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Ursula Doleschal, Klagenfurt (Austria)

65. Singulatives

Abstract

Singulatives are derived unit nouns. Their varieties revolve around a core notion of a map between nominalizing morphology and unitizing value, varying across languages in semantic latitude and relation to grammatical number, as illustrated by several examples. The meaning of unitizing is elucidated, in relation to packaging and individualizing. A final discussion places singulatives in the context of the typology of strategies for dividing reference.

1. Introduction

An expression meaning ‘many x’ is not necessarily based, in form or in meaning, on a corresponding expression meaning ‘one x’. If a unit-denoting noun is morphologically derived from a more basic non-unit-denoting noun, the derived noun, its grammatical

category, the individualizing marker, or the individualizing derivation, are often called *singulative*.

The creation of this term is attributed to Johann Caspar Zeuss (see Cuzzolin 1998), who in his *Grammatica Celtica* (1853: 299) adopted it to describe the derived singular of those nouns that in the Brittonic branch of Celtic express the plural with a bare stem and the singular with a suffixed stem:

(1)

‘trees’	‘tree’	
gwydd	*gwydd-en*	Welsh
gveyth	*gveth-en*	Cornish
gwez	*gwez-enn*	Breton

(Pedersen 1913: 70)

What is distinctive about singulatives is that the derivative nature of the singular form corresponds to a derivative conceptualization: the unmarked plural form is also conceptually basic, and describes an entity as a discrete aggregate. Derivatively, the singulative describes the parts of this aggregate as individual atomic entities, denumerable and identifiable. Like its opposite *collective*, the term *singulative* is used in different senses, all revolving around a key notion of a unit-denoting noun morphologically derived from a more basic non-unit-denoting noun.

2. Delineating the category

2.1. Morphological and semantic dimensions

The concept of singulative captures the intersection of two fundamental properties: morphologically, the derivation of singular from non-singular word forms; and semantically, the derivation of unit-denoting expressions from bases which denote aggregates of such units. I will call this semantic function “unitizing”. The term *packaging* refers instead to the segmentation of a non-atomic domain into units, as in Dutch *bier* ‘beer’ – *bier-tje* ‘a beer’. In languages where the two conceptualizations correlate with different grammatical properties, packaging turns mass nouns into count nouns.

In the most restrictive use of the term, singulatives are the output of derivational morphology with a unitizing value which turns a description of many units into a description of one unit. In a broader sense, singulatives are the output of morphology with a packaging value where the input is not an aggregate of distinct units. The two functions are clearly distinct notionally, but are often brought about by the same morphological markers, with an overlap that varies substantially across languages. In addition, the same morphology may derive individual-denoting nouns not just from a plural- or mass-denoting base, but from a base that is not a noun. Particularly common is the use of the same morphology in packaging and evaluative function (cf. Jurafsky 1996: 555).

Singulatives, then, are not just unit nouns, but unit nouns whose singular form is derived from a non-singular form by morphology with this specific function. By contrast, *cow*, for instance, is not morphologically derived from *cattle*, although semantically it stands to the collective in almost the same relation as the Arabic singulative *baqar-a*

stands to the collective *baqar* 'cattle, livestock'. The phrase *piece of furniture* is in a sense the singulative of *furniture*, but it is not a word, much less one derived from the collective. Using the term in this purely notional sense would lump together singulatives proper with all other linguistic strategies for identifying a unit out of a collection: by distinct lexical items, as in *person − people*; by different interpretations of the same lexical item, as in the count vs. mass readings of *hair*; or by syntactic means, as in periphrases like *a piece of furniture* or in classifier constructions. The adjective *singulative* describes the unitizing value of a linguistic expression or operation; *singulative nouns*, or just *singulatives*, can more specifically refer to individual-denoting nouns derived by unitizing morphology.

