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## On the plural forms of nouns in German compared to Macedonian language

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**Abstract:** This study is intended to serve as a guide to teachers of German who are teaching German as a foreign language and as a second language, by contrasting the grammatical structures of contemporary German and Macedonian language. This study is limited to the grammatical category *number of nouns* only. By contrasting the two systems point for point, teachers can more readily see just those places where there are dissimilarities - and congruence - between the two systems and where students of one, say Macedonians who wish to learn German, can more readily be made aware of what to look out for as they practice grammar drills in the target language. The morphological exponence of the noun categories of case, number and gender in German language presents the linguist with some singularly difficult problems largely because their realization does not occur uniformly through a system of suffixed formatives on the noun, as in the classical inflecting languages, but most often in part or exclusively through formatives on those other members of the noun phrase which are traditionally seen as standing in a relationship of agreement to the noun.

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### 1. Introduction

I come from Macedonia, a small country with a long name, which has always been a traditional center of mutual meetings and agreements, communication and co-existence of the people on the Balkan Peninsula, as well as one of the most dynamic regions where many of the socio-economic activities in South-East Europe and wider developed. Macedonia is a multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural country and long time ago it was the scene

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of many wars and conflicts and thus was the subject of attacks, which were sometimes solved with military and sometimes with diplomatic means. Today, the official languages in the Republic of Macedonia are the Macedonian language and the Albanian language ("As of July 10, 2013, the Ministry of foreign affairs listed on its website"). The Macedonian language belongs to the South Slavic languages and is spoken by 2-3 million people who live in the country and in the diaspora (especially in Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia, the USA, Australia and Canada). On the other hand, the Albanian language belongs to the Indo-European languages and does not belong to any other existing branch. In Macedonia people generally speak two or more than two languages (Macedonian/Albanian or Turkish) or even three languages /Xhaferi, B. & Xhaferi, G., 2012/. The modern standard written version of Macedonian appeared in 1945. Since then many literary works have been published in Macedonian. Literary Macedonian is based on the dialects of the West Central region (Prilep, Kičevo, Bitola, Kruševo and Lerin). (Kostadinovska-Daskalovska K. 2005).

## 2. Number as a grammatical category in Macedonian nouns

For the examination of the grammatical category *number* in Macedonian nouns we use the references of the famous Macedonian grammarians as well as of the foreign scientists, such as Koneski B. (1982), Kepeski K. (1978), Lunt H.G. (1952), and Friedman V. (2001).

We begin our analysis with the interpretation of Lunt H.G. (1952: 26) about the grouping of Macedonian words into various categories — or their classification according to „parts of speech" — which is accomplished for some words on a morphological level, by their different forms, and for others on a syntactical level, by their function in the sentence. Two major groups are at once apparent: those which may change in form and those which do not. The changeable words fall again into two groups, which we may call verbs and nouns. Verbs express an action or process, and have a number of forms which may define the participants in the process and their relation to it. The nouns are of two types, those which belong to one of three classes called genders, and those which have forms for all three genders. The first class comprises the substantives (or nouns in a narrower sense). Words having various gender-forms are adjectives and pronouns. Pronouns are distinguished from adjectives in that they may not be modified by an adverb.

