ON THE TURKISH PLURAL SUFFIX +*lAr*

Turgut BAYDAR[*]

ABSTRACT

The plural suffix +lAr is a noun inflectional suffix, which has been used to make nouns plural since Old Turkish. Today, this suffix is actively used in Turkish used in Turkeyand other modern Turkish dialects.

In this study, in contrast to what is presented in existing grammars, attention is drawn through witnessed examples to the fact that the plural suffix +lAr establishes a relationship between the words / word groups it is attached to and the predicate of the sentence.

Key Words: noun inflectional suffixes, +lAr plural suffix, the scope of the +lAr plural suffix.

ÖZET

+*lAr* Çokluk Eki Üzerine

+lAr çokluk eki Eski Türkçeden beri isimleri çokluk yapmak amacıyla kullanılan bir isim çekim ekidir. Ek, bugün Türkiye Türkçesinde ve diğer Çağdaş Türk Lehçelerinde işlek olarak kullanılmaktadır.

Çalışmada eldeki mevcut gramerlerde ifade edilenin aksine, +lAr çokluk ekinin geldiği kelimeler / kelime gruplarıyla cümlenin yüklemi arasında ilişki kurduğu tanıklı örneklerle dikkatlere sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: isim çekim ekleri, +lAr çokluk eki, +lAr çokluk ekinin kapsamı.

[*] *Asst. Prof., Instructor at Erzincan University, Faculty of Education, Department of Turkish Education.*

One of the suffixes giving activity to the root and stem of words is the *+lAr* plural suffix. The *+lAr* plural suffix is a noun inflectional suffix that has been used to make nouns plurals since Old Turkish.[1]

Previous studies evaluated plural suffix at a different position than other noun inflectional suffixes. The reason behind this was explained as follows: *Grammatical nuance expressed by plural suffix remains just in the root or stem. It does not describe a relation beyond the word, a relation linked to other words. It establishes relation with objects that are of the same kind, which is absolutely an internal relation, by defining that the number of the single object to which root or stem corresponds is more than one. A root or stem taking a plural suffix has to use a possessive suffix, case suffix and interrogative suffix in order to establish a relationship with other words.* (Ergin 1989: 123)[2]

Ahmet Cevat Emre comments on this topic as follows: *The verb close to the mass subject becomes singular, but if the verb is distant from the mass subject or the sentence becomes longer because of repeated expressions, verbs are put into plural form; examples:*

***Halk** toplanmıştı, hızlı hızlı konuşuyor**lar**, gürültü patırtı ediyor**lar**dı.*

*…Vücutlarının, ocaklarının yiyeceğini hazırlamış olan bu **halk** kahvelere dolarak vakitlerini nargile köpürdetmek, öksürükle… tükürüklerle sık sık fasılaya uğrayan manasız sohbetlere dalmakla geçirir**ler**di.*

*Çun halka söz arz edersin gökçek ibaret ile gösteri, ta ki **halk** seni sözde ne mertebelüsün… bile**ler**.* (Emre 1945: 317)

Emre mentioned that the reason for the predicates of sentences in this structure to take a plural personal suffix is because they are distant from the subject and that this tradition has been continuing since 14th century.

On this topic Jean Deny states: *In Turkish, there are several suffixes expressing the number of the category of person through concurrence*

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1   See for the use of the suffix in every period of Turkish since Old Turkish. Leylâ Karahan (1998), "Birleşik Kipli Fiillerde Çokluk Eki -*lAr*'ın Yeri", *Türk Dili*, S. 563, Ankara: TDK Yay., s.381-387; K. Grönbech (1995), *Türkçenin Yapısı*, (Çev. M. Akalın), Ankara: TDK Yay., s.50-70.

2   See for expressions in this accordance. Zeynep Korkmaz, (2003), *Türkiye Türkçesi Grameri -Şekil Bilgisi-*, Ankara: TDK Yay., s.257-259; Gürer Gülsevin (2004), "Türkçede 'Sıra Dışı Ekler' ve Eklerin Tasnif-Tanımlanma Sorunu Üzerine", *V. Uluslararası Türk Dili Kurultayı Bildirileri I*, 20-26 Eylül 2004, TDK Yay., Ankara, s.1279-1280; Tahir Kahraman (1999), *Türk Gramerinin Sorunları II*, Ankara: TDK Yay., s.291-293.

(singular or plural); however one of them has a special potency in pointing to the number of the category of person: plural suffix -ler, -lar.

