

PLURALIZATION IN ILOCANO: THE RELATIONSHIP OF FORM AND MEANING

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Ilocano is an Austronesian language spoken by over three million people in the Philippines, and also in Ilocano emigrant communities in Hawaii and the mainland United States. Originally confined to the extreme North-West Coastal portion of the island of Luzon, over the last century Ilocano speakers have occupied many of the surrounding provinces, so that the language is now the dominant mother-tongue or lingua franca throughout northern and in much of central Luzon. It is the best known language of the Northern Philippine group. Of the other major Philippine languages, of which Tagalog and Cebuano (Vizayan) are probably the most widely known outside the Philippines, all except Pangasinan belong to the Southern group. Pangasinan and a very few minor languages appear to constitute a third group, coordinate with the Northern and Southern languages.¹

The process of 'pluralization' in Ilocano has been adequately described in relation to the morphology of nouns, verbs, adjectives and noun-markers.² An examination of the semantic correlates of this process reveals, however, two distinct kinds of plurality. One kind has the component "more than one", and will be referred to in this paper as simple plurality; the other has an individuating and universal function with the component "severally and separately", and will be designated distributive.

Verb³ and adjective pluralization is characteristically distributive in nature, while plural noun-markers may be described as simple or neutral plurals. This point will be returned to later. It is the nouns, however, which are of major interest, because of apparent irregularities in the formation of some plural forms, and the semantic differences associated with these 'deviant' examples.

Countable nouns in Ilocano may be divided into five classes, each characterised by a particular type of reduplication to mark 'plurality', together with a group of nouns of Spanish and English origin which may be pluralized as regular Ilocano forms, or by the addition of the (Spanish) suffix *-(e)s* or both

distributive) can be determined only in relation to the context. Thus *dagiti dudukto:res* may mean either 'more than one doctor' or 'each doctor'. (For this reason the type of plural denoted by these forms was not included in the remarks about 'double pluralization' of certain loan words).

It is possible therefore to state a general rule for the combination of plural articles with countable nouns:

Plural article + Pluralized stem:

[+ Human] simple or distributive plural
 [- Human] distributive plural

Plural article + Root:

[- Human] simple plural

The eight nouns of the *qubing* series form their own paradigm, often retaining the ambiguity of other nouns with a human referent when the singly pluralized form is used, but having in addition an unambiguous distributive form:

Plural article + Pluralized (-C₂C₂-) stem:
 simple or distributive plural

Plural article + Reduplicated (C₁V₁C₂-) pluralized stem:
 distributive plural.

If the pluralized verbs and adjectives are examined, the same processes will be found at work - the 'plural' form is clearly distributive in character: e.g.

Nagtaray dagiti qubbing.
run mkr.pl child+pl
 'The children ran.'

Nagtataray dagiti qubbing.
run+pl mkr.pl child+pl
 '(Each of) the children ran.'

The distributive character of the action as expressed in the verb is reflected in the choice of a distributive plural form of the noun referring to the actor. This is not apparent in nouns referring to human beings, where the obligatory plural in this context is capable of two surface interpretations. If a non-human actor is substituted for *qubbing*, it will be in the form of a distributive plural, however - *nagtataray dagiti bakba:kes* '(each of) the monkeys ran'. The universalist connotations of the unambiguously distributive form of the *qubing* series restrict the use of this form in such contexts - *nagtataray dagiti qubqubbing* is a 'well formed sentence', but with a greatly intensified distributive connotation, so much so that most listeners would have the impression that the speaker was referring to all the children in the world. On the other hand,

common nouns (those marked [- Human]) may occasionally appear as simple plurals following a distributive verb, as in *nagtataray dagiti ba:kes* - here, however, the emphasis is on generality for the actor; such a sentence would imply that 'monkeys ran, but (e.g.) dogs did not', the action having been performed individually by members of a specified homogenous group.

Adjectives parallel verbs in their 'plural' and 'non-plural' forms:

Napintas dagiti balbala:sang.

beautiful mkr.pl maiden+pl

'The maidens are beautiful (collectively and equally).'

contrasts with

Napipintas dagiti balbala:sang.

beautiful+pl mkp.pl maiden+pl

'The maidens are beautiful (individually and possibly differently).'

Thus all the morphologically pluralized nouns, verbs and adjectives, with the exception of nouns characterized by the feature [+ Human], are distributive in nature. Simple plurality is found only in relation to common nouns with non-human referents and is formed by combining an unpluralized root with a plural article; with the other countable nouns simple plurality must be inferred from the context. This explains why 'a plural noun requires a plural noun-marker, but not vice-versa, and a plural verb or adjective requires a plural noun, but not vice-versa'.⁸ It also accounts for the 'double plural' forms of certain nouns.