Across languages, singulatives vary along several dimensions. They can represent a class of singular nouns, or they can occur in both number values. Unitizing morphology can be more or less regular, its application more or less productive, and the choice of markers more or less predictable from the form or meaning of the base. The markers involved may or may not have other semantic functions beside unitizing. Finally, a collective-singulative opposition may pervade the whole nominal lexicon, or concern only semantically determined classes of nouns, or a few lexemes. In general, the stronger the mutual implication between morphological exponents and unitizing interpretation, the greater justification there is for viewing singulatives as a category in the grammar of a language − as opposed to a description of the form or meaning of certain nouns.

2.2. Singulatives as a category

It is customary to recognize a category of singulative nouns, opposed to underived collectives, in the Brittonic branch of Celtic (Welsh, Breton, Cornish). A morphologically uniform class of unitizing singulatives is also prominent in Arabic (including Maltese), traditionally identified as a specific value of nominal derivation under the name of *'ism l waħda*, or *nomen unitatis*. Singulatives as derived singulars are also a salient feature of the number system of Nilo-Saharan languages (Dimmendaal 2000). The term can also denote nouns overtly marked as singular, opposed not just to overt collectives but also to an unmarked "general" form compatible with singular or plural reading, most typically in Cushitic languages. More broadly, many languages have derivational morphemes that can be called singulatives for their unitizing or packaging value, as in Tariana (Aikhenvald 2006: 171), Itelmen (Georg and Volodin 1999: 105), or Burushaski (Berger 1998: 39). The term can also indicate the singular interpretation of bare forms unmarked for number, but this no longer refers to a relation between morphology and semantics. Gender reassignment from masculine to feminine has a singulative function in Chadic languages, where a noun with generic or collective value is reinterpreted as individual-denoting (Newman 1990: 134); a similar function is performed by reassignment to class 5 in Swahili (Contini-Morava 1999).

Welsh illustrates a language in which singulatives constitute a category in the grammatical system. This language has an inflectional number category with a straightforward singular-plural opposition, operative on agreement controllers and targets (cf. Corbett 2000). Most nouns have a basic singular form, from which the plural is derived by a variety of morphological means. There is however a class of nouns where the marked-

ness relation is inverted: as shown in (1), the plural is basic and the singular is suffixed. While these nouns are a "relatively small number" (King 1993: 67), they are too many to be regarded as lexical exceptions. What characterizes them as a local regularity, rather than a list of irregularities, is the systematic match of a uniform exponent with a constant interpretation: each singulative noun is suffixed by *-yn* (masculine) or *-en* (feminine), where the choice is determined by the gender of the base noun, and denotes an identifiable unit contrasting with the collective aggregate denoted by the base; for instance, King (1993: 67) suggests 'leaf − foliage / leaves' as a translation for *dail-en* − *dail*. Accordingly, membership in this set of nouns has a clear semantic motivation. Most collectives denote animal and vegetal living beings typically perceived as aggregates: plants (*ysgall*, *ysgall-en* 'thistles', *coed*, *coed-en* 'trees'), trees (*derw*, *derw-en* 'oaks') and other particulate aspects of vegetation (*cnau*, *cneu-en* 'nuts', *gwiail*, *gwial-en* 'twigs'); insects (*clêr*, *cler-en* 'flies'), animals (*adar*, singulative *ader-yn* 'birds'), but also children (*plant*, *plent-yn*). Other concepts include gravel (*graean, greyen-yn*), stars (*sêr*, *ser-en*) or lightnings (*lluched*, *lluched-en*), and a remarkably small number of artifacts, like clothes (*dillad*, *dilled-yn*) and bricks (*brics*, *brics-en*; the base is the English *bricks*, plural). Other bases are not bare stems: *llygod* 'mice' and *pysgod* 'fish' display the same ending *-od* which forms suffixal plurals for other names of animals, like *cath* 'cat' − *cath-od* 'cats'. It seems plausible, however, that this stem-final *-od* goes back historically to a formant distinct from the plural suffix (cf. Cuzzolin 1998). What matters is that the base for singulative suffixation is not necessarily a bare stem. Finally, there are cases like *blod-yn* 'flower' − *blod-au* 'flowers': here both forms are suffixal, the singulative ending alternating with the plural one.

