

Simulative plurals in Western Iranian languages

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Abstract. This study investigates the encoding strategies and diachronic sources of simulative plurals — constructions denoting ‘X and similar entities’ — in Western Iranian languages. Unlike ordinary plurals, the set formed by simulative plurals is comprised of some heterogeneous members. While previous research on Western Iranian languages has predominantly examined ordinary and associative plurals, simulative plurals remain understudied. Drawing on data from various languages and dialects across this branch, the present article identifies four major strategies for expressing simulative plurals: (1) echo-reduplication, (2) a complementary system of echo-reduplication and suffixation, (3) the functional extension of the default plural suffix *-hā* to a simulative marker, and (4) non-morphological constructions using lexical items meaning ‘thing’. In general, simulative plural constructions are headed by a nominal bearing the [–animate] feature, most commonly denoting trivialization, mockery, or ridicule; in some instances, they may additionally convey an ironic interpretation. However, in Iranian languages, simulative plurals may be deployed with nominals marked for the [+human] feature in specific contexts; in such cases, the construction conveys a pejorative meaning. The sole exception to this pattern is the use of the simulative suffix *-hā* with a proper noun head. Diachronic analysis shows that non-morphological simulative markers predominantly originate from lexical sources — most commonly nouns meaning ‘thing’, whereas the ultimate source of morphological simulative markers is unknown or only partially known — such as Persian *-hā*, which evolved from an adverbial derivational suffix into a plural marker before subsequently developing a simulative function. This trajectory constitutes a typologically rare pathway of linguistic change.

Keywords: simulative plural, heterogeneous plurals, Western Iranian languages

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Симилятивная множественность в западных иранских языках

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются стратегии выражения симилятивной множественности — конструкции со значением ‘X и подобные’ — и их диахронические источники в западных иранских языках. На материале различных языков и диалектов выделяются четыре основные стратегии: 1) эхо-редупликация; 2) система с дополнительной дистрибуцией эхо-редупликации и суффиксации; 3) расширение функций показателя множественного числа *-hā*; 4) конструкции с лексемой ‘вещь’. Анализируются признаки существительных (одушевленность, нарицательность), которые могут выступать вершинами в конструкции, и дополнительные значения, выражаемые данными конструкциями, такие как пейоративность.

Ключевые слова: симилятивная множественность, неаддитивная множественность, западные иранские языки

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1. Introduction

In the literature on categorization, a distinction is typically drawn between **stable categories** and **ad hoc categories** [Barsalou 1983; 1991; 2003; 2010]. Stable categories are context-independent and are expressed through conventional linguistic forms, whereas ad hoc categories are highly context-dependent, both in their construction and interpretation (cf. Casasanto, Lupyan [2015], who argue that all categories may be considered ad hoc). Many languages provide specific constructions for cases where context plays a crucial role in determining category membership; for further discussion, see [Mauri 2016; Moravcsik 2020; Ramat 2024]. For instance, within the domain of number, it is generally possible to distin-

guish two types of plurals cross-linguistically: the **ordinary** (or **additive plural**) and the **heterogeneous plural**, the latter comprising the **associative plural** and the **similative plural**. The ordinary plural, as a stable category, denotes a collection of referentially homogeneous members. That is, each referent of the plural form is also a referent of the singular nominal base [Daniel, Moravcsik 2013: 150]. For example, the plural noun *books* denotes a set of similar entities in which all members share the defining property of being a “book”. This type of plural is expressed cross-linguistically through various grammatical devices, the most common being inflectional affixes. In Persian, for instance, ordinary plural marking strategies include suffixes such as *-ân*, *-hâ/-â*, and *-ât*, as illustrated by *došman-ân* ‘enemies’, *ketâb-hâ* ‘books’, and *touzih-ât* ‘explanations’.

In contrast, associative plurals and similative plurals, as ad hoc categories, form sets with heterogeneous members. An associative plural refers to a construction in which a nominal, combined with a synthetic or analytic marker, denotes a human referent along with associated individuals, typically expressing meanings equivalent to ‘X and company’ [Mauri, Sansò 2023]. In Persian, for example, the associative plural is formed by attaching *-inâ* ‘these’ to a nominal, as in *Ali-inâ* ‘Ali and his associates’ (e.g., friends or family members); for a detailed discussion of associative plural markers in Iranian languages, see [Naghzguy-Kohan 2022].

On the other hand, the “similative plural” as labeled by Daniel and Moravcsik [2013] refers to a construction in which a nominal, combined with a synthetic or analytic marker, conveys the meaning of ‘X and similar entities’. This is exemplified in Persian by echo-reduplication, as in *ketâb metâb* ‘book(s) and similar items’ or *daftar maftar* ‘notebook(s) and similar items’.