According to the American linguist Friedman (2001: 18-19) the Macedonian plural formation is based on a combination of form and gender. Most nouns ending in a consonant add *-i*, but masculine nouns with the singulative suffix *-in* drop that suffix in the plural. The vowel of the singular drops before the ending of the plural unless it is stressed. The majority of masculine and feminine nouns take *-i*, most neuters take *-a*. Most monosyllabic masculines, including new loanwords, take *-ovi*, e.g. *sin* 'son' PL *sinovi*, *fri-šop* 'duty free shop' PL *fri-šopovi* (note that the element *fri-* is treated as an uninflecting modifier). There are about ten exceptions that take *-i* and ten more that vacillate between the two possibilities. A few monosyllabic nouns in *-j* or a palatal can take *-evi*, e.g. *kraj* 'region' PL *kraevi* (also *kraišta*) *nož* 'knife' PL *noževi* or *nožovi*, and this suffix has spread by analogy to a few other nouns, all in dentals, e.g. *kurs* 'course' PL *kursevi*. Masculines in unstressed *-o*, *-e* add *-vci*: *tatko* 'father', PL *tatkovci*. Neuters in unstressed *-e* not preceded by *-c*, *-št*, *-i*, *-j* take *-inja*. This same suffix pluralizes nouns in *-ce* with a diminutive meaning (but diminutives in *-ence* have PL *-enca*). Some neuter loans in stressed *-é* take *-inja*, in which case the stress becomes antepenultimate. Other loans in stressed *-é* normally add *-a*, but the use of *-inja* is spreading. Occasionally plural formation is influenced by the collective: *pat* means both 'road' and 'time', but the regular plural *pati* means 'times' while the collective *patišta* is the normal plural meaning 'roads'. Because the vocative and oblique forms are marginal, facultative phenomena, it is misleading to present them together with plural formation as a reduced declensional paradigm.

The chief remaining exceptions of the morphonemic alternations in plural formation are all masculine and neuter: *šura* 'wife's brother', PL *šurevi*, *domakin* 'master of the house', PL *domakini*, *brat* 'brother', PL *braća*, *čovek* 'person', PL *lugje* 'people', *životno* 'animal', PL *životni*, *ramo* 'shoulder', PL *ramena*, *nebo* 'sky', PL *nebesa*.

Nouns of all genders can form collective plurals in {-je}, although these forms are fairly restricted in literary Macedonian usage. At one time these collectives could form a plural in {-ja}, but this is now merely a competing variant (Koneski 1967:224, pace Lunt 1952:31, de Bray 1980:170-71). Some nouns form collective plurals with *-išta*, which is homonymous with the plural of the augmentative pejorative suffix.

The singular of non-human animates can function as a kind of collective, e.g. *odi po riba* 'go after (hunt) fish' but *odi po ženi* 'go after (chase) women'. Non-personal masculine nouns (and a few personal ones) also have a quantitative plural: *-a*. This suffix does not cause vowel-zero alternation: *den* 'day', PL *dni* and *denovi*, *dva dena*

‘two days’. Pluralia tantum is represented with following examples: *ališta* ‘clothes’, *bečvi* ‘trousers’ (archaic), *gakí* ‘underpants, shorts’, *gradi* ‘chest’, *jasli* ‘manger’, *nogari* ‘leggings’, *nokvi* ‘bread-trough’, *očila* ‘glasses’, *pleki* ‘shoulders’, *šalvari* ‘pantaloon’ (Friedman, 2001: 20).

Table 1. *Examples of plural formation in Macedonian nouns*<sup>2</sup>

Morphemes (for masculines)	Singular	Plural Example
-ovi	<i>grad</i>	<i>gradovi</i> /town,-s/ Stadt, -e
-i	<i>zab</i>	<i>zabi</i> /tooth, teeth/ Zahn, -e
-i; -ista	<i>pat</i>	<i>pati/patišta</i> /way,-s/ Mal, -e; Weg,-e
-ovi	<i>den</i>	<i>denovi/dni</i> /day,-s/ Tag,-e
-i	<i>prsten</i>	<i>prsteni</i> /ring,-s/ Ring,-e
-reduction of a consonant	<i>Srbin</i>	<i>Srbi</i> / Serb,-s/ Serbe,-en
-reduction of a vowel + -i	<i>kolega</i>	<i>kolegi</i> /colleague,-s/ Kollege, -n
-vci	<i>čičko</i>	<i>čičkovci</i> /uncle,-s/ Onkel,-
Morphemes for feminines		
-i	<i>čest</i>	<i>česti</i> /honor, -s/ Ehre,-en
Ø	<i>ledi</i>	<i>Ledi</i> /lady, -ies/ Lady,-ies
-i	<i>žena</i>	<i>ženi</i> /woman, women/ Frau, -en
Morphemes for neuters		
-a	<i>srce</i>	<i>srca</i> /heart,-s/ Herz,-en
-a	<i>učenje</i>	<i>učenja</i> /study,-ies/ Lernen, -
-inja	<i>seme</i>	<i>seminja</i> /seed,-s/ Seme, -n
-a	<i>nivó</i>	<i>nivóa</i> /level,-s/ Stufe,-n
-a	<i>mesto</i>	<i>mesta</i> /place,-s/ Platz, -e

