

### 3. One or All: The Development of Singulatives to Collectives in Semitic

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Semitic languages generally have two genders, masculine and feminine. Masculine nouns are unmarked (as in Classical Arabic *'ibn-* ‘son’) while feminine nouns are marked by either *-t* or its allomorph *-at* (as in Classical Arabic *bint-* ‘daughter’ and *madīnat-* ‘city’). This distinction of gender and gender marking is found in all major branches of Semitic and can be reconstructed to the proto language without difficulty. There is evidence, however, that the feminine marker *-(a)t* did not originate as gender marker in the nominal system of Semitic. As argued in Hasselbach (2014ab), the morpheme *-(a)t* has various other functions in Semitic languages, such as marking abstracts, singulatives, and collectives, to name the most frequent functions (Hasselbach 2014b: 331). In the same article it was suggested based on comparison with other, less frequent Semitic feminine markers, that the original function of the morpheme might have been the marking of singulatives (Hasselbach 2014b: 342) – although the function to mark abstracts must have developed early on in the history of the language family since it is attested in all major branches.

The third function of *-(a)t*, the marking of collectives, seemingly contradicts the proposed reconstruction of the morpheme as originally marking singulatives. In the articles from 2014, it was hypothetically proposed that the use of *-(a)t* with collectives might have arisen through the use of the morpheme with numerals, but at that point there was no satisfactory explanation for this phenomenon. In this talk I would like to reconsider the semantic and syntactic constructions that might have caused the development of a morpheme that marked singulatives into one that can also mark collectives. The marking of collectives clearly seems to be secondary since this function only occurs in West Semitic languages (Semitic has two major branches, East Semitic, which includes Akkadian and Eblaite, and West Semitic, which includes all other Semitic languages). We can also trace a similar development with a less common Semitic feminine marker, *-ay*, which also has the function to mark collectives besides marking feminine gender and abstracts (Hasselbach 2014b: 335).

The methodology used for this investigation will be based on Typology and Historical Linguistics in order to explore the diachronic processes that led to the seemingly contradictory functions of *-(a)t* in Semitic, and to find potential cross-linguistic parallels. The same morpheme also developed into the marker of the 3<sup>rd</sup> feminine singular on perfect verbs. The investigation of sources for third person verbal markers and use of these forms might shed additional light on the question.

There is surprisingly little literature on this topic and no detailed explanatory framework that could account for the developments in Semitic. This talk intends to fill this gap in our understanding of the diachronic processes involved in the functional developments of feminine markers, both from a Semitic and cross-linguistic perspective (Corbett 1991), and to provide such an explanatory framework.

#### References

- Corbett, G.G. 1991. *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Hasselbach, R. 2014a. Agreement and the development of gender in Semitic (pt. I). *ZDMG* 164: 33-64.  
Hasselbach, R. 2014b. Agreement and the development of gender in Semitic (pt. II). *ZDMG* 164: 319-344.