2.3. Singulatives as singular forms

In some languages, singulatives are integrated in the system of number exponence, where they define a particular class of singulars. The clearest and best-studied example comes from Nilo-Saharan languages (Dimmendaal 2000), some of which express a singular-plural syntactic opposition via a three-way partition of nouns: basic singulars, suffixed for plural; basic plurals, suffixed for singular; and nouns suffixed in both number values. The three patterns are exemplified by Baale, belonging to the Surmic family:

(2)

	singular	plural
'crocodile'	*kiŋáŋ*	*kiŋaŋ-é*
'wagtail'	*dorsa-jí*	*dorsa*
'buffalo'	*kóówá-n*	*kóówá-i(t)*

(Baale: Dimmendaal 2000: 224–228)

Forms like *dorsa-jí* are singulative in the formal sense, as they fill the singular cell in the paradigm with a form derived from the form filling the plural cell (forms like *kiŋaŋ-é*, which illustrate the opposite derivation, are sometimes called plurative). But this way of forming a singular by adding a marker to the plural is also a semantically unitizing operation, which marks the conceptual and perceptual priority of plural over singular referents for notions like 'louse', 'ant', 'bird', 'feather', 'leaf', as well as some occurring

in natural sets like ‘finger’ or ‘eye’; basic plurals include human-denoting terms like ‘child’, and intrinsically plural-referring names of populations, like *suri-jí* − *suri* ‘Suri person − Suri people’ (Dimmendaal 2000: 220−226). Deriving a description for individual humans from a collective description of a people is a widespread phenomenon which can give rise to collective-singulative oppositions even in languages that otherwise lack morphologized singulatives. A good example is provided by Russian human-denoting nouns like *anglič-anin* − *anglič-ane* ‘Englishman − Englishmen’, or *dvor-ânin* − *dvor-âne* ‘nobleman − noblemen’ (from *dvor* ‘court’), where the singular ending *-ânin* derives historically by suffixing a singulative *-in* ending to a collective form in *-ân*.

It is important to distinguish these cases, in which nouns marked as singulative *are* the singular in a number opposition, from superficially similar cases where nouns marked as singulative contrast not only with an overtly marked plural, but also with a bare form compatible with a singular or plural interpretation (Corbett 2000: 16−18). The best-known example is provided by languages in the Cushitic branch of Afroasiatic where we find oppositions like the following (the superscript circle indicates an accented vowel in Afar):

(3)

	general (sg/pl)	plural	singulative
‘gazelle’	*híddi’*	*hiddí-ile’*	−
‘guest’	*keesúmma’*	−	*kéesúmm-itʃ*[a]
			(Oromo: Andrzejewski 1960: 66)
‘beehive’	*guruf*	*guruf-wa*	*guruf-ta*
‘onion’	*båsal*	−	*basål-tu*
			(Afar: Hayward 1998: 627)
‘stone’	*kina*	−	*kin-čo*
			(Sidamo: Moreno 1940: 80)

The gaps are important: Hayward reports that in Afar only some nouns like ‘beehive’ have all three forms, while for Oromo Andrzejewski noted that use of the singulative or of the plural is very rare outside of a few nouns, adding that he only recorded a few human-denoting nouns (plus ‘young bull’) with a singulative, and only one with both a singulative and a plural (‘priest’). If we also consider that the singulative derivation may bring about semantic specialization (Oromo *nam*[a] ‘person’, singulative *nám-itʃa* ‘man’; Afar *daro* ‘grain’, singulative *daro-yta* ‘loaf of grain’; Hayward 1998: 627), and that it may express not only singularity but definiteness (Andrzejewski 1960: 74) or specificity (Dimmendaal 2000: 238), the conclusion is clear that we are not just dealing with a way to mark the singular value in an inflectional number opposition.