The objective of this article is to identify the strategies encoding similative plurals in a selection of modern Iranian languages and to trace their diachronic sources. To this end, Section 2 provides a detailed analysis of similative plurals. Section 3 reviews existing literature on similative plurals in Western Iranian languages. Section 4 outlines the data and methodology employed in this study. Section 5 presents the various strategies used to encode similative plurals across Iranian languages. Section 6 compares and contrasts the diachronic sources of these plurals in Iranian languages with those identified by Mauri and Sansò [2023]. Finally, Section 7 summarizes the conclusions drawn from the data analysis.

2. Similitive plurals

The similitive plural denotes a construction expressing the meaning ‘X and similar entities’, where X serves as an exemplar representing a broader set of conceptually related items. Crucially, the members of this set are semantically heterogeneous, sharing only contextually relevant features with the exemplar. For instance, the Persian similitive construction *daftar maftar* ‘notebook and similar items’ establishes a set in which *daftar* ‘notebook’ functions as the exemplar, while the full referential range is contextually determined and may encompass stationery, paper-based objects, or other functionally analogous items. These elements resemble the exemplar only in specific semantic aspects while differing in others. Thus, similitive plurals encode heterogeneous sets whose precise interpretation depends on context.

Formally, similitive plurals may be expressed through morphological markers (bound morphemes such as affixes) or non-morphological markers (free lexical items). The morphological strategies, particularly affixation, typically represent older grammaticalization patterns, indicating their diachronic precedence in such constructions [Daniel, Moravcsik 2013: 151].

From a typological perspective, the similitive plural has received significantly less attention from researchers compared to the associative plural. Mauri and Sansò [2023] attribute this lack of attention to descriptive unawareness and a descriptive gap rather than to the low frequency of this construction. However, at times, there is no descriptive unawareness, and scholars have indeed acknowledged this distinct functional category, albeit employing alternative terminology. For instance, in their analysis of reduplication phenomena in Tamil, Wiltshire and Marantz [2000: 558] use the terms “plural/variation suffix” rather than “similitive plural”. Thus, in this case, the distinction lies solely in the choice of technical nomenclature. Moreover, the similitive plural in many languages (including Iranian languages) is typically restricted to highly informal speech styles. Consequently, it is rarely attested in linguistic corpora. Thus, as Mauri and Sansò [2023] also underscore, it can be argued that the occurrence of such a construction is not uncommon cross-linguistically, and it is primarily the aforementioned reasons that have led to the assumption otherwise.

Functionally, the similitive plural aligns with the notion of a **general extender** in pragmatics. General extenders — elements such as *etcetera*, *and so on*, and *and the like* — serve to expand either a specific list or a single item by incorporating unspecified referents, cf. [Overstreet 1999]. Mauri and Sansò [2023] argue that researchers' hesitation to classify this construction as a distinct plural type stems from its predominantly analytic expression in well-studied familiar languages, despite evidence of synthetic markers fulfilling the same function in languages like Karbi (a Trans-Himalayan Tibeto-Burman language). This article demonstrates that not only analytic but also synthetic similitive markers are attested — even within the same language — among Iranian languages.

Another key consideration in analyzing ordinary, similitive, and associative plurals is their sensitivity to the animacy hierarchy (Speech Act Participants > Proper Names > Kin > Human > Animate > Inanimate). In languages with optional plural marking, ordinary plurals are more likely to appear on nouns ranking higher in this hierarchy. Notably, in languages like Persian — where nominal pluralization involves distinct inflectional classes — these classes exhibit differential sensitivity to animacy. For instance, the suffixes *-ân* and *-in* (e.g., *zanân* 'women', *mostaxdemin* 'servants') show a strong correlation with animate referents, whereas *-hâ* applies freely to both animate and inanimate nouns. Other suffixes, however, display no statistically significant animacy-based patterning [Naghzyguy-Kohan, Kuteva 2016].

As Mauri and Sansò [2023] observe, similitive and associative plurals exhibit a near-complementary distribution, conditioned by their respective positions on the animacy hierarchy. Associative plurals primarily occur with proper nouns and kinship terms, whereas similitive plurals are typically restricted to non-human and inanimate referents.

In summary, the distinctive properties of ordinary and heterogeneous plurals, as analyzed in existing scholarly works, cf. [Mauri, Sansò 2023], can be systematically compared, as illustrated in Table 1 (the Persian examples provided are my own).

As will be demonstrated later in this article, regarding the similitive plural, data from Iranian languages reveal that the fourth feature in Table 1 does not apply uniformly. Specifically, the nominal head of a similitive plural construction may bear the feature [+human].