It would be interesting to know whether the nouns of the *qubing* series have always constituted a closed set,⁹ or are instead 'living fossils' representing a morphological process which once characterised all Ilocano nouns with human referents. They form a set of very basic lexical items which, like pronouns, often in other languages manifest grammatical relationships which may no longer be marked explicitly elsewhere in the language. Even with these nouns a kind of semantic erosion has taken place, as the singly pluralized form is now as ambiguous as the morphological plural forms of 'human' nouns not in this group. The two other words characterized by reduplication of the second consonant provide some evidence that the two types of plurality marked in *qubing* etc. may have been separable at one time: the 'non-plural' forms *lala:ki* and *baba:qi* are universal in form and meaning, and the reduplicated first syllable could well be the relic of an ancient distributive marker.

The formation of two semantically distinct kinds of plural stems is obviously no longer a productive process in Ilocano - if

it were, the doubly pluralizable loan words would easily have fitted into the same frames as their few indigenous pseudo-counterparts. At least two possibilities present themselves for further investigation - that 'human' nouns in Ilocano and related languages originally formed a set analogous to *qubing*, *qubbing*, *qubqub(b)ing*,¹⁰ or that all countable nouns originally fitted into this set, with the distinction preserved in the case of common nouns through the root word functioning as a simple plural after the morphological distinction between singular, (simple) plural and distributive had partly disappeared. The distributive forms of common nouns, adjectives and verbs indicate the possibility that the reduplication of an initial segment of the stem may have marked distributive plurality, while the evidence from the *qubing/lala:ki* series points to some kind of medial reduplication or infixation as a marker of simple plurality.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Constantino, Ernesto, 1963. 'Ilocano Pluralizers'. *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review*, 28.4:408-415.
- Thomas, David and Alan Healey, 1962. 'Some Philippine language subgroupings'. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 4.9:21-33.

NOTES

- ¹ See Thomas and Healey (1962).
- ² This paper discusses aspects of pluralization in Ilocano not touched upon by Ernesto Constantino in his 'Ilocano Pluralizers' (1963). Professor Constantino described the morphological processes involved, but specifically excluded considerations of meaning.
- ³ The terms verb, noun and adjective are used here to denote the members of these major word classes in Ilocano as defined by Dr Constantino. A verb consists of a stem, plus a verbal affix and a tense/aspect marker, e.g. *napiglas* 'ran' (n- 'completed' + *pa* 'active deliberate' + *gla* 'run'). An adjective consists of a stem plus an adjective affix, e.g. *napiglas* 'beautiful' (na- + *pi* 'beauty'). A noun consists of an unaffixed root, or a stem plus nominal affix, e.g. *palig* 'child', *mananap* 'writer' (man- + *nap*

- 'write'). The term 'noun-marker' denotes those articles and demonstratives which occur before nouns and noun phrases.
- 4 The following departures from the conventional orthography are made in citing Ilocano forms: the glottal stop is written as *q*; traditional *c* (before *a*, *o*, *u*), *qu*, and *k* are represented by *k*; and *ç* (before *i*, *e*) and *s* by *s*; phonemic vowel length is marked by a colon (:) - it may be noted here that in reduplicated segments vowel length is lost, e.g. *sa:bung*, *sabsa:bung*. The digraph *ng* represents a voiced velar nasal, as in the conventional writing system.
 - 5 The author has observed the 'singly pluralized' forms *babba:i* and *lalla:ki* in the speech of Ilocanos from South-Eastern Pangasinan, with the same semantic implications as the analogous 'doubly pluralised' forms discussed by Constantino (see below).
 - 6 In these examples of Ilocano sentences, nouns, verbs, adjectives and pronouns are identified by English translations (ignoring other morphemes, if any, contained in the word, except for reduplication indicating plurality). Other forms are labelled thus: pl = plural, dem = demonstrative, loc = location marker, lg = ligature (relational particle), mkr = article, neg = negative marker.
 - 7 All nouns which do not refer to human beings may be said to be characterized by the feature [- Human] (in addition, of course, to other positively or negatively specified features).
 - 8 Constantino 1963: 415. Note however the exceptions to this rule, for example in the case of a pluralized verb followed by a plural article and non-pluralized noun to indicate the generality of the performance of the action by the members of one group in contrast with the general non-performance by other groups. Plurality is indicated by the noun-marker; the type of plurality is indicated by the form of the noun, adjective and verb stems.
 - 9 Factors such as relative frequency of use may, for example, have influenced the development of a distinction between distributive and simple pluralization in these forms alone.
 - 10 It is interesting to note in this connection that words denoting 'man', 'woman', and/or, some kinship categories are characterized by 'irregularly' formed plurals in many other Austronesian languages, from Pangasinan, geographically contiguous to Ilocano, to Maori, a much more distant relative genetically and geographically (e.g. Png. *agĩ* 'younger brother' *agāgi*, *toō* 'man' *totōo* 'men', where the stress shift appears to be morphologically conditioned; Maori *wahine* 'woman', *waahine*, *teina* 'younger brother' *teeina*, where the morphological marking of plurality by lengthening the first vowel in the stem is confined to a small set of words forming an interesting semantic parallel to the Ilocano grouping discussed in this paper, and perhaps also a morphological parallel, with consonantal length in Ilocano performing similar functions to vowel length in Maori).