Furthermore, the numeral *eden* ‘one’ functions with the meaning of an indefinite article denoting specificity and can even trigger object reduplication, especially colloquially (Naylor, 1989). ‘One’ is an adjective: *edniot*, *ednata*, *ednoto*, *ednite* (e.g.: *edniot maž*, *ednata žena*, *ednoto dete*, *ednite (nekoi) deca*). It can function with a meaning like that of an indefinite article, and in the plural it means ‘some’ (e.g.: *eden covek*, *edna žena*, *edno dete*, *edni deca*). (Friedman, 2001: 32).

### 3. Grammatical category number of nouns in German language

In the course of language production, grammatical features such as number and gender are used to control agreement. Whereas gender is an intrinsic feature of nouns (Corbett, 1991), number is a grammatical feature that has to be specified for nouns based on conceptual information. Number is used to control NP agreement and subject/verb agreement. Bock and her colleagues (Bock & Miller, 1991; Bock & Eberhard, 1993; Bock, Nicol, & Cooper Cutting, 1999) investigated the circumstances under which native speakers failed to produce number agreement. They found that semantic and morphophonological factors of the subject of the sentence are of minimal relevance to the syntactic and morphological processes that implement agreement. Instead, agreement control of

<sup>2</sup> The examples from Macedonian are given in their transliterated form, following the International Scholarly System (Cyrillic x is transliterated with Latin x).

verb number is achieved by lexical specification of plurality on the subject noun. Although both gender and number features are treated as diacritic parameters in Levelt's model (Levelt, 1989; Bock & Levelt, 1994; Levelt et al., 1999), they are different in some respects. Whereas gender refers to an intrinsic property of a lexical item (e.g., "Is an object classified as feminine, masculine, or neuter?"), number is an extrinsic feature, which derives from the conceptual level (e.g., "Are there one or more entities of an object?"). However, despite this apparent difference between gender and number, both are represented as grammatical features or diacritic parameters in Levelt's model.

The German language is relatively rich in plural morphology for nouns. German nouns can form the plural with several different plural allomorphs such as -n, -e, -er, -s, and a zero morpheme (Ø). Furthermore, the stem morpheme can alter when forming the plural in -e, -er, or Ø (see Table 2 for examples). This phenomenon is called "umlaut"<sup>3</sup> and is triggered by an independent phonological rule of fronting the stem vowel (Wiese, 1987, 1996). Therefore, umlaut is not treated as an independent plural marker. Although the phonological form of a word does not provide strong cues about its plural formation, the correlation between the gender and the morphophonology of the stem and the plural form can be quite high (e.g., masculine and neuter nouns with a final syllable containing a schwa usually form the plural with Ø, polysyllabic feminine nouns form the plural in -n, feminine nouns never form the plural in -er. However, there are also many exceptions, for example, *Muskel* (mas. /muskel/ 'muscle')—*Muskeln* ('muscles'). Historically, the definite article develops from the demonstrative, the indefinite from the numeral 'one'; but only the plural form is typical for the definite article. Similar developments can be found in various languages (cf. Heine/Kuteva 2002). If a language has no articles, the definiteness may be expressed with a number of other means, including word order, case system and an aspect (cf. Leiss 2000).