Table 1. Characteristic features of ordinary and heterogeneous plurals

Feature	Ordinary plural	Associative plural	Simulative plural
1. Composition	Homogeneous set: <i>sandali-hâ</i> ‘chairs’	Heterogeneous set: <i>Ali-inâ</i> ‘Ali and his associates’	Heterogeneous set: <i>sandali mandali</i> ‘chairs and similar items’
2. Set formation	Simple additive operation	Associative reasoning	Similarity-based reasoning
3. Context dependency	Context-independent	Context-dependent	Context-dependent
4. Animacy sensitivity	Higher animacy increases likelihood of marking	Restricted to proper nouns and kinship terms	Restricted to non-human/inanimate referents

3. Literature on simulative plurals

As previously noted, simulative constructions have received only sporadic attention in the relevant literature. This observation also applies to Iranian linguistic studies. Among Iranian languages, the construction that functionally expresses simulative plural and has garnered significant scholarly interest is echo-reduplication. The primary objective of existing studies on echo-reduplication constructions has been — at most — to offer a comprehensive description of this phenomenon, drawing on contemporary theoretical frameworks such as Inkelas and Zoll’s [2005] morphological model or Optimality Theory, e.g., [Shaghghi, Heidarpour Bidgoli 2001; Ghaniabadi et al. 2006]. The following works on Persian echo-reduplication are particularly relevant, as they address its functional properties: Rasekh-Mahand [2009] stands among the pioneering Iranian scholars to undertake a semantic analysis of reduplicative constructions. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Moravcsik [1978], Regier [1998], and Kajitani [2005], his study categorizes Persian echo-reduplicatives as instances of post-reduplication, wherein the reduplicated element follows the base. Furthermore, since the base is not fully duplicated, this process is characterized as partial reduplication. Rasekh-Mahand [2009] demonstrates that reduplication in Persian applies productively across lex-

ical categories — including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs — with nominal reduplicatives (e.g., *ketāb metāb* ‘book(s) and similar items’) constituting the majority. Crucially, such echo-formations predominantly encode a semantic nuance of quantitative augmentation. Similarly, Rezayati Kisheh-Khaleh and Soltani [2015] systematically extracted Persian reduplicative constructions and subjected them to morphological and semantic classification. Their study is distinguished by its extensive dataset and includes a thorough review of both international and Persian-language literature on reduplication. In one section, they analyze cases corresponding to what this study terms echo-reduplication. Rezayati Kisheh-Khaleh and Soltani identify the core semantic function of nominal echo constructions as expressing “adjacent and similar entities”. Ghaniabadi et al. [2006] likewise document echo-reduplicative constructions that semantically encode simulative plurality, though the authors do not employ this specific technical term in their analysis. Finally, although Smith’s [2020] study focuses exclusively on the semantics and pragmatics of simulative plurality in Persian and Japanese, it remains limited to *m*-reduplication (see Section 5.1). Other linguistic devices expressing simulative plural are entirely overlooked, suggesting the author may be unaware of this grammatical category as such.

To date, scholarly recognition of heterogeneous plurals in Iranian languages has been limited to just two diachronic-typological studies: Mauri and Sansò’s [2023] seminal work and Naghzhguy-Kohan’s [2022] investigation. Departing from previous research, Mauri and Sansò [2023: 9] aim to “provide source-oriented explanations for the variety of synchronic manifestations of heterogeneous plurals”. Their analysis draws on a 110-language sample that includes just one Iranian language (Persian), in which they identify only the associative plural construction *N+inā*, without specifying any strategies for expressing simulative plurals. Through examining both synchronic and diachronic variations, the authors attempt to delineate the distinctions and commonalities between associative and simulative constructions. Similarly, Naghzhguy-Kohan’s [2022] study focuses primarily on the encoding of associative plurals in Western Iranian languages, with only occasional references to simulative plurals.

These observations underscore the critical need for research on simulative constructions in Iranian languages — a gap the present study aims to address.

