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Introduction

The paper discusses morphological and semantic aspects of number marking in the Ethiosemitic language Wolane.¹ Together with Silt'e and Zay, Wolane forms the East Gurage language group within the Eastern branch of Transversal South-Ethiosemitic (cf. Gutt 1997b:509, Hetzron 1972:119).² The Wolane homeland is situated in the northern part of the Gurage-speaking area, approximately 160 km south of Addis Abäba, the capital of Ethiopia. Wolane is spoken by nearly 70,000 people as their native language. The majority of them are multilingual with Amharic and/or other Gurage languages and/or with Oromo (Meyer 2006:15ff.).

The paper is organized in the following way: After the plural marking morphemes have been presented in section 2, the semantics of bare and plural-marked nouns will be discussed in sections 3 and 4. Section 5 deals with the relation between definite marking of nouns and number implications. Selected aspects of number marking in Wolane are compared with related East Gurage languages in section 6. The main findings are summarized in section 7.

Morphological plural markers

Countable nouns in Wolane can be overtly marked for plural by a variety of morphemes (cf. Meyer 2006:148ff.). The most frequent plural marker is the morpheme *-ččä* (or its allomorph *-čä*)³ which is suffixed to a nominal stem (cf. Chart 1).

¹ I thank all the Wolane people, whose kind cooperation facilitated the research on their language. In particular, I am indebted to Zeynu Alemar and Shamil Sayyid. I gratefully acknowledge the Addis Ababa University, Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Ethiopian Languages Research Centre for granting me a research permit, and the SFB 295: *Cultural and Linguistic Contacts* at Mainz University and the German Research Council (DFG), whose financial support facilitated my research on Wolane.

² I follow the classification set down by HETZRON (1972), who considers Silt'e, Wolane and Zay separate languages belonging to the genetic group called *East Gurage* (for further information see MEYER 2006:18f.).

³ The allomorph *-čä* usually occurs when the noun ends in a syllable of the structure CVC. In all other occurrences the plural marker is the morpheme *-ččä* (cf. MEYER 2006:148ff.).

Chart 1 Plural marker -ččä

| | | | |
|--------------|---|------------------|-----------------|
| <i>wumf</i> | > | <i>wumf-iččä</i> | ‘bird/s’ |
| <i>ʾawrē</i> | > | <i>ʾawrē-ččä</i> | ‘wild animal/s’ |
| <i>wurbä</i> | > | <i>wurbä-ččä</i> | ‘lion/s’ |
| <i>gār</i> | > | <i>gār-čä</i> | ‘house/s’ |

Loanwords generally form their plural by the plural morpheme *-ččä*, as demonstrated in Chart 2.

Chart 2 Plural with loan-words

| | | | | |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|--------------|-------------------------|
| <i>bätrukān</i> | > | <i>bätrukān-čä</i> | ‘orange/s’ | (Amh. <i>bärtukan</i>) |
| <i>kurāz</i> | > | <i>kurās-čä</i> | ‘oil lamp/s’ | (Amh. <i>kuraz</i>) |
| <i>mäkinä</i> | > | <i>mäkinä-ččä</i> | ‘car/s’ | (Amh. <i>mäkina</i>) |

Another, non-linear morpheme that indicates plural is the reduplication of a stem-final consonant of a noun and its incorporation into a vocalized template. This template consists of the reduplicated final consonant (C_L) preceded by the vowel *ā* and followed by the vowel *ō*, thus ... $C_L\text{-}\bar{a}C_L\bar{o}$, as shown in Chart 3.

Chart 3 Plural formations by templatic reduplication ... $C_L\text{-}\bar{a}C_L\bar{o}$

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|--------------------|--------------|
| <i>dāhānō</i> | > | <i>dāhān-ānō</i> | ‘buffalo/es’ |
| <i>dārsāmmä</i> | > | <i>dārsāmm-āmō</i> | ‘singer/s’ |
| <i>wāšt</i> | > | <i>wāšt-ātō</i> | ‘sister/s’ |

Stem-final vowels are deleted when the noun marks plural by templatic reduplication. The consonant immediately preceding such a stem-final vowel fills the C_L -slot in the template. Geminated final consonants occur only as non-geminated consonants in the template. Most nouns marking their plural by templatic reduplication usually have an additional plural form involving the suffixation of the plural morpheme *-ččä* (cf. Chart 4). The two plural forms do not differ semantically.

