Verbal number in Itonama[1]

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1   Introduction

Itonama or *sihnipadara* (1PL.EXCL-speech) is a genetically unclassified language spoken in lowland Amazonian Bolivia, in the northeast, near to the Brazilian border. Nowadays Itonama is only spoken by a few elders in the town of Magdalena on the Itonamas River, a tributary of the Iténez (or Guaporé) River in the Province of Iténez, Department of Beni. These speakers are all well over 80 years old and they used to speak the language with even older people who all died in the past decades. The few speakers that are left do not speak Itonama among themselves. Furthermore, there are a few persons who claim to understand the language fully, who are even capable of judging the correctness of certain sentences and constructions, but who are not able to utter even a single word in Itonama.

Greenberg's (1987) classification of Itonama as Paezan, a sub-branch of Macro-Chibchan, has not yet been supported and Itonama is still considered an isolate. The Itonama phoneme inventory contains a typical Amazonian system of six vowels /i, e, a, o, u, ɨ/ and nineteen consonants, among which two glottalized stops /t͡ʔ/ and /k͡ʔ/, a glottalized affricate /t͡ʃʔ/, and a palatalized /tʲ/. Itonama is a polysynthetic, head-marking, nominative-accusative VSO-language, which lacks a grammaticalized gender system. It has a multiple classifier system and only two open word classes: verbs and nouns. While its nominal morphology seems quite transparent, the verbal morphology is much more complex with various prefix and suffix slots, verbal classifiers – which also appear on demonstratives – and body-part incorporation.

In this paper I will focus on a phenomenon that, according to Corbett (2000: 245), has been broadly attested in the native languages of North America and other parts of the world (African, Caucasian, Paleoasiatic, South Central Dravidian, Austronesian, Papuan languages, and American Sign Language), but not yet in South America: verbal number, number which relates to events as opposed to nominal number, which relates to entities. Apart from very few exceptions, number seems to be a verbal category

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in Itonama. In §2, I will give a short typological overview of verbal number, drawing heavily on Corbett (2000). §3 deals with the expression of verbal number in Itonama, while §4, finally, contains a short conclusion.

2   Typology of verbal number

As pointed out by Corbett (2000: 243), one needs to be careful about the terms one uses. Verbal number relates to the semantics of the verb and is not merely marked on it. So even in pro-drop languages, when there is no noun phrase present and number is marked on the verb, this does not necessarily indicate verbal number. Consider (1) below. The copula in (1a) marks person and number and the adjective marks gender and number. However, both instances of plurality involve nominal number, simply indicating the number of crazy persons/women, just as it is marked by the pronoun in (1b):[2]

(1)   Spanish (Indo-European)
        a. *Están   loc-a-s.*
           COP.PRES.3PL   crazy-F-PL
           'They are being silly.'
        b. *Ell-a-s   están   loc-a-s.*
           3-F-PL   COP.PRES.3PL   crazy-F-PL
           'They are being silly.'

In the following I will list some examples of what verbal number does look like. Usually it is expressed by a class of morphemes that takes the form of an affix on the verb, frequently reduplicative as in (2), most often derivational rather than inflectional, and expressing a broad range of notions, among others, typically temporally iterated and spatially scattered action.

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[2] The following abbreviations are used in this paper: ACT = active, CAU = causative, CLF2 = classifier: animate+vertical+plural, CLF5 = classifier: planted+vertical+singular, CLF6 = classifier: planted+vertical+plural, CLF8 = classifier: flat+plural, CLF9 = classifier: oval+singular, CLF10 = classifier: oval+plural, CONT = continuative, COP=copula, DEM = demonstrative, DM = discourse marker, DIS = distal, DISTR = distributive, EXCL = exclusive, F = feminine, HON = honorific, IMP = imperative, INCL = inclusive, INTNS = intensive, INV = inverse, ITE = iterative, MULT = multiple, NEG = negative, NEU = neutral, NON.S = non-subject, O = object, PL = plural, POSS = possessive, PRES = present, PROX = proximal, Q = question, interrogative, REL = relativizer, REP = repetitive, SG = singular, SUBORD = subordinate, S = subject, 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, and ∅ = zero marker. Moreover, ~ indicates reduplication and < > encloses an infix.