4. Data and methodology

Similitive plurals are typically used with very low frequency in formal conversation. Besides a lack of descriptive awareness, this may be one of the primary reasons for the limited attention given to this construction in the relevant literature; for discussion, see [Mauri, Sansò 2023]. For instance, even the most frequently used strategy for expressing similitive plural in Persian, namely that of echo-reduplication, is almost absent in the extant corpora of Persian language (like Dadegan¹). This situation is more unfavorable regarding other Iranian languages. Against this backdrop, the current study is based on the data gathered from a brief questionnaire I shared with some 700 people in social networks (especially the social media Instagram) during the COVID-19 pandemic quarantines. Since the audience consisted entirely of Iranians who were proficient in the official language (Persian), this short questionnaire was designed based on the common usage of similitive constructions occurring in Persian sentences. Participants were asked to provide the likely equivalent similitive constructions in their native languages. The questionnaire received responses from fifty-four individuals. All nonanonymous participants who responded to the questionnaire possessed at minimum a bachelor's degree, and their ages ranged from 23 to 61 years. It is evident that not all responses corresponded to fifty-four distinct languages or dialects. In some cases — particularly with different Persian varieties, the Lori varieties of Malâyeri and Borujerdi, and the Kurdish variety of Sine'i — multiple answers pertained to the same language or dialect, resulting in duplicates. All data were later double-checked and explicitly discussed with native speakers of respective Iranian languages. The languages and dialects that served as the foundation for the source data, references, and analysis in this article — each exhibiting structurally significant features central to the study — include several varieties of Colloquial Persian (Southwestern Iranian), such as Tehrâni spoken in Central Iran, Hamedâni and Arâki in the west, Shirâzi and Alâmarvdashti

¹ The Dadegan corpus (<https://dadegan.apll.ir/>) is a collection prepared by the Academy of Persian Language and Literature. In compiling this corpus, 1,493 texts have been utilized, spanning from the oldest surviving Persian texts to contemporary works. The number of selected phrases has now reached approximately five million.

in the southwest, Mashhadi in the east, and Birjandi in the southeast. Additionally, the study draws on Lori/Luri varieties, also Southwestern Iranian, including Malâyeri, Borujerdi, and Nahâvandi, all spoken in Western Iran. From the Northwestern Iranian group, Caspian languages such as Talyshi (Tâleshi) varieties from Shaft County and the city of Paresar in Gilân, as well as Gilaki from Anzali Port, Râmsari, Bâboli, Shâhrudi were examined. Finally, Kurdish varieties — also Northwestern Iranian — such as Sine’i, and Mahâbâdi contributed essential linguistic data to the analysis.

This study presents a diachronic-typological analysis of similative plural markers across the aforementioned Western Iranian subgroups, focusing on languages within the geographical area of Iran. Departing from Mauri and Sansò [2023] but following Daniel and Moravcsik [2013], the data were examined to identify both dedicated and non-dedicated (or polyfunctional) encoding strategies for similative plurals, including morphological and non-morphological markers. The diachronic component of this research traces the historical sources of these markers and, where possible, reconstructs their developmental trajectories. This approach could uncover developmental links — or typological correspondences — between similative plurals and other plural types, specifically associative and ordinary plurals, in these languages.

5. Encoding similative plurals in Western Iranian languages

Four major strategies are employed to express similative plurals in Western Iranian languages. In many cases, more than one strategy is at work in a single language.

5.1. Echo-reduplication

As a form of partial reduplication² — or “complex reduplication” in Rubino’s [2005a: 16–17] terms — echo-reduplication generally entails the replication of the base with a replacement in the initial consonant,

² In contrast, Stolz et al. [2011: 47] and Stolz [2018: 248] classify echo-reduplication as a form of total reduplication.

consonant cluster, or syllable. The reduplicant lacks independent meaning and typically does not occur as a standalone form. Cross-linguistic studies demonstrate that echo-reduplication is particularly prevalent in the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family, as well as in neighboring language families in South Asia such as Dravidian [Abbi 1992; Rubino 2005a: 24; 2005b; Singh 2005; Southern 2005: 135–156]. Across languages, echo-reduplication proper appears to be consistently linked to the expression of ad hoc categories, such as similitive plural, and related notions [Inkelas 2014: 171; Mauri, Sansò 2018].

Mauri and Sansò's [2023] survey of 110 languages identifies Bengali, Lao, and Tamil as using echo-reduplication to express similitive plurality, cf. Wiltshire, Marantz [2000: 558], who refer to the reduplicant in Tamil as a "plural/variation suffix". This aligns with Abbi's [1992: 20] contention that echo-reduplication in South Asian languages primarily conveys meanings of 'et cetera', 'things similar to', and related notions. Similarly, Rubino [2005a: 24], in his discussion of reduplicative constructions in Indo-Iranian languages, provides the examples in which the following instances of similitive plural in Tajik and Punjabi are found:

- ТАЖИК (Iranian, Tajikistan) [Rastorgueva 1963: 25–26]
- (1) *non* 'bread', *nonpon* 'food and the like'
- ПУНДЖАБИ (Indo-Aryan, India) [Bhatia 1993]
- (2) a. *paaNii* 'water', *paaNii vaaNii* 'water and the like'
 b. *kamm* 'work', *kamm vamm* 'work and the like'

The Tajik example above illustrates the use of echo-reduplication to encode similitive plural in an Iranian language. This phenomenon is a major widespread strategy across all sub-branches of the Iranian languages. However, echo-reduplication patterns exhibit minor variations among these languages and dialects, much like in non-Iranian languages, cf. [Inkelas 2014: 170].