Table 2. Examples of different plural formations in German nouns

Morpheme	Singular	Plural Example
-n	Frau 'lady'	Frauen 'ladies'
-e	Tag 'day'	Tage 'days'
-er	Bild 'picture'	Bilder 'pictures'
-s	Park 'park'	Parks 'parks'
-Ø	Wagen 'car'	Wagen 'cars'
-Ø + umlaut	Faden 'thread'	Fa'den 'threads'
-er + umlaut	Buch 'book'	Bu'cher 'books'
-Ø + umlaut	Faden 'thread'	–Fa'den 'threads'

#### 4. Comparison of the grammatical category *number* in German and Macedonian nouns

In the next section I will try to summarize and make comparison between the plural classes and forms in German and Macedonian nouns. The substance (material) nouns<sup>4</sup> that are used in singularia tantum in Macedonian, such as: *сол/sol*, *злато/zlato*; in German language: *Salz*, *Gold* show overlaeping in the grammatical category number in both languages. Furthermore, the proper names used in singularia tantum in Macedonian: *Петер/Peter*, in German: *Peter*, show also a degree of overlaeping. Nouns of properties and states: In Macedonian: *замор/zamor*, in German: *Müdigkeit*; then the collective nouns in Macedonian: *мебел/mebel*, *добиток/dibitok*; *граѓанство/gragjanstvo*; *човеумство/čoveštvo*, the German counterparts: *Möbel*, *Vieh*; *Bürgerum*; *Menschheit*, present also overlaeping in the

<sup>3</sup> Umlaut is very rare for some of the cases given in (2), and also behaves differently for the two nonfeminine cases, masculine and neuter. It is more important, however, that umlaut is never productive in plural formation (new nouns never show umlaut in their plural form). A comprehensive discussion of umlaut is beyond the scope of the present article.

<sup>4</sup> The examples from Macedonian are given in their transliterated form, following the International Scholarly System (Cyrillic x is transliterated with Latin x as well as with Cyrillic x for better understanding).

grammatical category number.

Some collective nouns are a potential source for an interlingual interference for the Macedonian and German native speakers. For example: the German word *Möbel* (in German is used only in plural, but the Macedonian counterpart is used only in singular). The same principle applies for the following examples: Some geographical names in Macedonian: *Антилите* / *Antilite*; in German: *die Antillen*. In German: *Ferien*, then nouns denoting personal groups: *Eltern*, *Geschwister*, then collectives from trade and industry in Macedonian: *финансии* / *finansii*, *finances*, in German: *Immobilien*, *Lebensmittel*; *Garments*: *фармерки* / *farmerki*, *Jeans*; in Macedonian: *панталони* / *pantaloni*, *pants*, *trousers*. To this group belong also the objects consisting of two identical parts, such as in Macedonian language: *очила/očila*, *Brille*; *ножици/nožici*, *Schere*.

The following examples present the source for interlingual interference: in Macedonian these lexemes are used as pluralia tantum, but in German they have variable numerus: *очила/očila* gegenüber *Brille:Brillen*. To this group belong the examples, such as: *панталони/pantaloni* versus *Hose:Hosen*. The source for interlingual interference is presented in the nouns of German language (where they appear as pluralia tantum) while in Macedonian they appear with variable numerus or as singularia tantum. For example: *Eltern* vs. *родител/roditel*: *родителу/roditeli*; *Ferien* vs. *распуст/raspust* (singularia tantum). In the colloquial Macedonian language in singular form we can also use the lexeme *панталона/pantalona* („Hose“). In German very oft the plural form is interpreted as singular one (wo ist denn bloß meine alte Jeans (Duden)). In some cases the singular forms are also built, e.g.: *Immobilien* ist marked as pluralia tantum according Engel (1996: 503) and in Duden it is marked as a noun with variable numerus (*Immobilie*, -, -n).

The masculine nouns with consonant at the end of the word, have another plural form, the so-called counted plural. For example: *заб/zab* m. ‚Zahn‘ vs. *заба/zaba* ‚Zähne‘; *лист/list* m. ‚Blatt‘ vs. *листа/lista* ‚Blätter‘. Some masculine and feminine nouns have another plural form, so-called collective plural form: *лист/list* m. ‚Blatt‘ vs. *лисје, лисја/lisje, lisja* ‚Blätter‘; *планина/planina* f. ‚Berg‘ vs. *планиње/planinje* ‚Berge‘; ‚Gebirge‘.

