

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MULTIPLICITY IN ENGLISH AND AZERBAIJANI: A COGNITIVE-DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

КОНЦЕПТУАЛІЗАЦІЯ МНОЖИННОСТІ В АНГЛІЙСЬКІЙ ТА АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСЬКІЙ МОВАХ: КОГНІТИВНО-ДИСКУРСИВНИЙ АНАЛІЗ

Sevinj Mahmudova Zulfigar,
orcid.org/0009-0006-2496-8958

Doctoral student,
Khazar University

Lecturer at the Department of English Language Teaching Methodology
Azerbaijan University of Languages

Multiplicity is commonly associated with the grammatical contrast between singular and plural forms. However, linguistic expressions of multiplicity extend far beyond morphological number marking. Speakers may construe a collection as a set of separate individuals, a unified group, an indefinite quantity, a distributive configuration, or a culturally salient social category. The present article examines how multiplicity is conceptualized and discursively represented in English and Azerbaijani. The study adopts a qualitative comparative approach combining insights from cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, and contemporary research on plural semantics. The analysis focuses on nominal plural markers, collective nouns, numerals, quantifiers, bare nouns, pronouns, agreement patterns, and context-dependent interpretations. English generally marks nominal plurality through the suffix *-s/-es*, although irregular forms, zero plurals, collective nouns, and mass-count shifts contribute to a more complex system. Azerbaijani mainly employs the suffixes *-lar/-lər*, selected according to vowel harmony, yet plural meaning may remain morphologically unmarked after numerals and certain quantitative expressions. The comparison demonstrates that morphological form alone does not determine plural interpretation. In both languages, discourse context activates collective, distributive, generic, associative, and approximative readings. Nevertheless, the two languages differ in how explicitly number is encoded. English usually requires plural marking after numerals and reflects number distinctions in agreement, whereas Azerbaijani generally uses a morphologically singular noun following a cardinal numeral. Azerbaijani plural morphology also develops pragmatic meanings such as respect, family association, approximation, and social grouping. The article argues that multiplicity should be treated as a flexible conceptual domain constructed through the interaction of grammar, lexical semantics, cognition, and discourse. This approach provides a more comprehensive account than analyses that restrict plurality to a binary singular–plural opposition.

Key words: multiplicity, plurality, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis, English, Azerbaijani, conceptualization, grammatical number.

Множинність зазвичай пов'язують із граматичним протиставленням форм однини та множини. Проте мовні засоби вираження множинності значно виходять за межі морфологічного маркування граматичного числа. Мовці можуть осмислювати сукупність як набір окремих індивідів, єдину групу, невизначену кількість, дистрибутивну конфігурацію або культурно значущу соціальну категорію. У статті досліджується, яким чином множинність концептуалізується та репрезентується в дискурсі англійської й азербайджанської мов. У дослідженні застосовано якісний порівняльний підхід, що поєднує положення когнітивної лінгвістики, дискурс-аналізу та сучасних досліджень семантики множини. Аналіз зосереджено на показниках іменникової множини, збірних іменниках, числівниках, квантифікаторах, іменниках без артикля, займенниках, моделях узгодження та контекстуально зумовлених інтерпретаціях. В англійській мові множина іменників переважно позначається суфіксами *-s/-es*, хоча нерегулярні форми, нульові форми множини, збірні іменники та переходи між злічуваним і незлічуваним значеннями ускладнюють цю систему. В азербайджанській мові множина переважно виражається за допомогою суфіксів *-lar/-lər*, вибір яких визначається законом гармонії голосних. Водночас після числівників і певних кількісних виразів значення множини може залишатися морфологічно немаркованим. Порівняння засвідчує, що сама по собі морфологічна форма не визначає інтерпретацію множинності. В обох мовах дискурсивний контекст активізує збірні, дистрибутивні, узагальнені, асоціативні та приблизні значення. Однак ці мови відрізняються за ступенем експліцитності вираження граматичного числа. В англійській мові після числівників зазвичай необхідне маркування множини, а числові відмінності відображаються також у граматичному узгодженні. Натомість в азербайджанській мові після кількісного числівника зазвичай уживається іменник у морфологічній формі однини.

Морфологічні показники множини в азербайджанській мові також можуть набувати прагматичних значень, зокрема виражати повагу, родинну належність, близькість і соціальне групування. У статті обґрунтовується необхідність розглядати множинність як гнучку концептуальну сферу, що формується внаслідок взаємодії граматики, лексичної семантики, когнітивних процесів і дискурсу. Такий підхід забезпечує більш комплексне пояснення цього явища порівняно з дослідженнями, у яких множинність обмежується бінарною опозицією однини та множини.