Chart 4 Double plural formations

| | | | | | |
|---------------|---|-----------------|----|------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>ʾaftō</i> | > | <i>ʾaftātō</i> | or | <i>ʾaftōččä</i> | ‘girl/s of marriageable age’ |
| <i>gōlōdō</i> | > | <i>gōlōdādō</i> | or | <i>gōlōdiččä</i> | ‘knife/knives’ |
| <i>kältä</i> | > | <i>kältātō</i> | or | <i>kältäččä</i> | ‘small axe/s’ |

Plural formation by templatic reduplication is less frequent compared to plural formation by the morpheme *-ččä* and appears not to be productive. Templatic reduplication is lexicalized, i.e. it is restricted to an arbitrary set of nouns. This set of nouns is difficult to define because there are neither distinctive phonological nor semantic features which are applicable to the entire set.⁴ Most Wolane informants had the impression that the plural formed by templatic reduplication is more archaic or represents a more

⁴ The situation is different in Kistane, a North Gurage language, which also has a variety of plural-marking morphemes whose usage is predictable based on semantic features of the nouns (cf. BEDILU WAKJIRA 2010:21f.).

prestigious Wolane variety (i.e. a Wolane variety used by their forefathers) than the plural marked by the morpheme *-ččä*.

In rare cases suffixation and templatic reduplication appear as a combined plural marker as shown in Chart 5.

Chart 5 Combined plural markers

(a) template ... $C_L\bar{a}C_L\bar{o}$ followed by suffix *-ččä*

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|----------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| ^o <i>umi</i> | > | ^o <i>umāmčä</i> | (< ^o <i>um</i> - <i>ām(ō)</i> - <i>čä</i>) | ‘uncle/s (brothers of mother)’ |
| ^č <i>älō</i> | > | ^č <i>älälčä</i> | (< ^č <i>äl</i> - <i>äl(ō)</i> - <i>čä</i>) | ‘child/ren’ |
| <i>wāḡi</i> | > | <i>wāḡāččä</i> | (< <i>wāḡ</i> - <i>āḡ(ō)</i> - <i>čä</i>) | ‘brother/s’ |

(b) suffix *-ččä* followed by template ... $C_L\bar{a}C_L\bar{o}$

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| ^o <i>ibēr</i> | > | ^o <i>ibērčäčō</i> | (< ^o <i>ibēr</i> - <i>č(ä)</i> - <i>āčō</i>) | ‘grandparent/s’ |
| <i>gār</i> | > | <i>gārčäčō</i> | (< <i>gār</i> - <i>č(ä)</i> - <i>āčō</i>) | ‘house/s’ |

The suffixation of the plural morpheme *-ččä* to the plural template ... $C_L\bar{a}C_L\bar{o}$ yields the deletion of the final vowel *ō* of the template (cf. Chart 5a). The reverse ordering of the two plural formatives, i.e. first suffixation of the morpheme *-ččä* and then templatic reduplication, seems only to appear with the two nouns cited in Chart 5b. All nouns forming their plural by a combination of the two plural markers have an additional plural form by either the suffixation of the morpheme *-ččä* or the templatic reduplication. Again, no semantic differences have been recorded between the various plural forms.

Full reduplication of an entire nominal stem, as demonstrated in Chart 6, is another form of plural formation. It is restricted, however, to a few adjectives. Therefore, it must be considered as a non-productive lexicalized form of plural formation.

Chart 6 Plural formation by full reduplication

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------|---------|
| ^o <i>anč’ir</i> | > | ^o <i>anč’ir-’anč’ir</i> | or | ^o <i>anč’iriččä</i> | ‘short’ |
| <i>fäyyä</i> | > | <i>fäyyä-fäyyä</i> | or | <i>fäyyäččä</i> | ‘good’ |
| <i>furt’</i> | > | <i>furt’-furt’</i> | or | <i>furt’iččä</i> | ‘small’ |

As with nouns forming their plural by templatic reduplication, the adjectives forming their plural by full reduplication also optionally mark plural by the morpheme *-ččä*. A few adjectives form their plural by a combination of full reduplication and additional suffixation of the morpheme *-ččä*, as illustrated in Chart 7.

