pragmatics:

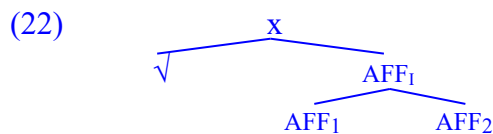
- the regular suffixal plural (*-očč-*) is conditioned by partitivity
- the irregular plural is not
- the double plural may behave as a regular or as an irregular plural

It is as if either one or the other of the plural markers in the double plural makes no semantic contribution

And remember: the irregular plural is lexically conditioned!

3 COMPLEX AFFIX FORMATION

Micromorphology (term from Stump 2019; similar mechanisms in Bochner 1993, Soukka 2000, Luís & Spencer 2005, Stump 2017a, b, 2019, 2022, 2023): **affixes may combine without a stem:**



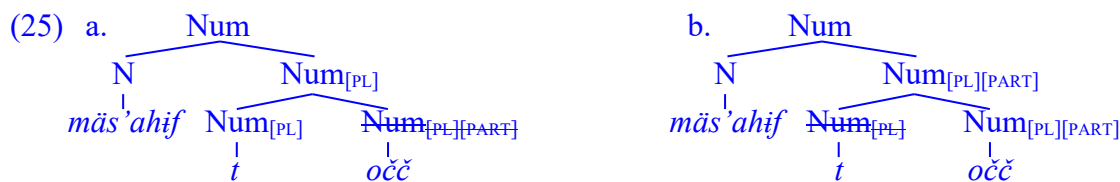
A combination of two affixes is not expected to be interpretable compositionally

Hence one of the two affixes in a complex affix structure (22) must be semantically deleted

Usually semantic deletion (Haspelmath's (1995) **affix conglutination**) targets the inner suffix:

- (23) a. metric 'using meters as base' < 'meter' English
 b. metrical 'related to poetic meter; involving measurement' < 'meter'
 ≠ 'involving metric'
- (24) a. stroit' 'imagine; present.PFV.INF' Russian
 b. stroitel' 'builder', stroitel'nica 'builder.F'
 c. stroitel'stvo 'building, construction'
 d. stroitel'nij 'having to do with building', ≠ 'having to do with builders')

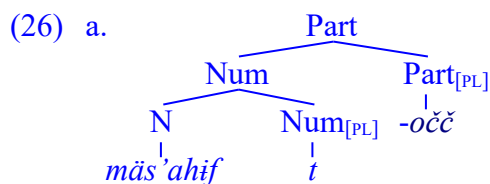
Could the Amharic double plural involve **complex affix formation in which either of the two markers can be semantically deleted**?



As a matter of fact, postulating different structures for the two readings is preferable (because it seems strange to say that you can optionally delete one piece of semantics)

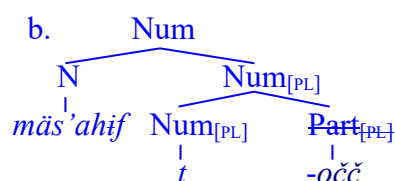
The partitive reading can be also derived by straightforward iterative suffixation, with plurality encoded twice but on different heads (with either only the lower one being interpretable or both of them, redundancy is no problem):

Nothing crucial, as far as I can see, depends on the precise labels of the functional heads involved, but the lower one cannot be n: its exponent is also used in adjectives (section 2.2) and in overtly derived nouns (section 4.2)



The non-partitive plural reading cannot be derived by simple iterative affixation because it is nonsensical to say that a functional partitive head is introduced and then semantically deleted

But if this is complex affixation with the uncharacteristic semantic deletion of the outer suffix, the semantics of the suffix *-očč-* becomes irrelevant, it is inserted for some other reason:



Especially since so much remains unclear about plural marking in Amharic NPs. For instance, in some (but not all) plural NPs *-očč-* appears on adjectives (cf. Leslau 1995:175-176, 213-214, Kramer 2016:548fn.):

Where the presence and type of plural marking also play a semantic role (work in progress with Mulusew Asratie)

(27) arānguade-wočč-u/k'äyayy-očč-u t'ärmus-očč all-u Mulusew Asratie, p.c.
 green-PL-DEF/ red.RDP-PL-DEF bottle-PL be.present-3PLs
 'The green/red bottles are there.'