(2)   Indonesian (Austric)
        Bu   Yem meng-urut~urut rambut   anak-nya
        HON.F Yem ACT-stroke~ITE hair   child-3POSS
        'Mrs Yem stroked her child's hair (over and over again).'

Yet another way of expressing verbal number is discussed in Mithun (1988: 213). In many North-American languages, verb stems alternate according to the number of participants involved. The set of alternating stems consists of a limited number of common verbs, in some languages only two or three, in others up to several dozen. They usually include intransitives, such as: *sit*, *lie*, *stand*, *go*, *walk*, *fly*, *run*, *die*, and transitives, such as: *take*, *pick up*, *carry*, *throw*, and *kill*. For intransitive verbs, the selection of a stem reflects the number of subjects, and for transitive verbs, it reflects the number of objects involved. Consider the examples given by Mithun (1988) in Table 1:

Table 1. Stem alternation in North-American languages (Mithun 1988: 213)

LANGUAGE	VERB	SG	NON-SG	SOURCE
	'sit/dwell'	'(one to) sit'	'(group to) sit'	
Shuswap		*ʔém*	*téq*	Gibson (1973: 52)
Southern Paiute		*qarï*	*yuɣwi-*	Sapir (1930: 242)
Haida		*q!ao*	*L!ū*	Swanton (1911: 276)
	'kill'	'kill (one)'	'kill (several)'	
Shuswap		*púl*	*'ik^w*	Gibson (1973: 52)
Southern Paiute		*paq-a*	*qɔ'i-*	Sapir (1930: 242)
Haida		*tia*	*L!da*	Swanton (1911: 276)

Morphemes expressing verbal number are frequently labelled **distributive** markers, or **verbal plurality** markers, but, as pointed out by Newman (1980, 1990), this term does not sufficiently distinguish the morphemes in question from those verbal affixes that merely indicate agreement with a plural argument. Therefore, Newman suggests the term **pluractional** markers, a term which is nowadays mainly used by Africanists.

The semantics of verbal number or pluractional markers has been discussed in some detail by Dressler (1968), and especially by Cusic (1981) and Lasersohn (1995); furthermore, a major approach is to be found in Fraj-

zyngier (1985), and especially Durie (1986), while Mithun (1988) gives a diachronic approach.

Corbett (2000: 246) distinguishes two main types of verbal number: event number and participant number. In the case of event number the most common distinction to be made is that of single event as opposed to multiple events. Consider (4):

(4)   Hausa (Chadic; Eulenberg 1971: 73-4, quoted in Corbett 2000: 246)
        a. *naa aikee   su*
           I   send   them
        b. *naa a''aikee su*
           I   send.PL   them

Taking into account (4), we see that the verb in (4b) is partly reduplicated, marking it as 'plural'. It indicates that the sending was not simple, that it involved, so to say, more than one time, more than one place, thus, more than one 'sending-event', as opposed to the single 'sending-event' in (4a). According to Durie (1986: 356), in the case of participant number the most common distinction is single as opposed to plural, or one and two versus three or more. Mithun's examples of stem alternation in Table 1 seem to be good examples of participant number. Consider also the Huichol examples quoted in Comrie (1982):

(5)   Huichol (Uto-Aztecan; Grimes 1964: 98, quoted in Comrie 1982: 112)
        a. *Wan maria maa-ti   me-neci-mieni.*
           Juan María and-S   3PL-1SG-kill.SG
           'Juan and María are killing me.'
        b. *Nee wan maria maa-me   ne-wa-qiini.*
           I   Juan María and-NON.S   1SG-3PL-kill.PL
           'I am killing Juan and María.'

Recall that with transitive verbs, it is always the number of the object that is relevant. Thus, in Huichol, the verb *kill* has a singular stem *-mie* (5a) and a plural stem *-qii* (5b). Finally, Corbett (2000: 249) notes that some languages have mixed event and participant number, and may signal both using the same formal device.