Chart 7 Combination of plural formatives with adjectives

| | | | | |
|--------------|---|------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>fätti</i> | > | <i>fätti-fätti-ččä</i> | | ‘wide’ |
| <i>t’it</i> | > | <i>t’itt’iččä</i> | (< <i>t’it-t’it-ččä</i>) | ‘small, some, few’ |

In contrast to common nouns, the full reduplication or suffixation of the morpheme *-ččä* with adjectives may convey a neat semantic difference as illustrated in examples (1) and (2):

- (1) ²*ağis-čä* *ləβas-čä* *wobäβ-ä.*
 new-PL garment-PL buy:PV-3sm
 ‘He bought new garments.’ (explicitly referring to different items)
- (2) ²*ağis-²ağis* *ləβas-čä* *wobäβ-ä.*
 new-new garment-PL buy:PV-3sm
 ‘He bought new garments.’ (may refer to several items of the same kind)

The repetition of the adjective in example (2) may imply that either several items of the same kind, e.g., several trousers of the same size and make, or different items, e.g., trousers, shirts, etc., have been bought. Example (1) using the plural marker *-čä* on the adjective, in contrast, explicitly expresses that different kinds of garments were bought. This semantic difference seems only to exist in a few contexts. In most cases the two plural forms of the adjective are interchangeable, as was the case with common nouns.

Furthermore, Wolane has a few nouns which express plural by suppletive lexical items (see Chart 9 and Chart 10 below).

To conclude, Wolane has several morphological and lexical means to overtly express plural with countable nouns and adjectives. Among these plural markers the morpheme *-čä* suffixed to a nominal is the most productive. The morpheme *-čä* usually occurs as optional plural marker with nominals forming their plural by other morphemes; it is the only plural marker with loanwords and it may also be applied to relative verbs (see example (13) below). The other plural morphemes seem to be non-productive, lexicalized plural forms because they are restricted in their distribution and not freely applicable.

Number implications of bare and plural-marked nouns

Although Wolane possesses a variety of morphemes indicating nominal plural, nouns which are overtly marked for plural are not frequent in texts or in free speech. They occur, however, in elicitation. A ‘bare’ noun, i.e. a noun as it occurs as lexical entry, can convey singular and plural readings, as shown in example (3):

- (3) *bāli^ə* *-n.*
 old_person_[αPL, αFEM]⁵ -COP:3sm
 (a) ‘He is an old man.’ [-PL, -FEM]
 (b) ‘They are old men’ [+PL, -FEM]
 (c) ‘They are old persons.’ [+PL, (αFEM)]

⁵ I added the semantic features number (PL) and gender (FEM) in the interlinear gloss and translation. When the semantics of the noun has the option to differentiate between neutral, singular or plural entities on the one hand, and neutral, masculine or feminine gender on the other, the respective features are marked with the alpha-symbol (α). When the number or gender feature is somehow connected with a noun but bleached out for the respective discourse-context, it occurs crossed out in parentheses.

As can be seen from the English translation, the bare noun *bāli'ə* is multiply ambiguous. It may refer to a single old man (translation (a)), to a group of old men (translation (b)) or to old persons in general (translation (c)). The reason for this ambiguity is the lexical semantics of the noun *bāli'ə* 'old person'. Although it inherently possesses the semantic features number and gender it is not strictly specified for them, i.e., it can refer to single or to plural referents and, depending on the number feature, to male(s) or to a group of male(s) and female(s). This means that a bare noun in Wolane may only encode a general quality or property; in the case of the noun *bāli'ə* it is the quality of 'being an old person'. Nouns which are not specified for number and gender morpho-syntactically always agree with a default third person singular masculine on the copula, as in example (3), or on the verb, as in example (4).

- (4) *bāli'ə* *mät'ä.*
 old_person_[αPL, αFEM] come:PV:3sm
 (a) 'An old man.' [-PL, -FEM]
 (b) 'Old men came.' [+PL, -FEM]
 (c) 'Old persons came.' [+PL, (αFEM)]

Multiple ambiguities as in examples (3) or (4) are restricted to isolated clauses. Usually the discourse context provides the necessary information for the addressee to fill in the correct values for the unspecified features number and gender. The noun *bāli'ə* 'old person', as it occurs in examples (4) and (3), for instance, can have either a negative number value [-PL] yielding a singular reading or a positive value [+PL] yielding a plural reading. The gender, however, can only have a negative value ([-FEM = masculine]) in singular or it is bleached out in plural ([αFEM]). In plural, the gender is of no (syntactic) relevance because Wolane distinguishes morpho-syntactically between feminine and masculine entities only in singular. When the speaker refers to a single old woman, for instance, the agreement marker on the copula or verb has usually to be changed, as shown in (5).