In echo-reduplication constructions, the phonological form of the reduplicant is typically determined by the base word. A common feature across many Iranian languages is the use of the nasal /m/ as the default onset — unless the base itself begins with /m/, in which case the reduplicant's onset shifts to /p/. As the following examples in Table 2 demonstrate, this phonological pattern is attested in both Northwestern and Southwestern Iranian languages.

Table 2. Echo-reduplication in Iranian languages

Language/dialect	Examples
Tehrâni	<i>kâqaz mâqaz</i> ‘paper and similar stuff’; <i>miz piz</i> ‘table and similar stuff’
Arâki	<i>xune mune</i> ‘house and the like’; <i>mâšin pâšin</i> ‘car and the like’
Shirâzi	<i>difâl mifâl</i> ‘wall and similar stuff’; <i>medâd pedâd</i> ‘pencil and similar stuff’
Mashhadi	<i>čârqađ mârqađ</i> ‘scarf and similar stuff’; <i>milân pilân</i> ‘a wide alley and the like’
Shâhrudi	<i>sâroq mâroq</i> ‘bundle and the like’; <i>mašrafe pašrafe</i> ‘wine goblet and the like’
Gilaki	<i>šâlaki pâlaki</i> ‘rag/old cloth and the like’; <i>marqâne parqâne</i> ‘egg and the like’
Bâboli	<i>lave mave</i> ‘pot and similar stuff’; <i>metkâ petkâ</i> ‘pillow and similar suff’
Sine’i	<i>kâr-o-mâr</i> ‘business and similar affairs’; <i>psa-o-msa</i> ‘pistachio and similar stuff’ ³

While the general principles governing echo-reduplication formation described above exhibit systematic regularity, they are not entirely exceptionless. Specifically, a limited number of deviations from these patterns can be attested in the data. The existence of such exceptions necessitates further investigation in each language to determine whether factors such as analogy underlie these modifications or whether other linguistic mechanisms are responsible for their occurrence. Table 3 lists some attested instances of deviations from the general reduplication patterns across four languages/dialects in the dataset.

It is noteworthy that the features identified as irregularities in certain varieties of Persian — specifically, in Tehrâni and Mashhadi in the table above — exhibit complete regularity in some dialects of Talyshi, where the oral stop /p/ serves as the default reduplicant onset. This default is overridden only when the base word begins with /b/ or /p/, triggering a shift to the nasal onset /m/. The following examples come from the Talyshi variety spoken in Nasir-Mahale, a village in Shaft County, Gilan Province:

³ -o- in Sine’i examples is a linker/interfix.

- TALYSHI (Nasir-Mahale)
- (3) a. *sefra* *pefra* b. *bez* *mez*
 tablecloth RED goat RED
 ‘tablecloth and the like’ ‘goat and the like’
- liv* *piv* *pele* *mele*
 leave RED steamed_rice RED
 ‘leave and the like’ ‘steamed rice and the like’

Table 3. Irregularities in reduplicative constructions in some Iranian languages

Language/dialect	Examples
Tehrâni	<i>kâhu mâhu</i> / <i>kâhu pâhu</i> ‘lettuce and similar stuff’ ⁴
Mashhadi	<i>late pate</i> ‘rag and the like’; <i>šeleng peleng</i> ‘hose and similar stuff’; <i>čoqok poqok</i> ‘sparrow and the like’; <i>zeqare peqare</i> ‘a little thing and the like’
Shirâzi	<i>mâšin tâšin</i> ‘car and similar stuff’; <i>menâre kenâre</i> ‘minâret and the like’
Râmsari	<i>mâšin bâšin</i> ‘car and similar stuff’

It is important to note that Talyshi is not the only language in which the rules governing reduplicative construction formation diverge from those found in the majority of Iranian languages, including Standard Persian (or Tehrâni). A parallel case can be observed in the Alâmarvdashti variety of Persian. In this dialect, as in most other Iranian languages, the default onset of the reduplicant is /m/. However, when the base begins with /m/, the reduplicant’s onset is realized as /t/ rather than /p/:

- ALÂMARVDASHTI
- (4) a. *xârak* *mârak* b. *maxtak* *taxtak*
 unripe_date RED cradle RED
 ‘unripe date and the like’ ‘cradle and similar stuff’
- tabar* *mabar* *mox-o-tox*
 axe RED palm-LNK-RED
 ‘axe and the like’ ‘palm and the like’

⁴For more examples see [Ghaniabadi et al. 2006].