Ключові слова: множинність, множина, когнітивна лінгвістика, дискурс-аналіз, англійська мова, азербайджанська мова, концептуалізація, граматичне число.

Introduction. Number is a familiar yet conceptually complex grammatical category. At first sight, the distinction appears simple: singular forms usually refer to one entity, while plural forms refer to more than one. In actual language use, however, this opposition is not always clear-cut. Plural nouns may identify specific groups, social categories, kinds, repeated events, approximate periods, or indefinite quantities. At the same time, expressions without an explicit plural marker may still convey the idea of multiplicity. For this reason, plurality cannot be explained only through the presence or absence of a grammatical suffix. The meaning of plural forms is shaped by several interacting factors, including morphology, lexical meaning, sentence structure, and context. A group of people, for example, may be presented as separate individuals, as members of a larger unit, or as a single collective body. The interpretation depends on how the speaker organizes and presents the situation. Discourse also influences plural meaning through communicative purpose, genre, speaker attitude, and shared cultural knowledge. Expressions such as *the authorities*, *young people*, *the students*, *camaat*, *gəncələr*, and *müəllimlər* may refer to concrete groups, institutions, broad categories, or socially constructed communities.

A comparison of English and Azerbaijani is especially useful because the two languages differ typologically. English is mainly analytic, whereas Azerbaijani is an agglutinative Turkic language in which plurality is generally marked by the suffixes *-lar* and *-lər*. A clear difference appears after cardinal numerals. English uses plural nouns, as in *three books*, while Azerbaijani normally uses an unmarked noun, as in *üç kitab*.

This article examines how multiplicity is conceptualized in both languages and how discourse affects the interpretation of plural and quantitative forms. It applies a qualitative comparative approach to representative grammatical and lexical patterns in contemporary English and Azerbaijani. It considers collective, distributive, generic, associative, and context-dependent meanings in use.

The aim of this article is to examine how multiplicity is conceptualized and expressed in English and Azerbaijani from cognitive and discursive perspectives.

Discussion. The most productive marker of nominal plurality in English is the suffix *-s*, together with its orthographic variant *-es*. Its pronunciation varies according to the final sound of the noun, producing /s/, /z/, or /ɪz/ in forms such as *books*, *rooms*, and *classes*. This system presents plurality as a formally marked extension of a singular lexical item.

Nevertheless, English number morphology is not entirely regular. The language also contains inherited irregular plurals, including *children*, *men*, *women*, *feet*, *teeth*, and *mice*, as well as zero-marked forms such as *sheep*, *deer*, and, in certain contexts, *fish*. These patterns show that plurality is represented through both productive rules and established lexical forms. Some English nouns are morphologically plural although they may refer to a single object composed of two or several connected parts. Examples include *scissors*, *trousers*, *glasses*, and *binoculars*. The phrase *a pair of scissors* places a singular measure expression before a plural lexical noun. Grammatical plurality in this construction does not indicate several separate objects. Instead, it reflects the internal structure of an object conceptualized as containing paired elements. Number marking therefore expresses a conventional way of viewing the referent rather than its simple numerical quantity. Bare plurals in English are equally flexible. In *Dogs are intelligent animals*, the noun refers generically to a species or class. In *Dogs are playing outside*, the same form normally identifies a particular group available from the situation or previous discourse. Plural morphology alone does not determine genericity. Interpretation develops through the interaction of the noun phrase with tense, aspect, predicate meaning, and communicative context.

Morphological Representation of Multiplicity in Azerbaijani. English and Azerbaijani therefore distribute numerical information differently. English normally combines a numeral greater than one with a plural noun, as in *three books*, *seven students*, and *twenty houses*. Azerbaijani uses *üç kitab*, *yeddi tələbə*, and *iyirmi ev*, where the quantitative modifier is sufficient. English encodes multiplicity twice, through the numeral and the noun ending, whereas Azerbaijani generally avoids this repetition. A form such as *üç kitablar* is unacceptable in the neutral meaning “three books.” In marked contexts, however, plural morphology after quantitative expressions may contribute classificatory, expressive, or contrastive meaning rather than simple counting. Azerbaijani plural marking also interacts with possession and case morphology. Once *-lar* or *-lər* is attached to the noun stem, other suffixes follow in a fixed sequence, as in *kitablarımızdan* “from our books” or *tələbələrinizlə* “with your students.” This ordering makes the structure of the word transparent and allows several grammatical meanings to be expressed within a single form. At the same time, the plural suffix may acquire contextual nuances, including emphasis, social grouping, or approximation. Such uses confirm that Azerbaijani plurality is not merely numerical but also shaped by discourse,