The collective plural in masculines has the following endings for plural forms, which present differences in the meaning of the plural forms in German and Macedonian: in masculines: -je, -ja, -ишта/išta; -рид/rid:ридишта/ridišta ‚Hügel‘; *роб/rob*:*робје/robje* and *робја/robja* ‚Sklave‘; in neutral nouns: -ja (seltener: -je): *крило/kriło*:*крилја/krilja* and *крилје/krilje*; in feminine nouns: -je:- *планина/planina* : *планиње/planinje* ‚Berg‘; *ливада/livada*:*ливаѓе/livagje* ‚Wiese‘.

The collective plural presents semantic differences in the following examples: In Macedonian the lexeme *клас/klas* m. has the meaning of (1). ‚ear‘; and (2). ‚school class‘ (Homonymie). The counted plural (*класа/klasa*) has both meanings. The unmarked plural (*класови/klasovi*) has both meanings, too. The collective plural (*класје/klasje* and *класја/klasja*) retains only the first meaning.

The another example is the Macedonian noun *лист/list* m. ‚Blatt‘ and has the following meaning (1). Flat, green, colored part of higher plants, (2). piece of paper; (3). wade (Polysemy). So, the counted plural (*листа/lista*) has all three meanings, the unmarked plural (*листови/listovi*) has all three meanings, and the collective plural (*лисја/lisja* und *лисје/lisje*) has only the first meaning. The next example would be the Macedonian lexeme *дрво/drvo* n. which has a meaning of (1). wood; and (2). tree (Polysemy). The unmarked plural (*дрва/drva*) retains only the first meaning, the collective plural (*дреја/dryja* and *дреје/dryje*) has only the second meaning. The Macedonian lexeme *цвет/cvet* m. ‚Blüte‘ has the counted plural (*цвета/cveta*) and retains its general meaning. The collective plural (*цвеќе/cvekje*) in singular has the meaning of ‚Blume‘ and is formed subsequently from the collective plural, which is singular-conceived as an unmarked plural: *цвеќиња / cvekjinja* ‚Blumen‘.

The Macedonian lexeme *гроб/grob* m ‚Grab‘ has the counted plural (*гроба/groba*) and the unmarked plural (*гробови/grobovi*) retain the same meaning. The collective plural *гробушта/grobišta* has taken the meaning of ‚Friedhof‘. The next example is a word *пат/pat* with the meanings: (1). way, street; (2). time; the occurrence of a repeating event (Homonymie). The counted plural (*ната/pata*) has only the first meaning. The seldom-used collective plural (*патје/patje*) has only the first meaning. The collective plural *натушта/patišta* is used as an unmarked plural with the first meaning. The unmarked plural *пати* has only the second meaning. The plural forms with the ending -e occur in following examples: *луге / lugje*, people; *паце / race*, ‚Hände‘/‚Arme‘ and *нозе / noze*, ‚Beine‘/‚Füße‘, so that the plural form ending in -je, spontaneously triggers no plural congruence.

## 5. Summary

Singular and plural forms are distinguished as grammatical classes in nouns in both languages. Exceptions are in form of singularia and pluralia tantum. There is only particularly overlapping of the lexemes in both languages. In Macedonian language the plural classes are distinguished as: unmarked plural form, collective plural and countable plural. In German there are five different types of plural forms in nouns. The indefinite article in Macedonian is *eden*. There is only plural form in indefinite noun phrases. In German the indefinite article is *ein* (used as a singularia tantum). In Macedonian the numeral *eden* which occurs in plural form as *edni* functions only as a pluralia tantum, and has the meaning of 'some'. The function of the grammatical category *number* in nouns in German and Macedonian language is very important in the process of describing nouns and giving meanings in sentences. The process of finding and choosing the correct right equivalent of German plural form of noun in Macedonian language is sometimes difficult and misleading in many cases because of the probable problematic differences between some German nouns and their possible equivalents in Macedonian.

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