

# Armenian Classifiers and Number Marking

## SALT - UMASS

Alan Bale & Hrayr Khanjian

Concordia University, MIT

March 21, 2008

# Main Issue

- Explore the connection between number marking and classifiers.
- Explore whether plural marking has a different semantics in different languages.

# Main Issue

- Explore the connection between number marking and classifiers.
- Explore whether plural marking has a different semantics in different languages.

# Classifier Languages & Number Marking

- **FACT:** Classifier languages generally do not have number marking.
- **Proposals:**
  - Due to the semantic nature of the nominals in such languages. (cf. Chierchia, 1998)
  - Due to morpho-syntactic competition. (cf. Borer, 2005)

# Classifier Languages & Number Marking

- **FACT:** Classifier languages generally do not have number marking.
- **Proposals:**
  - 1 Due to the semantic nature of the nominals in such languages. (cf. Chierchia, 1998)
  - 2 Due to morpho-syntactic competition. (cf. Borer, 2005)

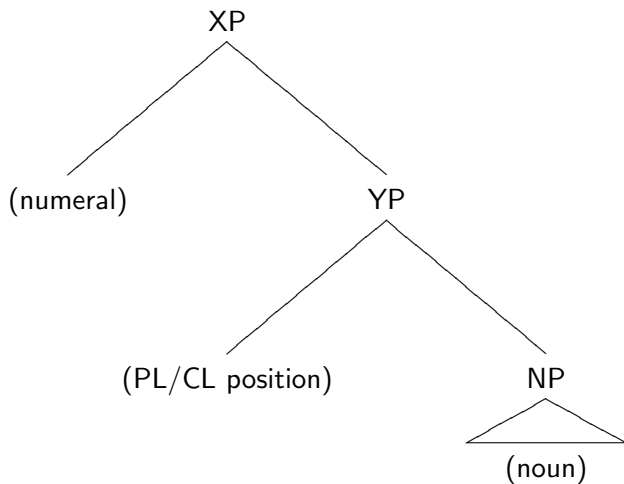
# Classifier Languages & Number Marking

- **FACT:** Classifier languages generally do not have number marking.
- **Proposals:**
  - 1 Due to the semantic nature of the nominals in such languages. (cf. Chierchia, 1998)
  - 2 Due to morpho-syntactic competition. (cf. Borer, 2005)

# Classifier Languages & Number Marking

- **FACT:** Classifier languages generally do not have number marking.
- **Proposals:**
  - 1 Due to the semantic nature of the nominals in such languages. (cf. Chierchia, 1998)
  - 2 Due to morpho-syntactic competition. (cf. Borer, 2005)

# Classifier Languages & Number Marking



Evidence in support of Morpho-syntactic competition?

# (Western) Armenian

## (1) **Plural Marking: -er**

a. shenk-me                    desar  
building-(indef,sg) saw(2,sg)

You saw a building

b. yergu shenk-er            desar  
two building-(pl) saw(2,sg)

You saw two buildings

## (Western) Armenian

### (2) **Classifier: had**

- a. yergu had shenk  
two CL building  
two buildings
- b. \*yergu had shenk-er  
two CL building-(pl)
- c. \*yergu had shenk-me  
two CL building-(indef, sg)

# An alternative analysis of Armenian

# Classifiers and Measure Nouns

Measure nouns take plurals and mass nouns as complements:

- (3) a. two kilograms of rice, two kilograms of apples, two kilograms of peas
- b. ??two kilograms of (a) pea, ??two kilograms of two (or more) apples

# Classifiers and Measure Nouns

In English, plurals and mass nouns denote complete semilattices:

- Mass nouns like furniture denote atoms as well as groups.
- Plural nouns like children denote atoms as well as groups.

# Plurals denote Atoms?

Downward Entailing Environments:

- (4)
- a. If you have children, please raise your hand.
  - b. Everyone who has children, please raise your hand.
  - c. Do you have children?

(For discussion see Sauerland, 2003; Spector, 2003; Sauerland, Anderssen & Yatsushiro, 2005.)

Measure Nouns and (by analogy) Classifiers require complete semilattices as complements.

# Armenian Number Marking

## CONJECTURE: In Armenian ...

- Plural nouns denote all groups but do not denote atoms. They are incomplete semilattices.
- Singular nouns denote only the atoms. They are incomplete semilattices.

# Armenian Number Marking

**CONJECTURE:** In Armenian ...

- Plural nouns denote all groups but do not denote atoms. They are incomplete semilattices.
- Singular nouns denote only the atoms. They are incomplete semilattices.

# Prediction

## Armenian Plurals in Downward Entailing Environments:

- (5) a. Bezdig-ner unis?  
 child-(pl) have(2,sg)  
 Do you have (two or more) children?
- b. Jete bezdig-ner unis,           dun   kena.  
 if   child-(pl) have(2,sg), home go(2, sg)  
 If you have (two or more) children, then go home!
- c. Amen mart   vor   bezdig-ner uner  
 all   person that child-(pl) had  
 vodk-i                   gajne-tsav  
 foot-(Gen/Dative) stand.up-(3, sg)  
 Everyone who had (two or more) children stood up.

# Problems?

## Armenian Plurals with Negation:

(6) Bezdig-ner chi desah.  
 child-(pl) not saw(1,sg)  
 I didn't see children

(7) Voch bezdig-ner voch al gadu-ner desah.  
 no child-(pl) no also cat-(pl) saw(1,sg)  
 I saw no children and no cats

# Conclusions

- The lack of plural marking with classifiers might have a semantic explanation.
- If correct, the connection between number marking and classifiers might have more to do with nominal denotations than with morpho-syntactic positions or operations (as originally suggested by Chierchia, 1998).
- **Prediction** (yet to be investigated): If a language has a plural marker similar to the one in English plus classifiers, then such a language should allow for plural nouns to appear as complements to the classifiers.

# Conclusions

- The lack of plural marking with classifiers might have a semantic explanation.
- If correct, the connection between number marking and classifiers might have more to do with nominal denotations than with morpho-syntactic positions or operations (as originally suggested by Chierchia, 1998).
- **Prediction** (yet to be investigated): If a language has a plural marker similar to the one in English plus classifiers, then such a language should allow for plural nouns to appear as complements to the classifiers.

# Conclusions

- The lack of plural marking with classifiers might have a semantic explanation.
- If correct, the connection between number marking and classifiers might have more to do with nominal denotations than with morpho-syntactic positions or operations (as originally suggested by Chierchia, 1998).
- **Prediction** (yet to be investigated): If a language has a plural marker similar to the one in English plus classifiers, then such a language should allow for plural nouns to appear as complements to the classifiers.