speaker intention, and the semantic environment of the noun. Both languages allow plural participants to be interpreted collectively or distributively. Consider the English sentence *The children carried the boxes upstairs*. It may describe a joint activity in which all children carried the boxes together, or a distributed event in which individual children carried different boxes. Azerbaijani creates the same ambiguity in *Uşaqlar qutuları yuxarı mərtəbəyə daşıdılar*. Neither the plural suffix nor the verb independently determines how the participants are related to the event.

Reduplication is especially productive in Azerbaijani distributive constructions. Forms such as *bir-bir* “one by one,” *iki-iki* “two at a time,” *dəstə-dəstə* “in groups,” *ev-ev* “house by house,” and *küçə-küçə* “street by street” present multiplicity as internally organized repetition. English usually conveys comparable meanings through analytic phrases. Azerbaijani reduplication therefore provides a compact structural means of distributing participants, places, or actions across repeated units.

These nouns do not behave identically. English *police* normally takes plural agreement: *The police are investigating the incident*. Azerbaijani *polis* may refer to the institution as a unified body, while *polislər* explicitly foregrounds several officers. Thus, *Polis hadisəni araşdırır* profiles institutional action, whereas *Polislər hadisə yerinə gəldilər* presents individual members arriving at a location. A similar contrast appears between *Hökumət qərar qəbul etdi* and *Hökumət üzvləri müzakirəyə başladılar*. The first sentence construes the government as a single decision-making institution; the second highlights its constituent members. Azerbaijani possesses productive associative constructions that cannot be translated by simply adding an English plural suffix. The form *Əligil* refers to Ali together with his family or household, while *xalamgil* denotes the speaker’s aunt and people associated with her. In *Rəşadgilə getdik*, the group is accessed through Rəşad as its socially salient member. Although *-gil* is not the regular plural suffix, it belongs to the broader domain of multiplicity because it constructs an unspecified group around one reference individual. The expression *saat beşlərdə* is particularly revealing because the pluralized numeral does not denote several distinct fives. It identifies a region surrounding five o’clock. Multiplicity is extended metaphorically from separate entities to neighbouring points on a scale, showing how plural morphology can develop conventional meanings beyond enumeration [9, p. 218].

Genericity, Mass Nouns, and Countability. English and Azerbaijani both use plural nouns for generic reference. *Tigers are endangered animals*

and *Pələnglər nəslə kəsilmək təhlükəsi altında olan heyvanlardır* describe a species rather than a fixed set of animals. Similarly, *Teachers play an important role in society* and *Müəllimlər cəmiyyətdə mühüm rol oynayırlar* attribute a general characteristic to a professional category.

Generic meaning can also be expressed through singular forms. Azerbaijani uses sentences such as *İnsan sosial varlıqdır* and *Kitab insanın dünyagörüşünü genişləndirir*. English has comparable constructions, including *The tiger is an endangered species* and *A good teacher understands the learner*. Bare plurals, definite singulars, and indefinite singulars provide different conceptual routes to a category. Semantic plurality must therefore be distinguished from morphological plurality because kind reference may arise without a plural form [10, p. 64].

Mass nouns further demonstrate that countability is partly language-specific. English nouns such as *water*, *rice*, *furniture*, *advice*, and *information* normally resist direct pluralization in their basic senses. Azerbaijani nouns such as *su*, *düyü*, *mebel*, *məsləhət*, and *məlumat* are similarly shaped by lexical convention. Yet pluralization becomes possible when speakers reinterpret a substance or abstract notion as types, portions, manifestations, or individual items. Another important point is that countability may shift according to communicative setting. In restaurant discourse, for instance, *two coffees* refers to two servings rather than two kinds of coffee. Azerbaijani allows a similar interpretation in *iki çay*, where the noun designates two glasses or portions. Abstract nouns may also become countable when individual cases are emphasized, as in *different experiences* or *müxtəlif təcrübələr*. These examples show that speakers do not merely follow fixed lexical rules; they actively recategorize meanings to suit context. Count and mass distinctions are therefore best understood as flexible conceptual choices shaped by usage, convention, and discourse. English may refer to *the wines of France* or *the waters of the Caspian Sea*. Azerbaijani uses *müxtəlif şərablar*, *Xəzərin suları*, and *yeni məlumatlar*. A notable contrast concerns *information*. Standard English treats it as a mass noun and avoids *informations*, whereas Azerbaijani *məlumatlar* readily denotes separate facts, reports, or pieces of information. The same conceptual content is therefore packaged as mass in one language and as countable plurality in another.