- (5) *bāli'ə* *-n-t.*
 old_person_[αPL, αFEM] -COP-3sf
 'She is an old woman.' [-PL, +FEM]

Thus, the 3sf subject agreement marker on a copula or on a verb restricts the reading of a bare noun to a single, feminine entry, in case the bare noun possesses the semantic feature gender. The 3sm subject agreement marker, in contrast, is ambiguous. If it refers to a masculine noun it also indicates singular (cf. 4a). The same subject agreement marker can also be used to refer to a noun whose semantic plural and gender features are either bleached out or not of relevance (cf. 4b, c). In the latter function the 3sm

subject agreement marker can also refer to nouns which are intrinsically feminine, as shown in (6).

- (6) *assər mišt yä-hid!*
 ten wife_[αPL, +FEM] 3sm-go:JUS
 ‘Ten (of the) women should go!’ [(-PL, +FEM)]

Clauses like (6) are not frequent.⁶ Usually feminine subjects are referred to by 3sf subject agreement markers.

An overt morphological plural marker, too, disambiguates the reading of bare nouns. Here, reference can only be to a noun in the plural, i.e. number always has the value [+PL] and gender is regularly bleached out. When the plural morpheme *-ččä* is attached to the bare noun *bāli’ə* ‘old person’ (cf. (7)) its ambiguity disappears. Now the noun can only have a positive value for the number feature, which is also reflected by the use of third person plural agreement on the verb. The semantic feature gender is consequently bleached out.

- (7) *bāli’iččä mät’-u.*
 old_person:PL_[+PL, αFEM] come:PV-3p
 ‘Old persons came.’ [+PL, (αFEM)]

One difference between bare countable nouns and nouns which are overtly marked for plural in Wolane is their potential number implication. While bare nouns can refer to single or to plural entities, plural-marked nouns only refer to plural entities. Bare nouns in Wolane are thus *transnumeral*, i.e. they represent nominal concepts which are indifferent with regard to the opposition singular versus plural (cf. Corbett 2000:10ff., Biermann 1982:229). Transnumeral nouns in Wolane refer to a nominal concept in a general way and thus include quantities from one item to infinity. Plural nouns, in contrast, always encompass more than one item but less than infinity. Plural in Wolane is not a grammatical category which only expresses number. It simultaneously emphasizes that a quantity of individuated items belonging to a single nominal concept must be known at least to the speaker. Consequently, nouns which are overtly marked for plural in Wolane refer to specific items in the physical world.⁷ Transnumeral and plural nouns in Wolane thus reflect an

⁶ Sentence (6) is only acceptable in a context in which the speaker cannot refer to ten specific women in the physical world. This is, for instance, the case when he orders to choose a number of women-workers from a group of people whom he does not know.

⁷ Specificity means that the nominal concept in consideration “exists as a bounded, individuated entity in the message world” (PAYNE 1997:264). Although a specific constituent is marked as referential to an overt or a salient representation in the physical world or discourse, it does not need to be definite (cf. LAMBRECHT 1994:79ff.).

opposition between an open, unspecified quantity of items and a closed quantity of items belonging to a single nominal concept, respectively.

Specific or unspecified reference to nominal concepts in the physical world is the reason why quantifiers or numerals in Wolane can occur with a bare or a plural-marked noun as demonstrated in examples (8) to (10):

- (8) *bəžži säb mät'ä.*
 many person come:PV:3sm
 'Many people came.' (unspecific reference > open quantity)
- (9) *bəžži säb-čä mät'-u.*
 many person-PL come:PV:3p
 'Many people came.' (specific reference > closed quantity)
- (10) *ʔassər t'āy ʔassər t'āy-čä*
 ten sheep ten sheep-PL
 'ten sheep (unspecific reference)' 'ten sheep (specific reference)'

When examples (8) and (9) are compared with regard to the number of items belonging to the nominal concept *säb* 'person', it is implied that the bare transnumeral noun in (8) exceeds in quantity the plural-marked noun in (9). Although the number of items is not explicit in the two clauses, the fact that plural refers to a closed set of items seems to be responsible for this interpretation. The function of plural morphemes to indicate both, plurality and specificity, becomes clearly evident in example (11) versus example (12).

- (11) *ʔənnä ʔassər t'āy-čä yä-šāmil-n-u.*
 this ten sheep-PL GEN-Shamil-COP-3p
 'These ten sheep (PL) are Shamil's.'
- (12) **ʔənnä ʔassər t'āy yä-šāmil-ən.*
 this ten sheep GEN-Shamil-COP:3sm
 'These ten sheep are Shamil's.'