More importantly, however, **the syntax of partitivity-conditioned plural marking requires further investigation** (section 4.2)

4 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER QUESTIONS

Prior formal approaches to multiple plural marking (Acquaviva 2008, Wiltschko 2008, 2021, Kramer 2009, 2016, Alexiadou 2011, 2021, 2024, among many others) postulate distinct loci for plurality (*n*, Num)

Such hypotheses do not explain the facts examined:

- stress in Russian animate vs. inanimate double plurals
- the distinct effects of partitivity in Amharic regular, irregular and double plurals

These are very different cases with respect to optionality and semantics

But they both can be handled by the assumption that double marking may involve more than a single structure, with complex affixes triggering semantic deletion

The distinction in phonological cyclicity may provide an additional diagnostic

Not in Amharic, where stress has been argued to be determined by syllable weight (Sande & Hedding 2014, Sande 2014)

The complex affix hypothesis leaves open the question of what drives complex affix formation

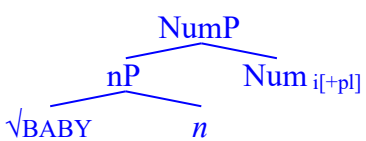
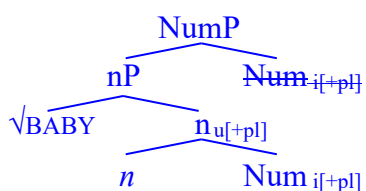
To the best of my knowledge, **complex affix formation is always driven by external factors**
 And the syntax of conditioned number-marking remains a BIG issue across languages

4.1 Further comments on Kramer's analysis

4.1.1 Fusion and Vocabulary Insertion

The feature bundle in (15b) contains two instances of the same feature ([*n*], [*pl*], [Num], [*pl*]), which surely cannot be right unless some internal structure is maintained

Can Lowering and subsequent Fusion occur when *n* is singular, as in (14a), and Num is plural?

(28) a.  → b. 

The resultant feature bundle will contain the same features as (15b): [*n*], [*pl*], [Num]

And should be realized the same as (15b), i.e., as a single irregular plural suffix

4.1.2 Derived nominals

Kramer focuses on null-derived deadjectival nouns, arguing that the irregular plural marker can function as a nominalizer

But the irregular plural marker can combine with *mä*-nominalizations, which can be agentive (Leslau 1995:228):

- (29) a. *mämhir* ‘teacher’ → *mämhir-an* K:528, L:171
b. *mäzämmər* ‘cantor’ → *mäzämmər-an* L:171

It is difficult to regard plural formation as nominalization, but when it combines with an overtly derived nominal, the nominalization analysis is unmotivated

4.1.3 Sociological factors

The use of the irregular plural is conditioned by sociological factors:

- Titov 1971:53, Zavadskaja 2007:34, Titov & Bulakh 2013:328, Mulugeta 2017: irregular plurals feel archaic/literary
- Kramer 2009:194: irregular plurals characterize older or church-related speakers; Kramer 2016:532: register differences are reported only for a subset of the triplets (unlike the English *schemas/schemata* examples)
- Amberber 2023: irregular plural markers are archaic

The use of double plural marking is reported to be a feature of colloquial Amharic and to reflect the non-familiarity of speakers with the Geez stratum of the language (cf. *formulas/formulae*) Yet it is already listed by Cohen 1936:72, which suggests a longstanding history

Mulugeta 2017: speakers who are not proficient in Geez do not recognize irregular plural forms as plural, especially since plural marking is not obligatory in indefinite plural NPs

Note that some irregular plurals have become singular in Amharic (Leslau 1995:172 *agär, hagär* ‘country’, *ahgur* ‘countries; continent’; Kramer 2016:550: *täkl* ‘plant’, *at(a)kilt* ‘plants; produce, garden’, etc.)