2.4. Singulatives and plural

In the Nilo-Saharan and Russian examples we have just considered, a singulative noun fills the singular cell in the paradigm, while the plural is expressed by a base collective form. But this coincidence between the two types of opposition, collective − singulative and plural − singular, is a property of certain number systems or of certain lexemes; it

is not a property of singulatives per se. Just as in English the collective *cattle* contrasts not just with the singular *cow*, but with the whole paradigm *cow* − *cows*, morphological singulatives can in principle be singular or plural, if this opposition is operative in the language. Maltese is a well-known illustration (Mifsud 1996: 37):

(4)		collective	singulative sg	singulative pl	Maltese
	'fly'	*dubbiin*	*dubbiina*	*dubbiniit*	

The corresponding phenomenon in Classical Arabic involves the feminine suffix *-a(t)*, plural *-aa(t)*; the final consonant is dropped in pre-pausal position and the vowel has various realizations in the modern dialects, as in the following examples from Damascus (Cowell 1964: 297, 369):

(5)		collective	singulative sg	singulative pl	Arabic of Damascus
	'fly'	*dəbbaan*	*dəbbaan-e*	*dəbbaan-aat*	

The singulative thus defines a formally and semantically regular opposition between singular and plural. The non-suffixed collective form also serves routinely to denote pluralities of what the singulative describes as a unit, but it is not "the" plural of the same noun; for the morphological system, it is another noun, and it can itself have alternative plurals − not arising by suffixation, like in the singulative, but by the rearrangement of the stem CV template which is the main expression of morphological oppositions in Semitic:

(6)		collective1	collective2	singulative sg	singulative pl	
	'fly'	*dubbiin*	*dbiiben*	*dubbiina*	*dubbiniit*	Maltese
		dəbbaan	*dababiin*	*dəbbaan-e*	*dəbbaan-aat*	Arabic of Damascus

Whether there is one or more collective for a given singulative, and what semantic distinctions may be expressed by different collectives beyond non-individuated plurality (often, 'several types' or 'a great many'), is ultimately a matter of historical accident. But the word-formation component makes such alternative plurals possible, if not productively so. The same applies to a second type of singulative derivation in Arabic, which derives unit nouns from collective designations for human ethnics (and for the demons called *jinn*) by means of the ending *-iiy*. This is the marker of a pattern of relational adjectives traditionally termed *nisba* 'relationship': *'arab* 'Arabs' − *'arab-iiy* 'Arab', *badw* 'bedouins' − *badaw-iiy* 'bedouin'. Here too, some singulatives are input to regular affixal pluralization, and some collective bases have a non-affixal plural:

(7)		collective1	collective2	singulative sg	singulative pl	
	'Greek'	*yuunaan*	–	*yuunaan-iiy*	*yuunaan-iiyy-uun*	Arabic
	'Turk'	*turk*	*atraak*	*turk-iiy*	–	

Several such plurals may be possible: Wehr (1976) lists *'uruub*, *a'rub*, *'urbaan*, *a'raab* for *'arab* 'Arabs'.

The collective-singulative opposition also cross-classifies with number in Celtic, most prominently in Breton. While singulatives in Welsh have one of two suffixes, corresponding to the gender of the base, modern Breton has generalized the feminine *-enn*; this means that the singulative derivation determines a gender value, effectively forming a new noun. The interaction with number confirms this interpretation. First, singulatives typically have a plural; in fact, in the wealth of plural formations of Breton, the pluralization pattern illustrated by *sili-enn* − *sili-enn-ou* 'eel − eels' stands out for its regularity. In addition, beside canonical collective-singulative pairs like *del* 'leaves, foliage' − *del-enn* 'leaf' or *per* 'pears' − *per-enn* 'pear', unit nouns can be built on suffixed plurals, like *pesk-ed-enn* from *pesk-ed*, sg. *pesk* 'fish', or *trid-i-enn* from *trid-i*, sg. *tred* 'starling'. The disappearance of a bare singular form can lead to a replacive pattern *X-enn* (sg.) − *X-[pl]*; in the dialect described by McKenna (1998: 223) *-enn* alternates with the collective plural suffix *-ad*, as in *gouri-ad* 'roots' − *gouri-enn* 'root'. This can give rise to series like *ster* 'star' [obsolete] − *ster-ed* − *ster-ed-enn* − *ster-ed-enn-ou*, where the last form, the plural of the singulative, signals a degree of individuation that makes it appropriate for entities that can be pointed to one by one, like stars on epaulettes or on a label, more than for the particulate appearance of a starry sky.