Naturally, certain irregularities or exceptions to the aforementioned rules are observed in Alâmarvdashti. Crucially, what may appear as deviations from these rules within Alâmarvdashti are, in fact, entirely regular in other varieties of Persian. These patterns can thus be attributed to the impact of Standard Persian, which has exerted a persistent contact influence on this variety of Persian. The following examples illustrate these deviations in Alâmarvdashti:

- ALÂMARVDASHTI
- (5) a. *morvârid porvârid* b. *medâd pedâd*
 pearl RED pencil RED
 ‘pearl and similar stuff’ ‘pencil and similar stuff’

5.1.1. Pragmatic functions of echo-reduplication

Like other types of reduplication constructions in the world’s languages, echo-reduplication constructions are multifunctional; for their different roles, see [Rubino 2005a: 19–22]. Despite Rubino’s [2005a: 24] assertion that echo-reduplication is unique to Eastern Indo-European languages, similar constructions exist even in English. One such example is *shm*-reduplication, a specific type of echo-reduplication that holds particular relevance for this study due to its multifunctional nature — mirroring the pragmatic functions observed in Iranian echo-reduplication. Nevins and Vaux [2003] note that it is used to downplay or deride a particular phrase, carrying a dismissive sense. Similarly, Ghomeshi et al. [2004] classify these constructions (exemplified by *table-shmable*) as deprecative reduplication. In the same vein, other scholars contend that the construction denotes mockery and ridiculing, or is associated with ironic interpretation [Inkelas, Zoll 2005: 42; Kořataj 2016: 243]. Cross-linguistic insights from Kdirbaeva [2024] corroborate these findings, demonstrating that reduplication structures in English and Karakalpak (a Turkic language spoken in Uzbekistan) similarly express pejoration and related notions. Collectively, these studies underscore echo-reduplication’s capacity to encode negative evaluation, playful derision, and pragmatic down-toning.

The same observations apply to echo-reduplication in Iranian languages. In these languages, when the base has the feature [–animate], the reduplication primarily conveys trivialization while also producing

diminutive effects. The following two examples from Tehrâni illustrate this point:

- TEHRÂNI
- (6) a. *telvezyun-melvezyun faqat jâ-ro tang kard-an*
 TV-RED only space-ACC tight do.PFV-3PL
be dard ne-mi-xor-an.
 to pain NEG-PRS-eat-3PL
 ‘TV and the like are just taking up space and are useless.’
- b. *motor-potor vasile-ye naqliye hesâb*
 motorcycle-RED device-EZ vehicle count
ne-mi-š-e. bo-ro ye mâšin be-xar.
 NEG-PRS-become-3SG IMP-go.2SG one car IMP-buy.2SG
 ‘A motorcycle and the like are not considered a proper vehicle. Go buy a real car.’

Furthermore, in some contexts, a noun bearing the [+human] feature can serve as the nominal head/base, as illustrated by the following Persian examples:

- TEHRÂNI
- (7) a. *doktor moktor* b. *mohandes pohandes*
 physician RED engineer RED
 ‘physicians and similar people’ ‘engineers and similar people’

In such cases, echo-reduplication acquires a pejorative — sometimes even derogatory — connotation, often signaling a negative evaluative stance toward the group it denotes.

Notably, the same phenomenon is attested in the Indo-Aryan language family. For instance, Singh [2005: 266], in analyzing partial reduplication in Modern Hindi, provides examples in which proper nouns serve as the base of reduplicative constructions, consistently yielding a “dismissive or ironic interpretation”:

- (8) MODERN HINDI (Indo-Aryan, India)
- a. *narendra* b. *bhagavaan*
 ‘Narendra’ ‘God’
narendravarendra *bhagavaanvagavaan*
 ‘undesirables like Narendra’ ‘crazy things like God’

However, these observations contrast with the properties that scholars have attributed to the nominal head of the similitive plural. For instance, in distinguishing associative plurals from similitive plurals, Daniel and Moravcsik [2013: 150] argue that a similitive plural “denotes a class of *objects* [emphasis mine — *M. N.-K.*] sharing similar features rather than a group of closely related associates”. Similarly, Mauri and Sansò [2023] observe that the feature [–animate] constitutes a defining characteristic of the nominal head in similitive plurals (see Table 1).

