The suffix -cxa in Kalmyk: agreement marker or participant number marker?

Sofia Oskolskaya
Saint-Petersburg State University, Russia
sonypolik@mail.ru

In Kalmyk (Mongolic, Altaic) there is a special optional marker –cxa (plurality of participants of action).

(1) teeg-tə mör-düd idšhəl-dhā-cxä-nä.
    steppe-DAT horse-PL pasture-PROG-PLR-PRS
    ‘The horses are pasturing in steppe’.

Object: to elicit the nature of this suffix.
The material is based on the data collected during the linguistic expeditions to Kalmykia in 2006-2007 organised by the Saint-Petersburg State University.


Verbal

Event number
(e.g. repetitive verb)

Nominal

Participant number
(e.g. plurality of agents)

(e.g. agreement)

Works devoted to the participant number:
- article by Irina Dolinina [1998] (native languages of Central America);
- review by Paul Newman [1979] (Chadic languages);
- article “The grammaticization of number as a verbal category” by Mark Durie [1986] (verb suppletion in the native languages of North America): this phenomenon reflects not an agreement, but the number of an argument.

Examples of verbal plurality (participant number):
- massacre (to kill a lot of people)
- stampede (when a lot of people or animals are running away).

Problem in Kalmyk: whether the marker –cxa relates to the nominal plurality or to the verbal plurality, and in the latter case whether it relates to the number of events or to the number of participants.

Other Mongolic languages:
- cagha/-cigha- in Moghol means “actions performed by many actors (pluritative or verbal plural)” [Weiers 2003: 253]
- sagaa/-segee- in Buryat – marker of repetitive / pluritative aspect (helsegee ‘to talk from time to time’) [Darbeeva 1997: 44]

Sanzheev [1963: 66]: the suffix of pluritative aspect combines into verbs which mean action that happens with many actors or (if we speak about one actor) many times. This suffix is widely
used in Mongolic languages. And lately it has lost the meaning of repeated action. So it is steadily turning into the marker of agreement.

Some features of the suffix –cgaa in Khalkha-Mongol [Shevernina 1985]:
1. It is used only with respect to animate actors.
2. It doesn’t change the lexical meaning of the verb and its argument structure.
3. It is connected with the plurality of subject.
4. It has the meaning of the joint plurality (the subject is characterized / described as the group of actors).
5. The subject always has the meaning of plural, which is expressed by markers of plurality and collectivity or by words with the same meaning (e.g. numerals).
6. This suffix doesn’t have the meaning of the repeated action.

Shevernina assumes that the suffix –cgaa should be treated as the plurality of participants marker while some other authors view it as an instantiation of the verbal plurality (verbal aspect, in other words) or agreement.

Properties of the Kalmyk –cxa

I. This suffix doesn’t indicate the number of events and it isn’t connected with aspect system of the language.

(2) a. Küük ən gäqäd-dhä-nä / *gäqäd-dhä-cxä-nä
   girl jump-PROG-PRS / *jump-PROG-PLR-PRS
   A girl is jumping.

b. Küüka-d gäqäd-dhä-nä / gäqäd-dhä-cxä-nä
   girl-PL jump-PROG-PRS / jump-PROG-PLR-PRS
   Girls are jumping.

   Badma year every fence-P.REFL paint-PRS / *paint-PLR-PRS.
   Badma paints the fence (lit. “his fence”) every year.

   1SG.GEN elder.brother-PL year every fence-P.REFL paint-PLR-PST  / paint-PRS
   My elder brothers paint the fence (lit. “his fence”) every year.

II. The suffix is optional. The idea of agreement expressed by –cxa is doubtful.

? Does –cxa express an agreement or participant number?

In traditional Kalmyk grammars ([Ochirov 1964], [Pyurbeev 1997] and others) this suffix is considered to be a marker of agreement.

Ochirov [1964: 31-32]:
1) If the subject is expressed by animate plural noun.

(4) kūükədə surqul’ sur-cxa-na
   children studies study-PLR-PRS
   ‘The children study’.

2) If the subject is expressed by collective noun.

(5) âm-tən ködəlməsh-tə qar-cxa-v
   life-with.COLL work-DAT go.out-PLR-PST
   ‘People came to work’.
3) If the subject is expressed by plural demonstrative pronoun.

