

## Verbal Number in Sumerian and Itonama.

### Introduction

Verbal number has been attested in a number of languages across the world, most notably those from North-American and Polynesian language families (Crevels, 2006). Thus far, Itonama is the only South-American language for which verbal number has been attested. Sadly, the language has become extinct not so long ago. Verbal number is also present in Sumerian, an ancient Near Eastern Language spoken more than 4000 years ago in southern Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) (Jagersma, 2010).

As opposed to nominal number, which relates to entities, verbal number relates to actions or states that are repeated across time and/or space (Crevels (2006), p. 160, Jagersma (2010), p. 414). This type of plurality is usually expressed by verbal affixes and reduplication. Most often derivational rather than inflectional.

For example, in Dutch the plurality of the action ‘to walk’ in (2) depends mostly on the pronoun *wij*. The form *lopen* has several other meanings, e.g. non-finite, 2PL, and 3PL, among others.

(1) ik loop

(2) wij lopen

In Central Pomo, a language spoken in Northern California (Corbett, 2000), verbal number is used to mark the relation between verb and number:

(3) dog hooking-catch-PFV\ he tied up the dog

(4) dog hooking-catch-PL.PFV\ he tied up the dogs

In (4) several tying-up events take place, hence the plural marking on the verb (Corbett, 2000, p. 244).

### Types of verbal number

Corbett (2000) identifies two types of verbal number: *event number* and *participant number*. Event number is independent of the number of participants. Rather, it denotes the number of actions that take place. The most important distinction that is made with event number is between single and multiple events. Compare for instance the sentences (5) and (6) in Itonama:

(5) why do you want to eat us, uncle?

(6) he has seen us!

Participant number expresses the plurality of actions or states, like in (4). In Sumerian, this is expressed using alternating verb stems. Compare:

(7) ‘it (one lamb) is one that lives at PN, the fattener’s place’ (Jagersma 2010, p. 316).

(8) ‘They (sheep) live at Lugal-ikush’s place’ (Jagersma 2010, p.316).

Although (7) and (8) seem just like agreement in number, there is a difference. According to Corbett (2000), the different forms are more like classificatory verbs, i.e. verbs that are semantically compatible with a restricted set of NPs. E.g. the Sumerian singular verb form ‘...’ refers to a single participant, whereas the plural form ‘...’ requires an object that consists of two participants (Jagersma, 2010, p. ???). The major distinction made by participant number is between one and two, and three or more participants (Corbett, 2000, p. 248).

## Verbal number in Sumerian

### verb alternation

Sumerian uses two different ways to express verbal number. Some verbs specify number as part of their lexical meaning (Table 1). Other verbs use reduplication of the verbal stem.

Table 1: Sumerian alternating verbs

verb	number
v	sg
v	pl

Verbal forms that reflect number are not that rare. In German, for instance, verbs are inflected for number, hence they have different forms for singular and plural. German verb forms, however, are part of a paradigm. E.g. 1SG *bin* and 1PL *sein* both belong to the paradigm of *sein* (‘to be’). The Sumerian verb stems in Table 1 do not behave like this at all. Rather, they behave just like other verbs, showing the same person affixes. Number is part of their lexical meaning.

Generally, it is assumed that the verbs in Table 1 show participant number (Jagersma, 2010, p. 317). However Jagersma (2010) argues that the crucial factor is not the number of a syntactic function, but rather that of a certain semantic role. It is always the role of the most directly affected participant that is pluralized. However, verbal number is not determined by this. Jagersma (2010) shows that these singular and plural verb forms primarily express verbal number, but because multiple events imply multiple participants the association with participant number is not far fetched (Jagersma, 2010, pp. 317–319).

## Verb reduplication

Verb alternation is limited to a small subset of Sumerian verbs. Verbal number, however, is not. For verbs that do not belong to the subset in Table 1, Sumerian uses full verb stem reduplication to express number. E.g.:

- (9) ‘He fashioned several clay nails.’ (En. I 30 2:7; L; 25)

The pluralized stem mainly expresses event number, e.g. plurality of action or state (Jagersma, 2010, pp. 319–322).

## Verbal number in Itonama

Verbal number in itonama

### Participant number

Not unlike Sumerian, Itonama has a complicated verbal morphology (Crevels, 2006, p. 163). Participant number can be expressed by altering the verb stem through (partial) reduplication (shown in (10) and (11)), stem alternation, verbal classifiers or pluractional markers (for more examples please see Crevels (2006), p. 166).

- (10) sih-k’i-ma-doh-ne upa’u \ 1PL.EXCL-INV-hand-bite-NEU dog \ ‘the dog bit us on the hand’
- (11) sih-k’i-ma-do~doh-ke upa’u \ 1PL.EXCL-INV-hand-ITE-bite-PL dog \ ‘the dogs bit us on the hand’

### Event number

Event number in Itonama is expressed in various ways as well. Strategies include using a distributive marker, (partial) reduplication, or use of a pluractional marker.

## Comparison

Pls look at ??

thx

## References

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