The occurrence of the proximal demonstrative pronoun *ʔənnä* 'this' and the overt possessor *šāmil* in example (11) allows only a specific reading of the noun *t'āy* 'sheep'. In such a context the noun *t'āy* 'sheep' must be overtly marked for plural and, consequently, for specific reference. The bare transnumeral noun yields an ungrammatical clause, as shown in example (12).

The plural morpheme *-čä* can also be suffixed to a (nominalized) relative verb⁸ whose agreement refers to the third person plural subject or object, as in example (13).

⁸ Relative clauses in Wolane are formed by a relative clause marker and an affirmative or negative verb in the perfective or imperfective aspect which is inflected for person, gender, number. Relative verbs can occur as modifiers to nouns or as head nouns (cf. MEYER 2006:121ff.).

- (13) *bētkä* *yä-²ābār-u-ym(-čä)*
 LOC:place:POSS:3sm REL-plant:PV-3p-o3p(-PL)
 ‘(the plants) which were planted at this place’

The object agreement marker *-ym* on the verb alone indicates that the referred object noun is in the plural. The suffixation of the plural morpheme *-čä* to the relative verb conveys the additional discourse-pragmatic information of specificity. It indicates that the plants in example (13) refer to a set of plants which is known at least to the speaker. Example (13) is also grammatical when the plural morpheme *-čä* does not occur. But in this case the specific reference is not apparent.

To summarize, the nominal number system in Wolane consists of morphologically unmarked transnumeral nouns and morphologically marked plural nouns. Transnumeral nouns are unmarked for the semantic feature number and may thus refer to a single item or to a variety of items belonging to the same nominal concept. Plural-marked nouns code two semantic features: reference to a closed set of items belonging to the same entity and a specific reference of this set in the physical world.

Nouns referring either to masculine or to feminine entities

Only a few nouns in Wolane, usually denoting nominal concepts which are related to humans or animals, are inherently marked either for masculine or for feminine gender. The majority of transnumeral nouns does not possess the semantic feature gender, another smaller group of nouns possesses the semantic feature gender but is not specified for it, i.e. nouns of this group may refer to masculine or feminine entities depending on the context.

The gender-indicating nouns in Wolane typically occur as a set of suppletive nouns that are specified for either masculine or feminine gender. The most frequent nouns of this type are summarized in Chart 8.

Chart 8 Conceptualization of transnumeral and gender

| Masculine: | | Feminine: | |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|
| <i>miš</i> | ‘man, husband’ | <i>mišt</i> | ‘woman, wife’ |
| <i>yigī</i> | ‘boy’ | <i>gäräd</i> | ‘girl’ |
| <i>qärēzä</i> | ‘boy of marriageable age’ | <i>’aftō</i> | ‘girl of marriageable age’ |
| <i>sibbō</i> | ‘widower’ | <i>wogyät</i> | ‘widow’ |
| <i>bärä</i> | ‘ox’ | <i>lām</i> | ‘cow’ |

With regard to plural marking, the nouns *miš* ‘man’ and *mišt* ‘woman’, on the one hand, and *lām* ‘cow’ and *bärä* ‘ox’, on the other, are exceptional. They differentiate between transnumeral and plural by suppletive lexical

entries rather than morphological plural markers. These nouns are part of basic taxonomies as presented in Chart 9 and Chart 10.

Chart 9 Basic taxonomy of humans

| | Transnum. [α PL] | Suppletive Plural [+PL] | Morph. Plural [+PL] |
|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 'person/human' | <i>säb</i> | _____ | <i>säb-ččä</i> |
| 'man' [-FEM] | <i>miš</i> | <i>'ab^wäč / säb(-ččä)</i> | _____ |
| 'woman' [+FEM] | <i>mišt</i> | <i>'ändäč</i> | <i>mišt-iččä</i> |

The noun *säb* in Chart 9 denotes human(s) in general. When a gender distinction is necessary in discourse the noun *miš* for 'man' or *mišt* for 'woman' is used instead. All three nouns are transnumeral. The plural of *säb* 'person/human' is built by suffixing the plural morpheme *-ččä* to the bare transnumeral noun yielding *säbččä* 'persons/humans'. The noun *mišt* has two optional plural forms. One is regularly formed by the plural morpheme *-ččä*; the other is the suppletive noun *'ändäč* 'women'. The noun *miš* 'man' does not possess a morphologically formed plural. Instead the nouns *'ab^wäč*, *säb* or *säbččä* are employed. The nouns *'ab^wäč* and *säb* also occur in non-plural, transnumeral contexts: *'ab^wäč* denotes a 'male youngster' (transnumeral) with the plural form *'ab^wäčiččä*; the noun *säb* also refers to humans without gender distinction. This lexical overlap is resolved by agreement marking on the verb. Both plural nouns, *'ab^wäč* (referring to men but not to male youngsters) and *'ändäč* are always referred to by 3p agreement markers on the verb.