2.5. Form and function

Even in languages where singulatives have a uniform morphology, the relation between markers and singulative function is rarely one-to-one. For example, Welsh has only two singulative suffixes, deterministically selected by the gender of the base. We can legitimately speak of a unified morphological marking for a unified semantic function; yet the relation is not one-to-one, because, as is often the case, the same suffixes also have a diminutive value (Cuzzolin 1998: 139 cites *gron-ynn-yn*, diminutive of *gron-yn* '(wheat) grain', singulative of *grawn* 'wheat'). In Breton, the connection between unitizing function and a dedicated morphology is weaker. The singulative suffix is always *-enn*, but, first, a few collectives are unitized by an alternative archaic construction involving the prefixes *pen(n)-* or *pez-* (Trépos 1956: 124, 236); second, *-enn* can also have a diminutive value; third, *-enn* is not limited to unitizing collectives, but acts more generally as an individualizing nominalizer. In addition to plurals, *-enn* can modify singular nouns, like *glav-enn* 'raindrop' from *glao* 'rain', or *dour-enn* 'liquid substance, secretion' from *dour* 'water'; it attaches even to nouns describing single discrete entities, like *kalon-enn* 'heart-shaped object, core' from *kalon* 'heart', or *karreg-enn* 'rock, boulder', from *karreg* 'rock' (cf. Trépos 1956: 268−278; Favereau 1997). Crucially, these derivations do not have evaluative function. Finally, *-enn* can form individual-referring nouns from non-nominal bases: cf. *glas-enn* 'lawn, green' from *glas* 'green/blue', *koant-enn* 'beautiful woman' from *koant* 'beautiful', and *drailh-enn* 'fragment' from *drailh-a* 'to break' (Favereau 1997; Trépos 1956: 270); already Zeuss (1853: 301) mentioned the derivation of *goulou-en*, glossed as 'candela', from *goulou*, glossed as 'lux'. These uses of *-enn* are far from regular or productive, and it should be emphasized that often a form in *-enn* is functionally the only singular, like *stered-enn* 'star' from the obsolete *ster.*

Similar remarks apply to Arabic. Here, the derivation of singulatives involves the deterministic choice of one of two suffixes, *-iiy* and *-a*, targets a semantically and formal-

ly coherent set of collectives, and creates count nouns interpreted as the corresponding units. While this creates a morphologically and semantically well-defined category in the grammar of Arabic, it is a particular *use* of morphological resources with broader semantic range. The ending *-iiy* derives relational adjectives in general, not just from collectives. As for *-a*, which creates feminine nouns, beside unitizing it derives nouns denoting portions of a mass (*laħm* 'meat' − *laħm-a* 'piece of meat'); it produces deverbal nominalizations denoting bounded events (*sariq* 'stealing' − *sariq-a* 'theft'), identified as a distinct function by the traditional label *'ism l marra* (*nomen vicis*); and it derives singular but not unitized abstract nouns like *waqaaħ-a* 'impudence' from *waqaaħ* 'impudent'. In this function, *-a* can actually combine with the relational affix, to form a complex ending *-iyy-a*, very productive in contemporary usage (as in *'arab-iyy-a* 'Arabic civilization'). In fact, this value of *-a* can bring about an interpretation that is the very opposite of the singulative: *maarr* 'pedestrian' − *maarr-a* '[collectivity of] pedestrians' (Holes 2004: 153).