This suffix is not just for a certain word section, it can be attached not only to the variable nouns (like universes, pronouns), but also to the third persons of verb moods (singular third person).

....On the other hand, Turkish language did not allocate a definitely settled place for the plural suffix in organization of words. Certain inconsistencies of Turkish language may be shown in connection with this topic (Deny 1941: 146-147).

Deny stated that plural suffix can be attached to verbs as well as nouns but this not an absolute rule. The interesting point here is that he stated that it can be attached, but Deny did not say that it is attached. In addition, he mentioned the inconsistencies in the manner of the attachment of the suffix to verbs, but he did not explain why the suffix can or cannot be attached to the verbs.

Kononov presents the following information about the plural suffix in the *chapter **Plural Case of Nouns** of his grammar: When a noun does not take plural suffix (-lar, -ler) in Turkish, it not only shows that this noun is singular, it also refers to the whole family of this noun.*

For example:

The word "at" is the singular form of this word, but it also refers to the entire group (class), which is "atlar".

Therefore, a noun in the singular form in Turkish can hold the meaning of "whole, indivisible unit". It is widely used in this form (meaning).

For example:

Looking at the sentence "Babamın iki merakı vardır: Kuş ve Çiçek." it is possible to explain that there are no words used just in "plural" form in Turkish.

Plurality is expressed in three ways in Turkish:

Morphological

Lexical

Syntactical

Morphological way: *the suffix -lar, -ler is attached to the noun: kuşlar, taşlar, evler.*

Lexical way: *nouns used as a "whole, indivisible unit": zenginlik, güzellik, ihtiyarlık, bolluk. Some take the suffix -lar, -ler, but then they hold a concrete meaning: zenginlikler, güzellikler.*

Nouns that cannot take -lar, -ler: öğretmenlik, köylülük, analık.

Syntactical way: *it can be inferred from the meaning of the words in noun phrases: bir kitap, birkaç insan, beş öğrenci.* (Kononov 1956: 67-73)

Kononov states in the chapter **Subject-Predicate Agreement** of his study: *….We can summarize the subject-predicate agreement in Turkish based on the examples below:*

Çocuklar geldi.

In this example, the word "çocuklar" refers to a group; the predicate is singular while the subject is plural.

Çocuklar geldiler.

In this example, the expression of "çocuklar" does not refer to a group but çocuklar (children) separately; both subject and predicate are plural.

Moreover, as in other languages, it is possible that predicate is plural when the subject is singular:

Bay geldiler. (Kononov 1956: 379)

Kononov mentioned that when the subject taking a plural suffix refers to a group, the predicate becomes singular; but if it does not hold any group meaning the predicate can take plural suffix.

After she presents the information given by other researchers in the matter of suffix, Kerime Üstünova states in one of the most recent and comprehensive studies; *Ad İşletimi (Biçim Bilgisi) (Noun Operation (Morphology),* :

…. Although there are various classifications, there is a point on which all the researchers agree that the plurality suffix does not act like a real inflectional suffix, and it does not make a formal contribution to the operation of the language and the system. As it does not establish a formal and semantic connection between the unit it is attached to and other units, it has to be the first suffix attached to the nouns and other inflectional suffixes have to come after the plural suffixes.

….Normally noun inflectional suffixes take on the ensuring of the fluidity of the language by putting the word they are attached to into relationship with other words. However, the fact that the plural suffix does not bring the word to anywhere leads it to have a narrower scope when compared to other inflectional suffixes (Üstünova 2008: 383-391).

Like other researchers, Üstünova pointed out that the function of the plural suffix is related to the word / word group which it is attached to. In her study, Üstünova examined the plural suffix under *Ulam Ekleri (Category Suffixes)* by stating *under category suffixes, we gathered noun inflectional*

suffixes that cannot link the language unit to which they are attached to another language unit, that is, which cannot establish a formal relationship, and whose semantic functions are limited to the words they are attached to (Üstünova 2008: 383).

As understood from this expression and the similar expressions, the plural suffix *+lAr* was subjected to a separate classification within its own class. Is that really so? Are the researchers correct in their assertions? These questions await a reply.

In this study, in the light of the questions asked above, we will try to explain that the plurality suffix is no different from other noun inflectional suffixes, in contrast to the assertions of the researchers; and accordingly, the effect of the plural suffix is not limited just to the word/ word group which it is attached to, and the words / word groups which take the plurality suffix are connected with other words /word groups, that is, with predicate of the sentence. We will try to explain these points through the use of examples. In addition, we will try to reveal the problem encountered in the analyses of sentences in this structure.