The nouns *bärä* 'ox' and *läm* 'cow' in Chart 10 are also part of a basic taxonomy.

Chart 10 Basic taxonomy of cattle

| | Transnum. [α PL] | Suppletive Plural [+PL] | Morph. Plural [+PL] |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 'cattle' | <i>'əri</i> | _____ | <i>'əri-ččä</i> |
| 'ox' [-FEM] | <i>bärä</i> | _____ | <i>bärččä (*bärä-ččä)</i> |
| 'cow' [+FEM] | <i>läm</i> | <i>'əri(-ččä)</i> | <i>läm-ččä</i> |

The gender-neutral noun *'əri* 'cattle' and the masculine noun *bärä* 'ox' form their plurals by suffixing the morpheme *-ččä*, whereas an unexpected phonological change takes place in the plural of *bärä* 'ox'. The plural of the feminine noun *läm* 'cow' is either morphologically marked or the suppletive nouns *'əri* or *'əriččä* 'cattle' are used.

Definiteness and number implications

If bare countable nouns in Wolane are indifferent with regard to number and if an overt plural is indicated by morphological or lexical means, then the question arises how an overt singular is expressed. One way to indicate

- (16) *bāli'ə-tē* *mät'ā-t.*
 old_person_[αPL, αFEM]-DEF:F_[+DEF, +FEM] come:PV-3sf
 'The old woman came.'
 [-PL, +FEM] - [+DEF, +FEM] (+SPEC) > SINGULATIVE
 [-PL, +FEM] - [+DEF, +FEM] (-SPEC) > DEFINITE, SINGULAR

It has already been mentioned that the noun *bāli'ə* 'old person' is unspecified for number and gender. Therefore, example (15) yields several readings without a concrete discourse context. When the speaker refers to a single specific 'old individual' in the physical world, as is the case in (15a), then the noun *bāli'ə* must be interpreted as singular masculine entity. The combination of singular, masculine gender, definiteness and specific reference yields a singulative reading, i.e. the noun refers to a specific person in the physical world. With non-plural nouns, the feature specificity is not marked overtly but only recoverable from the context. When the context does not provide such a specific reference, the noun is only interpreted as a definite entity referring to a single male person (15b). When neither specificity nor gender are of importance for the discourse, as in (15c), only a kind of generic reading occurs which emphasizes a group consisting of elders (or a single old person). In this case the semantic features number and gender of the noun *bāli'ə* are totally bleached out. Example (16) is less ambiguous. Gender is marked overtly as feminine by the feminine definite article so that the noun *bāli'ə* can only be interpreted as a single feminine entity. The specificity feature may take a positive or a negative value depending on the context. If it is positive, the noun refers to a definite, specific, old woman in the physical world (singulative). In case the noun has an unspecific reading, it refers to background information.

Transnumeral nouns which do not possess the semantic feature gender, like, for instance, the noun *gār* 'house' in examples (17) and (18), interact with the definite articles in a different way regarding number implication.

- (17) *gār-i* *nādād-ä.*
 house_[αPL]-DEF_{[+DEF]/^s[+DEF, -FEM]} burn:PV-3sm
 'The house(s) burnt.'
 (~~αPL~~) - [+DEF] (-SPEC) > GENERIC
- (18) *gār-tē* *nādätti.*
 house_[αPL]-DEF:F_[+DEF, +FEM] burn:PV:3sf
 'The house burnt.'
 [-PL] - [+DEF, +FEM] (+SPEC) > SINGULATIVE
 [-PL] - [+DEF, +FEM] (-SPEC) > DEFINITE, SINGULAR

The transnumeral noun *gār* 'house' cannot distinguish between masculine or feminine entities. Therefore, the article *-y* occurring in example (17) can only be the general definite article. The noun *gāri* 'the house' in (17) has a

tic change is also reflected in morphology because the noun *lām* is referred to by the 3sm default agreement marker in (22). Agreement with a 3sf subject occurs, however, when the noun *lām* is marked by the feminine definite article, as in (23).