(6) edən balqəsə or-cxa-v
    these city go.to-PLR-PST
    ‘They went to the city’.

III. “Suppletion is not triggered by a surface syntactic relation; rather it selects for the number of a particular semantic role of the verb” [Durie 1986: 357].

In the languages described in this article the ergative pattern is observed in stem suppletion. While the same languages have the accusative (or sometimes active) pattern of case marking or agreement.

(7) Huichol ([Comrie 1982] via [Durie 1986: 357])
   a. ne-nua
      1sgS-arrive:sg
      ‘I arrived.’
   b. tiiri yi-huuta-ti me-niua?zi
      children two SUBJ 3nonsgS-arrive:nonsg
      ‘Two children have arrived.’
   c. Wan Maria maa-ti me-neci-mieni
      Juan Maria and-SUBJ 3nonsgS-1sgO-kill:sg
      ‘Juan and Maria are killing me.’
   d. née Wan Maria maa-me ne-wa-qini
      I Juan Maria and-OBJ 1sgS-3nonsgO-kill:nonsg
      ‘I am killing Juan and Maria’.

In Kalmyk –cxa implies the number of the Agent or Actor. And Kalmyk has the accusative alignment of case marking and agreement.

(8) bi en degtar-müd bagsh-nar-asə av-na-v / *av-cxa-na-v
    1SG this book-PL teacher-PL-ABL take-PRS-1SG / take-PLR-PRS-1SG
    ‘I take these books from teachers’.

IV. Kalmyk –cxa can be sensitive to animacy or substance of an argument. First type of occurrence described by Ochirov doesn’t take place in the modern Kalmyk language: the suffix -cxa can be used both in the case of animate subject and in the case of inanimate subject:

(9) cholu-d sadən dorə kevt-cxa-nä
    rock-PL tree under lie-PLR-PRS
    ‘The rocks are under the trees’.

It can’t be used if the subject is expressed by uncountable noun:

(10) öckoldür dala usən *bää-cxa-lä
    yesterday much water be-PLR-CONF
    ‘There was much water yesterday’.

V. “Where there is discord between the number of participants bearing the appropriate semantic role and the strict morphological Number of the syntactic relation-bearing NP, suppletion will reflect the former, agreement the latter” [Durie 1986: 358].

The suffix can’t be used in those sentences where the subject is expressed by a polite second person pronoun tədən ‘you’ which is identical to the 2PL pronoun tədən ‘you’.
(11) Tadən shirə deer-əsə aaq-mud av-tən.
2PL table surface-ABL plate-PL take-2PL
‘You (pl / polite sg) are taking the plates from the table’.

(12) Tadən shirə deer-əsə aaq-mud av-cxa-tən.
2PL table surface-ABL plate-PL take-PLR-2PL
‘You (pl / *polite sg) are taking the plates from the table’.

VI. The absence of any marker of plurality on NP

1) The suffix –caa can be used in those sentences where the subject is expressed by the collective noun without number marker:

(13) Adun teeg-ər güü-dho jov-cxa-na.
herd steppe-INS run-CV.IPFV walk-PLR-PRS
‘A herd is running (about) in steppe’.

2) The suffix –caa can be also used in negative sentences where the plurality of participants (usually) isn’t marked:

(14) Kün xurag-tə ir-cxä-sən uga.
Person meeting-DAT come-PLR-PC.PRF NEG.COP
‘Nobody came to the meeting’.

3) The suffix –caa can be used in sentences where the subject is bolqən ‘every’:

(15) Kövün bolqən alymə av-cxa-v.
Boy every apple take-PLR-PST
‘Every boy took an apple’.

VII. “Stem suppletion for number is preserved in derivational word formation, but inflectional agreement is not” [Durie 1986: 361].

(16) Enə küükə-d oda duul-dho / duul-cxa-dho bää-nä
this children-PL now sing-CV.IPFV / sing-PLR-CV.IPFV be-PRS
‘These children are singing now’.
(17) Enə küükə-d oda duul-dho bää-nä / bää-cxä-nä
this children-PL now sing-CV.IPFV be-PRS / be-PLR-PRS
‘These children are singing now’.

Conclusion

The phenomena discussed above can be the arguments for the fact that the suffix –caa in Kalmyk should be interpreted as a marker of semantic selection of verb rather than a marker of agreement. Thus, it should be referred to verbal plurality rather than to nominal plurality.
References