Some uses of the plural suffix *+lAr* in certain periods of Turkish are quite different and interesting.

tėgin yėrçi avıçḳa *birle ikigü ḳaltı**lar**.* (Grönbech 1995: 62)

sekiz körkle tang arıġ ḳazlar *sarıġ altun yip engirer**ler**.* (Grönbech 1995: 62)

Qaçan kim Peyġāmbar ʿas yārānlarqa qonuŋ tėp fermānladı erse, **cümle ṣaḫāba** *qondı**lar**.* (Eckmann 1995: 32)

Andın soŋ **cümle ṣaḫāba** *ʿÖmer qatınġa kirdi**ler**, olturdı**lar**.* (Eckmann 1995: 84)

Peyġāmbar ʿas aydı: Miʿrāc tüninde Cebreʾil birle uçtmaḳhqa teferrüc qılurda uçtmaḳ içinde ėkki köşk kördüm. **Ėkkisi** *yanaşu tururlar.* (Eckmann 1995: 123)

Bir kün Peyġāmbar ʿas ḫıdmatınġa **ėkki kimerse** *keldi taqı aydı**lar** kim : Yā Resūlallāhi, bizlerke Taŋrı teʿālānıŋ Kelāmı birle ḫükm qılġıl, tėdi**ler**…* (Eckmann 1995: 241)

…Baʿżı **ḫalāyıq** *taqı olturdı**lar**.* (Eckmann 1995: 32,84,123,241,278) In the examples given above, it is very important that the predicates take the plural suffix, that is to say, when words / word groups, which do not take plural suffix but which express plurality, are used as the subject their predicates take plural personal suffix.

As mentioned above, existing studies have always stated that noun inflectional suffixes put words /word groups to which they are attached into a relationship with a verbal or with a finite verb functioning as the predicate in the sentence or with a word or word group coming after it or with a pronoun before it; however +*lAr*s do not have such a function, and the effect of word /word group to which +*lAr* is attached is limited just to this word / word group. In existing studies, examples are presented in accordance with this.

However, when we examine the topic in accordance with what the researchers say, we cannot explain certain expressions, such as 1. *Öğretmen içeri girdi*. 2. *Öğretmenler içeri girdi+Ø*. 3. *Öğretmenler içeri girdiler.* In fact, these examples are very important in the sense that they show that it is impossible to refer to an established rule in Turkish regarding whether or not the predicate of the sentence can take plural personal suffix when word /word group taking plural suffix functions as subject. As the subject of first example, *öğretmen*, did not take plural personal suffix, the predicate of the sentence did not take a plural personal suffix, either. Even though the subject took plural suffix in the second example, the predicate did not take a plural suffix, which needs some explanation. In third example, the subject and the predicate of the sentence take a plural suffix. **If we accept what is suggested in the existing studies, it is not possible for us to explain why the predicate of this third sentence takes plural personal suffix.** The only reason for this predicate taking a plural personal suffix is that the plural suffix is attached to the subject of the sentence. It can be said that the plural suffix was attached to the predicate of this sentence in order to be polite and show respect; so let us look at these sentences,

*Bülbüller keskin keskin ötüyor, uzaktan **mandıraların köpekleri** havlıyor**lar**dı*. (Tülek 2005: 74)

*İnce, uzun dallı badem ağaçlarının alaca gölgeleri sahile inen keçi yoluna düşüyor, **ilkbaharın tatlı rüzgârları ile sarhoş olan martılar**, çılgın naralarla havayı çınlatıyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 115)

*Ufku, küflü demir renginde, ağır bulut yığınları eziyor, **sürü sürü geçen kargalar** tam hisarın üstünden uçarken sanki gizli bir kara haber götürüyor**lar**mış gibi, acı acı bağırıyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 15)

***Gölgeler** yaklaştı**lar**.* (Tülek 2005: 73)

*Etrafta devriye takımları uzun mızraklarıyla cirit oynar gibi koşuşuyorlar, **aydınlıktan huylanan atlar** şaha kalkarak, delice dörtnala ileri atlıyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 215)

***Öbür günkü bayram için hazırlanan beyaz kurbanlar**, küçük Grijgal palangasının etrafında oturuyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 15)

*Sanki **bu uğursuz kargalar** hep onun mazgallarından taşıyor, anlaşılmaz bir dilin çirkin küfürlerine benzeyen sesleriyle etrafı gürültüye boğuyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 15)