In the following section I will present and discuss the Itonama data.

3   Verbal number in Itonama
3.1   Nominal number

Like in many Amerindian languages, Itonama nouns referring to non-humans are not marked for number at all (6), and only a few nouns referring to human beings and kin terms have frozen plural forms (7):

(6) *upa'u*   'dog'   *upa'u*   'dogs'
     uku   'house'   *uku*   'houses'
     yowo'ti   'ax'   *yowo'ti*   'axes'
(7) *wabï'ka*   'woman'   *ïwabï*   'women'
     umu   'man'   *umu'ke*   'men'
     t'iyaya'tya 'girl'   *t'iyaya'tye* 'girls'

Kin terms seem to have plural marking, but being derived from verbs, these terms owe their plural marking to their underlying verbal origin:

(8) *ah-may-maye'ne*   *ah-may-maye'ne-'cha'ke*
     3-SUBORD-father   3-SUBORD-father-MULT
     'his father'   'their fathers'

3.2   Verbal number

Itonama has a relatively complicated verbal morphology. There are several prefix and suffix slots. While first and second person subject arguments are obligatorily marked on the verb with a prefix, object arguments are marked with a suffix (9). As pointed out before, the number expressed in these instances is nominal number, simply agreeing with the arguments.

(9) *uwe'cha*   *padï*   *a'-may-yumo'-na-mo*
     why   uncle   2SG-SUBORD-eat-NEU-1O
     'Why are you going to eat me, uncle?'

Verbal moods, like negation, interrogative, and imperative are expressed after the subject cross-reference prefix right before the stem. When interrogative or imperative are expressed in combination with negation, the first two moods are expressed closest to the stem (10). Note that the negative infix in the form of a glottal stop causes the verb stem *-ch'awa-* 'want' to become discontinuous.

(10) *uwe'cha   padï'ka   a'-mi-di-ch'a<'>wa'-ko*
      why   uncle   2SG-NEG-Q-want<NEG>want-NEU
      a'-may-yumo'-tyo   nu'u-du   tere'ke
      2SG-SUBORD-eat-PL   DEM.PROX-CLF9   food
      'Why, uncle, don't you want to eat this food?'

Third person singular and plural are zero-marked in subject and object posi-
tion, as glossed in (11).

(11) *ø-yomoni'-ye'-na-'ka-ø   ni-mariya   k'ipala   naylu*
      3-leave-CLF10-NEU-F.SG-3   HON.F-María   egg   nest
      'María left the eggs in the nest.'

As exemplified in (11), if the third person singular is feminine, the feminine
singular marker *-'ka* is suffixed to the aspect marker. This feminine marker
is also prefixed to the unmarked masculine second person singular subject
cross-reference marker; compare the masculine forms of the second person
singular in (9) and (10) to the feminine form in (12):

(12) *no'o-so   opi   lowo'-tya*
      DEM.PROX-CLF8   fish   be.rotten-NEU
      k-a'-ki-maku-mu   ch'uka'te
      F.SG-2SG-IMP-give-1O   other
      'These fish are rotten, give me some others!'

3.2.1 Event number

Apart from the exceptions that we have seen above, number seems a verbal
category in Itonama. The language can express event number in various
ways, for example, by using a distributive marker as contrasted in (13) and
(14), by partial reduplication of the verb stem in combination with an
intensifying infix as in (15) and (16), or by the use of a pluractional marker
as in (17).

(13) a. *wase'wa   si-makï   uwaka   k'a-dïlï   ubuwa*
         yesterday 1SG-give   meat   DEM.DIS-CLF2 person
         'Yesterday I gave those persons meat.'
      b. *wase'wa   si-makï-he   uwaka   k'a-dïlï   ubuwa*
         yesterday 1SG-give-DISTR   meat   DEM.DIS-CLF2 person
         'Yesterday I gave each of those persons meat.'