- (23) *lām-tē* *mäy* *säčē-t.*
COW_[αPL, +FEM]-DEF:F_[+DEF, +FEM] water drink:PV-3sf
 ‘The cow drank water.’
[-PL, +FEM] - [+DEF, +FEM] (+SPEC) > SINGULATIVE
[-PL, +FEM] - [+DEF, +FEM] (-SPEC) > DEFINITE, SINGULAR

The feminine definite article in (23) only allows a singular reading of *lām* ‘cow’. When reference is to a specific cow in the physical world a singulative reading is obtained; when no specific reference exists only a definite-singular reading occurs. In both cases the verb agrees with a third person singular feminine subject.

So far we have seen that transnumeral nouns which are marked by the feminine or masculine definite articles change into singular entities while transnumeral nouns marked by the general definite article usually have a contrastive generic reading. The use of the definite article with a noun overtly marked for plural is not frequent and, without context, usually appears to be odd. If it occurs, it is implied that the speaker is referring to a specific set of entities which are contrasted against another set of entities. Example (24) illustrates such a rare co-occurrence of overtly marked plural and the general definite article on a noun.

- (24) *bāli’iččā-y* *mät’-u.*
old_person:PL_[+PL, (αFEM)]-DEF_[+DEF] come:PV-3p
 ‘Old persons came (and no other persons).’ (contrastive reading)
[+PL, (αFEM)]-[+DEF] (+SPEC)

The noun *bāli’iččā-y* in example (24) indicates a specific reference to a set of old persons in the physical world. The suffixation of the general definite article *-y* to the noun emphasizes the entire set of old people in consideration which yields a contrastive reading, i.e. the speaker emphasizes that only the old persons and nobody else fulfilled the action of coming.

Number marking in Wolane related to other East Gurage languages

A comparative view towards related Ethiosemitic languages shows that the templatic reduplication ...*C_L-āC_Lō* used as plural marker appears to be a characteristic feature of East Gurage languages, i.e. Silt’e, Wolane and Zay. In Silt’e (cf. Gutt 1997a:906) and Wolane the templatic reduplication pattern is identical, in Zay it is ...*C_L-āC_Lu* (cf. Meyer 2005:228). The sound change of the vowel *o* in Silt’e and Wolane towards the vowel *u* in Zay occurs regu-

larly in cognate items. Except Kistane, no other Ethiosemitic language uses this kind of templatic reduplication to indicate plural.⁹ In Kistane, the templatic reduplication follows the pattern ... $C_L a C_L \bar{a}$ (cf. Bedilu Wakjira 2010:22f.), i.e. instead of the final back vowels o/u in East Gurage the central vowel \bar{a} appears instead. A similar morpheme with the template ... $C_L VC_L(V)$ was recorded in Neo-Aramaic varieties and Modern South Arabian languages (cf. Ratcliffe 1996:298; Simeone-Senelle 1997:391). Ratcliffe (1996:302ff.) argues that the templatic reduplication plural in Semitic (and also in other Afroasiatic) languages developed out of a productive Semitic plural template $CVC\bar{a}C$. Thus, the templatic reduplication plural represents a common feature in the noun morphology of the East Gurage languages Silt'e, Wolane and Zay as well as the adjacent North Gurage language Kistane. The specific form of the templatic plural marker with a final back vowel may function as an additional isomorph for East Gurage languages.

Plural formation by lexical suppletion occurs only with a few nouns in Wolane. In Gunnän-Gurage languages, which are spoken adjacent to the Wolane speaking area, lexical suppletion is the only means to indicate plural on nouns; plural in these languages is usually expressed by verbal agreement markers (cf. Hetzron 1977:52f.). At this stage of research, it seems probable that plural formation by suppletion in Wolane (and probably in Silt'e, too) is the result of or has been retained through language contact with Gunnän-Gurage languages. Zay, an East Gurage language which is not in close contact with Gunnän-Gurage languages, does not use suppletive lexical entries to distinguish between transnumeral and plural. The plural noun 'əndāč 'women', however, has been recorded once in a traditional song in Zay. In everyday speech the noun *sēcčā* 'women' instead of the uncommon 'əndāč is found as plural of *sēt* 'woman'.

