Plural Marking beyond Count Nouns

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Plural marking on mass nouns in languages like English and Persian is assumed to be allowed *only* when the interpretation of the mass noun is subject to coercion—i.e. count reading of mass nouns (Ghomeshi 2003). As such, plural marking serves the purpose of portioning out the undivided stuff into conventionalized units (Borer 2005, Mathieu 2007).

This paper presents facts establishing that plural marking on mass nouns in Persian, in addition to its portioning-out function (2&3), can induce definiteness (1). I propose that the definiteness interpretation triggered by plural morphology arises from the syntax of plural marking in Persian.

(1) barq-â   /   âb-â   qat'-e.   *definiteness reading*
      electricity-PL / water-PL   cut-is.3SG
      'The power/the water is shut off.'

(2) berenj-â-ye   šomâl zud   mi-paz-e.   *taxonomic reading*
      rice-PL-EZ   north early   DUR-cook-3SG
      'Rice(*s) from the north cooks fast.' [i.e. different varieties]

(3) čây-â-ro   gozâšt-am   tu   sini.   *understood quantity reading*
      tea-PL-OM put.PST-1SG   in   tray
      'I put the teas in the tray.' [i.e. cups/glasses]

Building on Ghomeshi's (2003) assumption that plural marking in Persian, contra English, is licensed within D/QPs rather than NumPs, and Wiltschko's (2008) diagnostics for identifying the categorial identity of plural marking, I propose, following Ghaniabadi (to appear), that plural marking in Persian is not a functional head and is thus modificational. Adopting Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz 1993 *et seq.*), I propose that the definiteness-inducing plural marker and the default plural marker are two homophonous but semantically distinct Vocabulary Items meeting different contextual features at Vocabulary Insertion.

(4)   *Vocabulary Items for plural marking in Persian*
         a.   /-hâ/   ↔ [pl] / D$_{DEF}$ >   N + ____
         b.   /-hâ/   ↔ [pl]

The definiteness-inducing plural mass nouns in (1), i.e. *barq-â* 'the power' and *âb-â* 'the water', are not understood in any way to involve coercion effects. They are rather interpreted as referring to the totality/maximality/exhaustivity of the mass that satisfies the description of such plural nouns within their given context. Lyons (1999) adopts Hawkin's (1978) term "inclusiveness" to characterize the concept underlying the definiteness of plural and mass nouns. He further suggests that "with plural and mass nouns *the* is a universal quantifier, similar in meaning to *all*... and the difference between them may be that *all* is simply more emphatic" (p. 11). I show that this generalization holds true for the definiteness-inducing plural marker on mass nouns in Persian, thus providing further evidence in support of the proposal that the plural marker on mass nouns may function as a definite marker.

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