

Plurality and Pluractionality in Indonesian

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This paper describes the devices the Indonesian language uses to mark plurality and pluractionality. *Plurality* refers mainly to the ways languages encode plural number on pronouns, nouns or adjectives; *pluractionality* is the way verbs encode plurality of actors or plurality of action, several subjects performing the same action repeatedly, one or more subjects performing an action on several objects or combinations of such actions. Originally the term pluractionality was used only to describe Afro-Asiatic languages (Newman 1980) and Caucasian languages such as Chechen (Yu 2003) which grammaticalize this feature with dedicated morphemes. The term has since come to be applied in general as a feature of a language whether or not it encodes it with dedicated morphemes (see for instance Bertinetto and Lenci (2012) for Italian).

As Corbett (2000) points out, number is not such a basic and elementary issue especially in languages like Indonesian where a real opposition between singular and plural is not morphologically formalized. Plurality is optionally expressed by the means of reduplication of nouns (*buku-buku* 'books'), and adjectives (*tinggi-tinggi* 'many tall things'). What is in fact expressed with reduplication here is variety or diversity of the reduplicated object. That number strictly is not being marked is clear from examples like *tiga buku* 'three books' where a quantified plural nominal does not require any morphological marking such as reduplication. Pluractionality however, accurately encompasses a range of functions that are expressed in Indonesian by verbal reduplication (*lari-lari* 'run back and forth without a target'), by multiple affixation (*berhamburan* 'many things scattered around'), by free morphemes and lexical tools (adverbials and verbal periphrases like *sering* 'often'). Sometimes the context itself may suggest plurality and pluractionality by pragmatic inference without any overt plural morpheme. An analysis of overt and covert devices used to mark plurality and pluractionality is provided and their distribution is discussed.

The basic idea of this paper came from the difficulty Italian speakers learning Indonesian have in producing reduplication beyond its function of indicating, when necessary, plurality of nouns and adjectives, and to understand pluractionality when no reduplication is employed. Reduplication in most cases is wrongly interpreted as a mark of nominal plurality, and conversely its lack prevents Italian speakers to interpret plurality. Additional evidence is presented from parallel translations, and particularly translation errors, of Italian and Indonesian, the former which obligatorily marks number and plurality morphologically, the latter which does not encode number in any similar way.

Other data are mainly taken from literary Indonesian with occasional comparison to the colloquial variant, which helps explicate to what extent the two varieties differ one another in the use of reduplication and the expression of plurality and pluractionality with and without overt marking.