The pattern of unmarked transnumeral nouns and morphologically marked plural nouns seems to be common to all East Gurage languages (cf. Gutt 1997a: 906 for Silt'e and Meyer 2005: 226f. for Zay). Gutt (1997a: 906) postulates a three-way distinction between singular, plural and paucal of a noun in Silt'e, whereby singular and plural are unmarked forms and paucal is morphologically marked. As singular and plural are not distinguished

⁹ A number of Ethiosemitic languages not belonging to East Gurage may also employ reduplication of consonants as a plural-marking device. However, in these languages the reduplication is usually based on the second to the last consonant of the stem whereby between the reduplicated consonant the vowel \bar{a} appears, as in Amharic *wäyfän* > *wäyfaḥän* 'young bullock(s)' (LESLAU 1995:174). Note that this kind of plural formation is usually accompanied by additional changes of the nominal stem.

from each other morphologically they may actually represent a single category, namely, the transnumeral. Consequently, the so-called ‘paucal’, a grammatical category of a noun referring to a few items, could represent a plural with specific reference to a set of items belonging to the same nominal concept in the physical world. However, not the quantifying notion ‘a few’ characterizes this category, but the combination of the two features, plurality and specificity.

Wolane and Silt’e differ from Zay with regard to the singulative. While Silt’e is almost identical to Wolane in marking an item as singular or singulative (cf. Gutt 1994), Zay uses additional morphemes to indicate a singulative with ethnonyms and nouns denoting ‘man’ and ‘woman’ (Meyer 2005:229f.). The feminine article in Zay is not used to indicate singular with non-feminine transnumeral nouns. Further, the distinction between masculine and feminine gender is restricted to nominals referring to humans in Zay while it also occurs with nouns denoting animate, non-human concepts in Wolane and Silt’e.

Conclusion

Wolane distinguishes between morphologically unmarked transnumeral nouns and morphologically marked plural nouns. Plural markers encode two grammatical features: plurality and specificity. The definite articles in Wolane can also indicate number. The general definite marker *and* the masculine definite article are represented by a single morpheme *-y*; the feminine definite article is the suffix *-tē* which consists of the feminine marker **-tā* and the general definite marker *-y*. There are distributional restrictions between the definite articles and three classes of nouns. These three classes of nouns are defined by their semantic markedness for gender, namely, (a) nouns which do not possess the semantic feature gender, (b) nouns which possess the semantic feature gender but can refer to feminine or to masculine entities, and (c) nouns which refer either to masculine or to feminine entities. The general definite article is combinable with all three noun classes and usually yields a contrastive generic reading but does not indicate singular number. While the masculine definite article can only be attached to masculine nouns of class (b) and (c), the feminine definite article occurs with nouns of all three classes. The masculine and feminine definite articles transform a transnumeral noun into a definite, singular noun.

The homonymy of the general and the masculine definite article is probably not a coincidence but an internal development resulting from the existence of an additionally marker **-tā* for feminine nouns. Historically, the general definite article and the feminine marker merged into a feminine

definite article. As masculine nouns did not possess an additional marker, the general article alone took over the function to mark masculine gender.

Number marking in Wolane shows that there is no one-to-one relationship between a morpheme and its function. Due to language-internal developments, language contact or other reasons a morpheme may obtain additional functions or enter new usage patterns so that it synchronically occurs in different grammatical or semantic contexts.

Abbreviations

| | | | |
|-------|---|--------|--------------------------------------|
| 3p | 3 rd person plural subject | JUS | jussive |
| 3sf | 3 rd person singular feminine subject | LOC | locative |
| 3sm | 3 rd person singular masculine subject | o3p | 3 rd person plural object |
| Amh. | Amharic | PL | plural marker |
| COP | copula | αPL | not specified for number |
| DEF | general or masculine definite article | +PL | plural number |
| DEF:F | feminine definite article | -PL | singular number |
| FEM | semantic feature gender | POSS | possessive pronoun |
| αFEM | not specified for gender | PV | perfective aspect |
| +FEM | feminine gender | REL | relative verb marker |
| -FEM | masculine gender | +SPEC | specific reference |
| GEN | genitive | -SPEC | unspecific reference |
| | | (αFEM) | bleached out gender feature |
| | | (αPL) | bleached out number feature |

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Abstract

Countable common nouns in the East Gurage language Wolane are usually unmarked for number and belong to one of three noun classes based on the inherent gender feature of the nouns. First, it will be argued that morphological plural marking indicates plurality *and* specificity. Second, it will be shown that the interaction between the three noun classes and definiteness has various pragmatic effects. Finally, the findings for Wolane are compared with related East Gurage languages.