(14) a. *wabï'ka nutyo-na-'ka   wanu'we   ïyak'ï*
      woman   pour-NEU-F.SG   water   gourd
      'The woman poured water into the gourd.'
    b. *wabï'ka   nutyo-he-'ka   wanu'we ïyak'ï*
      woman   pour-DISTR-F.SG   water   gourd
      'The woman was pouring water into the gourd (little by little).'

(15) *ohni   ni~su<hu>suh-ne   kay-chadï-ne-'o*
     he   foot~ITE<INTNS>smell-NEU   face-find-NEU-REP
    'He kept smelling his tracks and got him again.'

(16) a. *sosohte yumani ya~ka<'a>ka-ne-'ka   wabï'ka*
      all   night   sing-ITE<INTNS>sing-NEU-F.SG   woman
      'The woman sang every night.'
    b. *sosohte yumani ya~ka<'a>ka-na-'ke   ïwabï*
      all   night   sing~ITE<INTNS>sing-NEU-PL   women
      'The women sang every night.'

(17) a. *ubuwa   ibah-ne ihwana*
      person   hit-NEU   Juan
      'The man hit Juan (once).'
    b. *ubuwa   bah-na-'ke ihwana*
      person   hit-NEU-PL Juan
      'The man hit Juan (several times).'

The difference between (13a) and (13b) is the distributive marker *-he* in (13b), which marks the different 'giving-events' to each of the persons involved, whereas in (13a) there was just a single 'giving-event', in which, as my informants pointed out, the meat was given in one package. The sentences in (14) form another example of the difference in event number caused by the use of *-he*. Partial CV reduplication of the verb stem in combination with an intensifying infix, as in examples (15) and (16), is yet another strategy to render 'plural verbs' and, therefore, plural event number. In (17b), finally, the verb gets a plural reading by the addition of the pluractional marker *-'ke*.

3.2.2 Participant number
Participant number can be expressed by altering the verb stem through partial CV reduplication as in (18b), by different verb stems for singular and plural (19), verbal classifiers (20), or by pluractional markers as in (21).

(18) a. *sih-k'i-ma-doh-ne*   *upa'u*
          1PL.EXCL-INV-hand-bite-NEU   dog
          'The dog bit us on the hand.'
      b. *sih-k'i-ma-do~doh-ke*   *upa'u*
          1PL.EXCL-INV-hand-ITE-bite-PL   dog
          'The dogs bit us on the hand.'

(19) a. *ah-may-sewa-na*   *tyahka'kahka wa'ihna oli'-na*
          3-SUBORD-see-NEU   moon   DM   fall.SG-NEU
          'When he saw the moon, he fell.'
      b. *ispi'i   soloh-ke   wanu'we*
          almost   fall.PL-PL   water
          'They almost fell into the water.'

(20) a. *s-mi-chuwanano*   *si-chobo   abïte   opi'i*
          1SG.POSS-REL-compound   be-CLF5   tree   small
          'There is a small tree in my compound.'
      b. *nik'abï   chokosno   osi-bo   abïte*
          over.there   forest   be-CLF6   tree
          mi-yu-so~lo<ho>loh-te   *dih-ni-yumo'-te*
          REL-CAU-fall~ITE<INTNS>fall-CONT   1PL.INCL-REL-eat-CONT
          'There are trees over there in the forest that are dropping fruit all
          the time so that we can all eat.'

(21) a. *chaswada-'ke ihwana   obeha*
          shave-PL   Juan   sheep
          'Juan shaved the sheep (SG).'
      b. *chaswada-'cha'ke   ihwana obeha*
          shave-MULT   Juan   sheep
          'Juan shaved the sheep (PL).'

(22) a. *isuh-ne   upa'u   uwaka*
          smell-NEU   dog   meat
          'The dog smelled the meat.'
      b. *suh-na-'ke   upa'u   uwaka*
          smell-NEU-PL   dog   meat
          'The dog sniffed at the meat.'
      c. *suh-na-'cha'ke   upa'u   uwaka*
          smell-NEU-MULT dog   meat
          'The dogs sniffed at the meat.'