When the unitizing function is less directly related to a morphological class, it can still make sense to speak of singulative derivations. Wierzbicka (1988: 518) discusses under this rubric Russian formations like *goroš-ina* 'pea' or *trav-in-ka* 'blade of grass', from *goroh* 'peas' and *trava* 'grass'. These correspond to canonical singulatives which turn nouns denoting particulate substances into nouns denoting the perceptual atoms of these substances. However, this type of lexical correspondences does not approach the extension of singulative affixation in the vocabulary of Arabic or Breton. In addition, it represents a particular use of a suffix which can have a range of other semantic functions (Townsend 1980: 190). First, *-ina* can express packaging from a mass, as exemplified by *lëd* 'ice' − *l'd-ina* 'ice floe' or *krov'* 'blood' − *krov-inka* 'drop of blood', although this is lexically quite restricted. Secondly, the suffix can derive an entity-denoting noun from a verbal stem (*razval-it'sâ* 'to collapse' − *razval-ina* 'wreck [person]', pl. *razval-iny* 'ruins'), or turn a general noun into a description for individual events or objects (*konec* 'end' − *konč-ina* 'demise'; *verh* 'top, summit' − *verš-ina* 'peak'). In a few cases, it also derives a mass noun, naming the edible meat of animals from the animal kind name (*baran* 'lamb' − *baran-ina* 'lamb meat'). The label "singulative" in such cases identifies a particular individualizing function of nominalizing morphology. Correspondingly, in Tariana, Aikhenvald (2006: 171) describes both as "singulative" and "individualizing nominalizer" the suffix *-seri*, which has a plural *-seni* and attaches to suffixed collectives as well as to non-nominal bases: *mawari-ne-seri* 'one of the snake people' (snake-PL-SGLT), *nu-phune-seri* 'my follower, my enemy' (1sg-accompany-SGLT).

3. Unitizing

3.1. Mass, unity, and individuation

To say that singulatives derive a reading 'one x' from collectives interpreted as 'many x', or that the Welsh *dail-en* 'leaf' denotes a unit in the denotation of the collective *dail* 'foliage, leaves', effectively restates what one already knows about the meaning of these words, or what is implied by their translation. Intuitively, singulatives describe as self-standing entities what collectives describe as a mass-like multitude. This cannot just

mean that singulatives turn a mass input into a count output. First, it would miss the key fact that the core cases of singulatives individuate not just parts of a mass, but units in a collection; this is what the terminological opposition of "packaging" and "unitizing" is meant to capture, if not to explain. Second, the concept of "mass" is problematic because it conflates a semantic notion of non-atomicity (cumulativity, divisibility) with a cluster of grammatical properties, which vary across languages and do not always align perfectly with each other. But the two are notoriously distinct, as made especially clear by grammatically mass terms which denote discrete units, like *furniture* (cf. Rothstein 2010). For singulatives, more important than a linguistic mass/count distinction, and cognitively prior to it (Soja, Carey and Spelke 1991), is the conceptual distinction between properties that define a standard of unity and properties that do not.

A standard of unity is a way to be 'one'. But being 'one' can only be defined relative to a concept (a point made by Frege 1884). Count nouns like *leaf*, *stalk*, *branch*, *tree*, *wood* define criteria of unity, or "built-in modes, however arbitrary, of dividing their reference" (Quine 1960: 91). But singulatives are not just count nouns; they denote entities conceptualized as fully individuated members of a set, each identifiable as distinct from others. Many nouns are grammatically count but lack this property, like units of measure, or property nominalizations with a count syntax (as in *a particular intensity*). This means that singulatives typically encapsulate a standard of identity (Acquaviva 2008: ch. 4): they conceptualize their referents not as interchangeable tokens but as identifiable individuals, which can be semantically distributed over, and enumerated by unit numerals.