It should also be noted that in many Iranian languages, echo-reduplication permits adjectives, in addition to nominals, to function as heads, cf. [Rasekh-Mahand 2009]. In such cases, it appears that the nominal head — which would normally accompany its modifier — has been elided, with the nominal meaning and its category being transferred to the adjacent adjective through a metonymic process. This is illustrated by the following Persian examples:

STANDARD PERSIAN

- (9) a. *zan=e zarif marif* → *zarif marif*
 woman-LNK delicate RED
 ‘a delicate (woman) and the like’
- b. *mard=e čâq mâq* → *čâq mâq*
 man-LNK fat RED
 ‘a fat man and the like’

The use of lexical categories other than nouns as bases for echo-reduplication is not unique to the Iranian branch. For instance, Abbi [1992: 21–22] documents the use of adjectives in echo-reduplication in the Dravidian languages Tamil and Telugu. Furthermore, Mauri and Sansò [2018] observe that in Kannada — another Dravidian language — echo-reduplication can apply to words across all word classes. Their examples include both nominal and verbal bases, yielding a similitive plural (10a) and a similarity meaning (10b), respectively:

KANNADA (Dravidian, Southern Dravidian) [Lidz 2000: 148–149]

- (10) a. *pustaka* → *pustaka-gistaka*
 book book-RED
 ‘books and related stuff’

- b. *ooda* → *ooda-giida beeDa*
 run run-RED PROH
 ‘Don’t run or do related activities.’

5.2. Employment of echo-reduplication and suffixation as complementary strategies

In certain Southwestern Iranian languages — such as the Hamedâni variety of Persian and the Lori varieties of Borujerdi, Malâyeri, and Nahâvandi — the use of echo-reduplication and the suffixation of a simulative marker operate in complementary distribution. These two mutually exclusive strategies are phonologically conditioned: as a general rule, if the nominal base begins with any sound other than /m/, the onset of the reduplicated segment is replaced by /m/, see (11)–(12).

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>(11) HAMEDÂNI
 <i>telâ melâ</i>
 gold RED
 ‘gold and similar items’</p> | <p>(12) BORUJERDI
 <i>xodkâr modkâr</i>
 pen RED
 ‘pen and similar items’</p> |
|---|--|

Conversely, when the nominal base begins with /m/, a dedicated simulative suffix is attached instead (see Table 4). Despite minor phonetic variations, this simulative suffix remains consistent across all the aforementioned languages and dialects.

Table 4. Simulative suffixes

Language/dialect	Examples
Hamedâni (- <i>melân</i>)	<i>mâšin-melân</i> ‘car and similar stuff’; <i>moqr-melân</i> ‘chicken/hen and similar stuff’
Malâyeri (- <i>melon</i>)	<i>medâd-melon</i> ‘pencil and similar stuff’
Borujerdi (- <i>melu</i>)	<i>mâši-melu</i> ‘car and similar stuff’; <i>mobl-melu</i> ‘sofa and similar stuff’
Nahâvandi (- <i>malo</i>)	<i>mâšin-malo</i> ‘car and similar stuff’; <i>miva-malo</i> ‘fruit and similar stuff’

The origin of the simulative suffix *-melân* and its various forms in the aforementioned dialects remains uncertain. In general, this com-

plementary distribution strategy — specifically, the alternation between echo-reduplication and invariable suffixation — is confined to Iranian languages and dialects spoken in the Southwestern region of present-day Iran.⁵ However, a parallel usage is attested in the Northwestern Iranian language Talyshi, where the similative marker *-mala* follows a distinct pattern. Unlike the phonologically conditioned systems of the Southwestern dialects, the Talyshi variety of Kische-Khale village in Paresar city of Gilan province possesses the suffix *-mala* which is lexically conditioned and does not depend on the phonological form of the nominal base. Instead, its application conveys a pragmatic nuance, typically indicating that the referent is perceived as of little value by the speaker. Examples include: *mâšin-mala* ‘car and similar items’; *mâtor-mala* ‘motorcycle and the like’; *dâz-mala* ‘sickle and similar items’; *kačâ-mala* ‘spoon and similar items’; *osun-mala* ‘iron and comparable materials’. This contrast between the phonologically driven systems of the Southwestern languages and the lexically/pragmatically motivated usage in Talyshi underscores the diversity in the functional distribution of similative markers across Iranian languages.

5.3. Default plural suffix *-hâ* as a similative marker

The suffix *-hâ* is the default plural marker in Modern Persian, applicable to both animate and inanimate nouns. However, when attached to a human proper noun, it can evoke a similative plural interpretation, denoting a group of individuals who share the characteristic(s) associated with that proper noun. For example, *Ferdowsi-hâ*⁶ ‘similar people like Ferdowsi’, cf.:

STANDARD PERSIAN

(13) *Iran Ferdowsi-hâ dâr-ad.*

Iran Ferdowsi-PL have-PRS.3SG

‘There are many poets like Ferdowsi in Iran.’