In (18b) the partial reduplication of the verb stem signals that more than one dog was involved in the biting incident as opposed to (18a), in which just one dog is involved.[3] Without the reduplication the free translation of *sihk'imadohke upa'u* would be 'The dog bit us (several times) on the hand'. As exemplified in (17), this implies that the pluractional marker -*'ke* does not denote participant plurality, but rather event plurality. In (19) the use of suppletive verb stems for singular and plural automatically leads to a distinction in participant number. In example (20a) the verbal classifier, -*chobo*, here attached to the existential root *si-* refers to a single, vertical and planted object, while -*bo* in (20b) refers to more than one vertical and planted object. Thus, in Itonama verbal classifiers are clear markers of participant number. In example (21), the use of different pluractional markers indicates a difference in participant number. Note that in (21a), the pluractional marker -*'ke* only refers to event number: it took Juan more than one 'shaving-event' to shave one sheep. In (21b), however, the marker -*cha'ke* indicates plural participant number, reflecting the number of objects involved. Example (22), finally offers another instance of the way in which the semantics of a verb may be changed by the use of different pluractional markers.

Going back to example (16) in the previous subsection, it is obvious that the feminine marker -*'ka* in (16a) indicates single participant number, while plural event number is indicated by the partial reduplication of the stem in combination with the intensifying infix -*'a*. In (16b) however, plural event number is indicated in the same way, while plural participant number is signalled by the pluractional marker -*'ke*. This implies that although -*'ke* usually denotes event plurality, the marker sometimes may denote participant plurality, especially when event plurality is already indicated by another strategy, as in the case of (16b).

(16) a. *sosohte yumani ya~ka<'a>ka-ne-'ka*   *wabï'ka*
         all   night   sing~ITE<INTNS>sing-NEU-F.SG   woman
         'The woman sang every night.'
      b. *sosohte yumani ya~ka<'a>ka-na-'ke*   *ïwabï*
         all   night   sing~ITE<INTNS>sing-NEU-PL   women
         'The women sang every night.'

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[3] While there is no intensifying infix in the case of participant number, it has been shown in examples (15) and (16) that partial reduplication of the verb stem in the case of event number is accompanied by an intensifying infix.

4   Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that in Itonama with very few exceptions nominal plurality is not expressed; instead morphemes associated with plural meaning are affixed to the verb. Cross-linguistically the most common means of forming these so-called 'plural verbs' are reduplication, affixation, and suppletion (Cusic 1981: 72).

As shown in the previous section, there are indeed several possibilities to mark event and participant number on the Itonama verb: partial CV reduplication of the root – either in combination with (event number) or without an intensifying infix (participant number) –, suppletive singular and plural verbs, and classifiers. Moreover, Itonama makes use of a number of pluractional morphemes, which seem to be related exclusively to verbal number, be it event number, participant number, or both. One of these morphemes, *-'ke* seems to apply to this last category. As listed in Table 2, the markers have a different formal expression in dependent constructions.

Table 2. Pluractional markers in Itonama

INDEPENDENT	DEPENDENT	GLOSS	VERBAL NUMBER
-na[4] *-ne* *-tya*	*-ko* *-na* *-tyo*	neutral	neutral
-'ke	*-cha, -tyo*	plural	event number & participant number
-te/-tye	*-cha*	continuative	event number
-he	*-cha*	distributive	event number
-cha'ke	*-cha'cha*	multiple	event number & participant number

Verbal number or pluractional markers can take a wide scope of readings and there is an urgent need for a more standardized terminology. Not only are several different terms in use, but some of these terms are used in very different senses by different authors (cf. Cusic 1981; Lasersohn 1995). The steadily growing amount of new data from previously undescribed languages, especially in South America, calls for an even more urgent

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[4] Although the marker *-na* appears in the same position as the other pluractional markers (i.e. right after the verb stem), it seems to play a neutral role as far as verbal number goes. The reason that *-na* has two allomorphs, *-ne* and *-tya*, has to do with the fact that Itonama has different verb classes.

standardization of terminology. It would facilitate the analysis of verbal number, a neglected category in most grammars of South-American indigenous languages.

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