***Duvar taşlarının arasından çıkan kertenkeleler**, üzerinde geziniyor**lar**, çuvaldan elbisesinin içine kaçıyor**lar**, gür, beyaz sakalının üstünde oynaşıyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 117)

***Üstündeki kertenkeleler** kaçıştı**lar**.* (Tülek 2005: 118)

***Kargalar**, havaya boşaltılmış bir çuval canlı kömür ellemeleri gibi karmakarışık geçiyor**lar**, sessizliği parçalayan keskin, sivri sesleriyle gaklıyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 17)

***Öteki atlar da** durmuyor**lar**dı.* (Tülek 2005: 159)

How can we explain that predicates of sentences with subjects having a plural suffix take a plural suffix? Did the predicates of these sentences take a plural personal suffix for reasons of respect/politeness? As the subjects of these sentences took a plural personal suffix, their predicates took the plurality suffix, too.

Serious problems are encountered in the analysis of this kind of sentences. That is to say; when we ask **İçeri giren kim? (Who is the one entering?)** of the predicate of the sentence *Öğretmenler içeri girdi.*, the answer is *o* or any **singular** noun corresponding to *o*. That is because our question was **kim (who referring to a singular person)** but not **kimler (who referring to plural persons)**. Therefore, the word *öğretmenler* in the sentence remains uncovered because *öğretmenler* is a noun taking a plural suffix and not related to the predicate of the sentence. Then, the expression the *real subject is within the predicate of the sentence*[3] remains uncovered. However, if we ask **İçeri girenler kimler? (Who are those entering?)** of the predicate of the sentence *Öğretmenler içeri girdiler.*, we take *öğretmenler* as the answer. Different situations may emerge in different sentences. For instance, when we ask **Geziye giden kim? (Who is this going on a trip?)** of the predicate of the sentence *1A sınıfı öğrencileri geziye gitti.*, we see that there is no concurrence between the subject and predicate of the sentence. That is because, it is not just one student of 1A class such as Ahmet or Ayşe, who went on a trip; the whole class went on the trip. Or when we ask **Ehl-i ırzlar nazarında hırsızlardan, uğursuzlardan daha korkunç olan kim? (Who is more terrifying than thieves and evils in the eyes of men of honor?** to the predicate of the sentence *Geceleri afyon*

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[3] Örnek olarak bk. Tahsin Banguoğlu (1995), *Türkçenin Grameri*, 4. bs., Ankara: TDK Yay., s.540; Fuat Bozkurt (2000), *Türkiye Türkçesi*, 2.bs., Ankara: Hatiboğlu Yay., s.167; Kerime Üstünova (2008), *Ad İşletimi (Biçim Bilgisi)*, İstanbul: Kesit Yay., s.161;391.

yutan bu serseriler, ehl-i ırzlar nazarında hırsızlardan, uğursuzlardan daha korkunçtu. (Tülek 2005: 73), again no relationship is seen between the subject and predicate of the sentence. That is because the answer to this question is *o*, Ali, Veli etc.

There is a difficulty similar to the one given above in explaining sentences whose subjects take a plural suffix while their predicates are singular.

Öğrenciler okula gidecek.

Çocuklar gelmedi. No plural personal suffix was attached to the predicates of these sentences. However, subjects of the sentences took a plural suffix. When we examine the predicates of these sentences, we again encounter a structure which is congruent with the meaning. The verb *git-* in the sentence *Öğrenciler okula gidecek* was subjected to inflection in future time and the 3rd person singular form, and it became the predicate. However, subject of the sentence is plural. The verb *gel-* in the sentence *Çocuklar gelmedi* was subjected to negative inflection in the simple past tense and 3rd person singular form, and it became the predicate. That is to say, the predicate was inflected with the 3rd person singular, but the subject is plural.

Result: as it is clearly revealed by these and similar examples, we think that the predicates of sentences whose subjects take a plural suffix must also take a plural personal suffix. We believe that, accordingly, structurally more compatible sentences will emerge and these kinds of sentences can be taught more easily.

Considering all these explanations, we can say that if a word / word group taking a plural suffix functions as the subject, the predicate of the sentence in question can take a plural personal suffix, as well. We say "…can take" because why it takes or does not take in every case awaits an explanation. In this case and in the light of the examples we have given and more can be provided, we think that the effect of the suffix *+lAr* is not just limited to the word / word group it is attached to in this particular usage, and therefore it should be revised examined again.

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