It is often claimed that the regular plural is always allowed, but both Kramer 2016 and Mulusew Asratie, p.c., note that it is not always the case

4.2 Amharic general number and the semantics of plural markers

Plural marking is obligatory in definite NPs (Kramer 2009:285)

It is “optional” in indefinite NPs (Leslau 1995:210, Kramer 2009:285, Meyer 2025, etc.):

- (30) a. *hullät bet sər̥ra* Mulugeta 2017:105
two house build-PFV
‘He built two houses.’
- b. *bet färräs-ä* Meyer 2025
house be.destroyed.PFV.3MSG
‘A house is destroyed/Houses are destroyed.’

Appleyard 1995, Meyer 2025, Mulusew 2026: Amharic has general number:

- (31) a. *tāmari māt't'a* Mulusew 2026
student come.PFV.3MSG_S
'A student/students has/have come.'
- b. *yonas inna p'etros tāmari/tāmari-očč n-aččāw*
Jonas and Peter student/student-PL be.PRES.3PL_S
'Jonas and Peter are students.'
- c. *bizu tāmari tāsābässābā*
many student gather.PFV.3MSG_S
'Many students have gathered.'

The use of the plural marker in indefinite NPs is conditioned by a discourse factor described as specificity (Meyer 2025), referentiality (Kramer 2009:172) or partitivity (Mulusew 2026) (Zavadskaja 2007:34, Titov 1971:53: the use of the plural is "collective" (which might mean "specific", as Russian collective numerals are not discourse-neutral))

- (32) a. *bizzu/sost bet fārrās-ä* Meyer 2025
many/three house be.destroyed.PFV-3MSG
'Many/three houses are destroyed.'
- b. *bizzu/sost bet-očč fārrās-u*
many/three house-PL be.destroyed.PFV-3PL
'Many/three houses are destroyed.'

Meyer 2025: (32b) involves "a particular subset of houses in the mind of the speaker"

Mulusew 2026 provides clear evidence for the partitive interpretation of marked plurals

Generic interpretation is only possible with unmarked nouns, plural marking forces an episodic reading:

- (33) a. *tāmari ay-i-rābbiš-imm* Mulusew 2026
student NEG-3-disturb.IPFV-NEG
'Students do not disturb.'
- b. *tāmari-očč ay-i-rābbiš-u-m*
student-PL NEG-3-disturb.IPFV-2PL_S-NEG
'Some students do not disturb.'

Measure nouns cannot be pluralized (cf. Klooster 1972:9-10, Ruys 2017 for Dutch, where most measure nouns remain singular when combined with cardinals):

- (34) a. *aratt meter(*-očč) gāmäd* Mulusew 2026
four meter(-PL) rope
'four meters of rope'
- b. *aratt kilo(*-wočč) sikkuar*
four kilo(-PL) sugar
'four kilos of sugar'

Measure interpretation is impossible with plural-marked nouns (cf. Hankamer & Mikkelsen 2008 for Danish, Grestenberger 2015 for Viennese German, Klooster 1972, Doetjes 1997, Ruys 2017 for Dutch):

- (35) a. aratt sini bunna Mulusew 2026
four cup coffee
'four cups of coffee'
- b. yä-aratt sini-wočč bunna
four cup-PL coffee
'four individuated cups of coffee'

On the demonymic interpretation of toponyms, plural marking requires a partitive reading: Leslau 1995:170 observes that a toponym combined with the plural marker yields a demonym, which may denote all or a subset of the people (*däbrä birhan-očč* 'those of (the people of/from) Däbrä Borhan'), but does not contrast it with the unmarked demonymic use of a toponym

- (36) a. gojjam addäm-ä. Mulusew 2026, translations slightly adjusted
Gojjam intrigue.PFV-3MSGs
'The Gojjamese (the entire people) intrigued.'
- b. gojjam-očč addäm-u.
Gojjam-PL intrigue.PFV-3PLs
'Some Gojjamese intrigued (unlike the others).'
- 'The Gojjamese (the entire people) intrigued (unlike other peoples).'

The contrast indicated in the translations in (36) strongly suggests that Amharic plural marking is sensitive to specificity understood as being part of a bigger set (i.e., partitivity)

Importantly, the discourse-established superset need not form part of the denotation of the noun

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