

Reduplication revisited: verbal plurality and exhaustivity in the visual-gestural modality

Josep Quer (ICREA-Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

Background. From the very early stages of sign language research (cf. Klima & Bellugi 1979 for ASL) and in subsequent descriptions of unrelated sign languages (SLs), a reduplicative morpheme in verbal morphology has been identified as encoding exhaustive distribution over a plural argument in agreement verbs (1). It consists in a sideward reduplication of the verb sign on the horizontal plane, where the repeated endpoints match the referential locus of a plural argument (Fig. 1). It is often labelled as [+distributive/exhaustive] and considered a mark of plural argument agreement. However, in Klima & Bellugi (1979: 284) it was called “distributional aspect”, highlighting the link to inflectional aspectual properties.



C) GIVE [exhaustive]
'give to each'

Figure 1

- (1) IX-1 BOOK STUDENT 1-GIVE-3-dist.
'I gave a book to each of the students.'

Goal. On the basis of Catalan Sign Language (LSC) data, this paper reconsiders the status of the alleged [+distributive/exhaustive] morpheme under the light of verbal plurality marking and argues for a broader analysis of reduplication in the verbal domain built on the category of *pluractionality*. This change in vantage point allows for a better understanding of reduplication in sign languages as a grammatical marker of plurality cutting across the parameters of event participants, event times and event locations.

Pluractional marking, cross-modally. Mainly beyond the domain of European languages, event plurality (multiple subevents conveyed in a single predication) is widely encoded by *pluractional* markers. The morphological exponent of pluractionals is often reduplication (next to other means like stem alternation or other suffixes), as illustrated in (2) for Hausa.

- (2) Mutàanee sun *fir*-fitoo
people 3pl.perf RED-come.out
'Many people came out.'

(Hausa, Součková 2011)

The interpretation that the pluractional form triggers in (2) is that there was a plurality of events, either because people came out one by one, or in small groups, or if the subevents happen to be simultaneous, people must have come out of different houses. The multiplicity of events conveyed by pluractionals can thus derive from the plurality of (i) participants involved, (ii) repetitions across time of the subevents, or (iii) locations of the subevents (Součková 2011, a.o.).

Recent work on French SL (LSF) by Kuhn & Aristodemo (2017) has shown that pluractionality is instantiated in the language and is realized by two distinct reduplicative morphemes, /rep/ and /alt/, which appear productively with a broad range of verbs, both agreeing and plain. However, they show that the differences in the form of the repetition are paired with different interpretations: /rep/, articulated as an exact repetition of the predicate on the vertical midsagittal axis, entails that the subevents with the same participants are distributed over time; /alt/, realized as a repetition alternating among the

dominant and the non-dominant hand, entails that the subevents are distributed over participants. An important piece of evidence for this distinction is the unacceptability of (3) in LSF: (3a) is out because /alt/ requires a plural argument, and variation across time, as facilitated by the quantificational adverb OFTEN, cannot rescue it (3b).

- (3) a. *JEAN ARRIVE-alt
(Intended: 'John arrived.')
- b. *OFTEN ONE PERSON FORGET-alt ONE WORD.
(Intended: 'One person often forgot one word.')

Pluractionals in LSC. Despite the striking similarities in the form of the pluractional morphemes between LSF and LSC, it is noticeable that we also find cross-linguistic variation in certain respects. Next to the shared core meaning, the following differences arise: (i) /alt/ in LSC does not anchor the distribution of the subevents to the plurality of participants, and allows it over the time and space parameters (compare (3a) and (4a)); (ii) the combination of /rep/ with an arc lateral displacement (/rep-arc/) ties the subevents to different participants or locations; (iii) /rep/ and /alt/ yield degree interpretations (also attested for spoken language pluractionals) when accompanied by the non-manual marker puffing mouth.

- (4) a. IX-1 DATE FORGET-alt.
'I forgot the date on different occasions/at different locations.'
- b. INSPECTOR SCHOOL GO-rep-arc.
'The inspector went to different schools (in different locations).'
- c. NIGHT YESTERDAY JOHN EAT-rep/alt.
'Last night John ate a lot.'

Aspectual inflections and exhaustivity. From this new perspective, we are compelled to reanalyze as instances of pluractionals (a) the aspectual inflections [habitual] and [iterative] (not illustrated here), which instantiate variants of /rep/ with meaningful differences in the properties of the path between repetitions (cf. Wilbur 2008), and (b) the so-called [distributive/exhaustive] marker discussed at the outset. The latter is argued to be a simple case of pluractional /rep-arc/ with accompanying specific non-manual markers (puffing and brow furrow) that compose with it to yield the exhaustive reading. This additional layer of exhaustively distributive meaning is not inherent to the pluractional, as the felicity of (5) without it demonstrates.

- (5) INSPECTOR SCHOOL GO-rep-arc, OTHERS NOT.
'The inspector went to several schools (#each school), to others he didn't.'

Conclusion. The reinterpretation of a range of reduplicative forms in verbs in SLs from the perspective of pluractionality provides a highly coherent interpretation of the facts having to do with verbal plurality, and it points at the overt composition of meaning of complex forms in the visual-gestural modality.

Selected references. Klima, E. & U. Bellugi. 1979. *The signs of language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Kuhn, J. & V. Aristodemo. 2017. Pluractionality, iconicity, and scope in French Sign Language. *Semantics and Pragmatics* 10(6). Součková, K. 2011. Pluractionality in Hausa. PhD Leiden Univ.