3.2. Outline of a semantic typology

The core singulative-collective oppositions involve concepts for entities that tend to be experienced in aggregates made up of atomic units but not numerically quantifiable. When a singulative unitizes a collective, both terms identify the same individual concept, which defines a uniform and stable granularity of the reference domain (contrast pairs like *band* − *player*, which define different criteria of unity). But what is primary is the indefinitely-numbered aggregate, formed by indistinguishable tokens of such an individual concept. This conceptualization is mass-like because it does not allow identifying reference to a particular token, not because it blurs the boundaries of discrete elements. A singulative derivation changes this conceptualization and allows identifying reference to individual tokens.

Singulatives based on human group denominations represent a slightly different category, where the standard of unity is the cognitively salient notion of a human being, while the collective identifies a group. Another variety is represented by singulatives which describe the units, not of a collection of indefinite cardinality, but of a closed small set of mutually cohesive elements forming a natural complex: typically body parts like teeth, feet, breasts, or paired garments; Trépos (1956: 124, 277) reports the Breton series *glin* 'knee' − *daoulin* 'pair of knees' (a formal dual, denoting a natural set) − *penn-daoulin* 'knee' (a prefixal singulative). Related to this category are compounds with a morpheme *leath* meaning 'half' to denote a single member of a natural pair: cf. Irish *leath bhliain* 'half year', but *leath-shúil* 'one eye' (as in *fear leathshúile* 'one-eyed man').

As we have seen, morphemes with a unitizing function can also have a packaging value, naming a bounded object from the name for a substance: cf. Arabic *zujaaj-a* 'piece of glass, bottle, flask, drinking glass' from *zujaaj* 'glass'; for Welsh, Cuzzolin (1998: 129) discusses unusual but attested cases like *cos-yn* 'piece of cheese' from *caws* 'cheese'. Unlike unitizing, packaging changes the granularity of the reference domain. But if the relation to the base is different, the output is the same as in unitizing: nouns denoting individual entities, as opposed to substances, property nominalizations, abstract units of measure, or indistinguishable members of an aggregate. The fact that location in space and time enhances identifiability probably explains the "concretizing" function of Breton singulatives like *lod-enn* 'part (object extended in space)' from *lod* 'part (subdivision)' (Trépos 1956: 268). What counts, however, is the identifiability of the referent, not concreteness per se; singulatives may refer to entities that can be told from each other but are abstract, like the Breton *kred-enn* 'belief' (as in 'the beliefs of the church') from *kred* 'faith' (cf. Acquaviva 2008: 245). This individualizing function places singulatives on a par with "actualizing" nominalizations that are neither packaging nor unitizing, as the Russian *pâtër-ka*, from *pât'* 'five', which may describe a bus, a school mark, or a banknote (cf. German *Fünfer*, English *fiver*).

4. Singulatives and typology

Unlike other unitizing morphemes like classifiers, singulatives are formants of lexical words. Their functions range from a strictly unitizing value to a broader range of individualizing nominalizations; in the former case they attach to nouns (collectively interpreted) to derive nouns (singularly interpreted), otherwise they attach to a wider range of bases, and unitizing is one among several semantic functions that derive individual-denoting nouns.

Their exponence is mostly suffixal. Prefixes with singulative value seem to be better characterized as compounding stems, in cases like the Breton *pen(n)-* or *pez-* (cf. section 2.5 above), from the nouns for 'head' or 'piece', or the Irish *leath* 'half' (cf. Corbett 2000: 163 for prefixal "quantity markers" in Oceanic languages). As McKenna (1988: 223) notes, *pen(n)-* may occasionally attach to a noun that is formally a derived singulative but functionally a simple singular; cf. *pen-salad-en* 'lettuce'. Apart from these cases, suffixes with a singulative value normally occur stem-finally closing off a nominalization, and before inflectional morphology which controls agreement, like the regular plural *-ou* of Breton or the fused inflectional endings of Russian. As a result, plural morphology can appear inside singulative affixes, when it lexically marks a collective reading on a stem, or outside, as a marker of contextually relevant plural inflection. Languages with a rich enough morphology can express both at the same time, like the Breton *ster-ed-enn-ou*. Breton also shows that a singulative noun may be input to verbal derivation, as in *sili-enn-a* 'to slip between the hands', formed from *sili-enn* 'eel' (Trépos 1956: 121).