Pronouns and the Discursive Construction of Groups. Plural pronouns play an important role in constructing collective identity. English *we* and Azerbaijani *biz* may include or exclude the addressee. In *We must protect the environment* or *Biz ətraf mühiti*

qorumaliyiq, the pronoun may include the speaker, audience, citizens, or humanity. In *We have reviewed your application* or *Biz müraciətinizə baxdıq*, it usually represents an institution addressing an external individual. Azerbaijani also uses *siz*, historically and grammatically plural, as a respectful form for one addressee. *Sən nə düşündürsən?* is informal singular, while *Siz nə düşündürsünüz?* may address several people or one person politely. Here plurality expresses social distance and respect rather than numerical quantity. Modern English *you* no longer marks this distinction grammatically.

The choice of pronoun may also signal alignment, responsibility, and distance within a text. Political speakers often use *we* to present contested goals as shared obligations, while they may position another community as separate or oppositional. Academic authors sometimes employ *we* to guide readers through an argument, even when the research has a single author. Azerbaijani uses *biz* in comparable ways, especially in public, institutional, and scholarly discourse. Such uses show that plural pronouns do more than identify participants. They organize relationships between speaker, audience, and referenced groups, shaping solidarity, authority, inclusion, exclusion, and the distribution of responsibility in communication. English identifiable plurals usually occur with the definite article, while Azerbaijani relies more heavily on contextual accessibility. In *Several students entered the hall. The students sat in the front row*, the article marks the second reference as identifiable. Azerbaijani expresses the same relation in *Bir neçə tələbə zala daxil oldu. Tələbələr ön sırada əyləşdilər*. Although Azerbaijani has no direct equivalent of *the*, prior discourse makes *tələbələr* definite.

Groups may also be assembled across discourse. In *A teacher and three students entered the room. They sat near the window*, the pronoun refers to participants introduced through two separate noun phrases. Azerbaijani *Bir müəllim və üç tələbə otağa daxil oldu. Onlar pəncərənin yanında əyləşdilər* constructs the same composite group. Plural reference is therefore dynamic: discourse can introduce, combine, divide, and reactivate groups [11, p. 4]. Plural expressions may also create rhetorical vagueness. Statements such as *Experts have raised concerns* or *Mütəxəssislər narahatlıqlarını bildiriblər* leave the number and identity of the experts unspecified. Such wording may be appropriate when the sources

are known from context, but it can also transform a limited opinion into an apparently collective position. Similar effects occur in *people say*, *researchers believe*, *deyirlər*, and *alimlər hesab edirlər*.

Conclusions. The analysis has shown that multiplicity in English and Azerbaijani cannot be adequately described as a simple contrast between one and more than one. The grammatical category of number provides an important structural foundation, but actual interpretations emerge through the interaction of morphology, lexical semantics, syntax, cognition, and discourse.

English generally represents nominal plurality through *-s/-es*, supplemented by irregular plurals, zero forms, collective nouns, and context-dependent count–mass shifts. Azerbaijani primarily uses *-lar/-lər*, a regular pair of vowel-harmonic suffixes that can combine with possessive and case morphology. Nevertheless, Azerbaijani nouns normally remain morphologically singular after cardinal numerals, demonstrating that conceptual multiplicity does not require formal plural marking.

In both languages, plural expressions may receive collective or distributive readings. They may refer to concrete groups, generic classes, repeated events, periods, kinds, institutions, or socially constructed categories. Pronouns such as *we/biz* and *they/onlar* are especially important in discourse because they organize social identities and establish boundaries between groups. Definite and contextually identifiable plurals also maintain reference across extended texts. The comparison further reveals language-specific patterns. English makes number visible in a wider range of agreement and determiner structures. Azerbaijani, by contrast, develops productive associative, honorific, approximative, and reduplicative meanings. Forms such as *Əligil*, *xalamgil*, *saat beşlərdə*, and *iki-iki* show that multiplicity may encode social association, approximate location on a scale, or distributive organization rather than simple enumeration. A cognitive-discursive account is therefore preferable to a purely formal description. Speakers do not merely count entities; they select ways of viewing and grouping them. The same participants may be construed as individuals, a collection, an institution, a family, a category, or an opposing social group. Discourse context determines which aspects of multiplicity become prominent.

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