In European languages, the relation of singulative affixes with gender varies. Some are category-preserving with respect to the gender of the base, in the terms of Stump (1993), but affixes like the Breton *-enn* or the Arabic *-a*, which derive nouns with a fixed gender, are category-assigning. Diminutives that may otherwise inherit the gender of their base determine a fixed value when used as individualizing nominalizers; cf.

Italian *crema* ‘cream’ (fem.) − *crem-ina* (fem.) ‘little cream’, but *crem-ino* ‘cream praline’ (masc.). Likewise, in Irish, *-ín* inherits the gender of the base when it has a diminutive value, but imposes the masculine when it derives a new nominal lexeme: *fear-ín* ‘little man’ is masculine, *bean-ín* ‘little woman’ is feminine, but *paidr-ín* ‘rosary’ is masculine even though derived from the feminine *paidir* ‘prayer’ (Ó Siadhail 1984; this explains why even *cail-ín* ‘girl’ is masculine).

As lexeme formants, singulative markers do not take part in agreement or concord. This seems to hold even when they coincide with the exponent of the singular number, as in Nilo-Saharan languages (there are singulative adjectives in Turkana, but they are a small closed set; cf. Dimmendaal 2000: 218). This of course does not apply when a singulative interpretation is achieved by reassignment to a different gender or noun class.

Two other properties of singulative morphology follow naturally from its lexeme-forming character: it only applies to a semantically motivated (often small) subset of the nominal lexicon; and its exponents are few and deterministically selected for each base, often having an alternative non-unitizing value. It might appear that these properties logically belong together, distinguishing singulatives from numeral classifiers as lexical vs. grammatical unitizing devices. However, Seifart (2005, 2009) has called attention to the mixed character of unitizing morphology in the Amazonian language Miraña. Here, unitizing follows the lexical pattern of singulatives in being expressed by affixes on nouns, which are compatible with inflectional pluralization. However, the affixes are many and classify most of the nominal lexicon, like classifiers; above all, they co-occur on nouns and numerals:

(8) *maːkíní-ʔo-βa úhɨ-ʔó-ːnɛ*
three-SNGLT-PL banana-SNGLT:OBLONG-PL
‘three bananas’
(Miraña: Seifart 2005: 5)

A satisfactory typology of unitizing, which would essentially contribute to a theory of how languages express the division of reference, is still a desideratum. Before this goal can be reached, more research is needed into the syntax and semantics of singulatives in particular languages, especially in quantified constructions.

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Paolo Acquaviva, Dublin (Ireland)

66. Collectives

Abstract

Collective nouns belong to a class of nouns which, just like the nominal categories mass noun, count noun, abstract noun, concrete noun, animate or inanimate noun, is characterized by very general semantic characteristics of nominal lexical items which may also have syntactic consequences such as number agreement and selection restrictions on adjectival modifiers. The aim of this article is to describe the most important word-formation patterns involved in creating collectives, illustrated by examples from several European − both Indo-European and non-Indo-European − languages. The focus will be on the relationship between the specific semantics of collectives and the particular means of word-formation in this domain, on cross-linguistic tendencies as well as some language-particular means.

1. The semantics of collectives

The term *collective* is employed for a special semantic class of nouns obligatorily designating a plurality of entities, although similar phenomena can be observed for adjectives and verbs, e.g., adjectives referring to a sum of properties as in *bitter-sweet*, and verb compounds combining two types of actions such as German *fräs-bohr-en* ‘mill-drill-INF’.