⁵ Unlike Arâki Persian, which uses only echo-reduplication, a Turkic variety spoken in Arak employs the suffix *-malân* to form a similative plural for certain Turkic nouns — mostly loans from Iranian languages — that begin with /m/. An alternative explanation is that this suffix is a substratal remnant of the Turkic communities’ original language. Since non-Iranian languages in Iran lie beyond the scope of this article, I will provide only a few illustrative examples: *malo-malân* ‘cow and the like’; *milčak-malân* ‘fly and the like’; *movâ-malân* ‘clay jug and the like’; *miz-malân* ‘table and the like’; *mâšin-malân* ‘car and the like’.

⁶ Ferdowsi (940–1020) was a famous Iranian epic writer.

This usage appears atypical for similitive plurals, as it diverges from the properties typically ascribed to the nominal base in such constructions. Specifically, while similitive plurals most commonly involve common nouns with non-human or inanimate referents (see Table 1), the base in this case is a proper noun — a category occupying a higher position in the animacy hierarchy. In the same vein, it seems that the nominal head in the construction, while functioning as exemplar of the set, is not characterized by low referentiality and unidentifiability, as defined by Mauri and Sansò [2023]. Furthermore, unlike conventional similitive plurals, this construction — formed through suffixation of proper nouns with ordinary plural markers — carries no pejorative or derogatory connotations.

Moreover, a crucial theoretical issue concerns the origin of the similitive plural marker *-hā*, which derives from an ordinary plural marker. This developmental pathway — from an ordinary plural marker to a marker of heterogeneous plurals — is notably common for associative plurals but not typically observed for similitive plurals. For instance, Daniel and Moravcsik [2013: 150] observe that in half of their sample languages, the associative plural marker also functions as an ordinary plural marker. They argue that these markers are most likely polysemous rather than resulting from accidental homonymy, thereby supporting the claim that associative plurals and ordinary plurals are inherently related. As our findings demonstrate, a similar — though less extensive — connection exists between similitive and ordinary plurals. Similarly, Mauri and Sansò [2023] demonstrate this relatedness, though with some divergent findings. Based on their 110-language sample, they propose a bidirectional diachronic relationship between associative plurals and ordinary plurals, wherein either may serve as the source for the other. However, their data present a distinct pattern for similitive plurals: only three languages in their sample exhibit the optional use of similitive plurals as ordinary plurals. Crucially, in these cases, the similitive markers derive from uncertainty markers, prompting Mauri and Sansò to posit a unidirectional developmental pathway: **uncertainty marker** → **similitive plural** → **(optional) ordinary plural**. Notably, the Persian data constitute a significant counterexample to this generalization. In Persian, the ordinary plural marker *-hā* has simultaneously developed similitive plural function. This suffix originates from the Middle Persian derivational suffix *-īhā*, a category-changing morpheme that derived adverbs

from nouns and adjectives [Abu al-Qasemi 2008: 329], as illustrated by the following examples:

- *tan* ‘body’ → *tanīhā* ‘alone’;
- *wuzurg* ‘great’ → *wuzurgīhā* ‘magnanimously’;
- *amaragān* ‘totality’ → *amaragnīhā* ‘wholly’;
- *borz* ‘tall (adj.)’ → *borzīhā* ‘tall (adv.)’.

This adverbial function survives only in the lexicalized form *tanhā* ‘alone’ in New Persian. Based on the foregoing observation, the suffix’s historical development demonstrates a distinct trajectory:

derivational suffix → **ordinary plural marker** →
→ **similitive plural marker**

When examined in conjunction with Mauri and Sansò’s [2023] findings, this pathway provides empirical support for potential bidirectionality in the diachronic development of similitive and ordinary plurals across languages.

5.4. Non-morphological constructions

In colloquial Persian, an independent lexeme with the original meaning ‘thing’ follows the nominal head to express similitive plural meaning:

- (14) COLLOQUIAL PERSIAN
xodkâr-i čiz-i dâr-id?
 pen-INDF thing-INDF have-PRS.2PL
 ‘Do you have a pen and the like?’

In the above example, both the nominal and the independent similitive marker take the indefinite suffix *-i*. The same construction is attested in Birjandi:

- (15) BIRJANDI
ya piyâz-i čiz-ē
 one onion-INDF thing-INDF
 ‘an onion and the like’

A somewhat analogous strategy is attested across various Kurdish varieties. In these dialects, the nominal is followed by the enclitic *-o-* (linker)

5. Interrogative markers;
6. Markers of vagueness/uncertainty.

This list is not exhaustive, as some constructions — such as echo-reduplications — do not derive from a clear (lexical) source. Mauri and Sansò [2023] contend that echo-reduplication should be treated as a semantically transparent process rather than a grammaticalized simulative plural marker. Consequently, from a (lexical) source perspective, its role in the development of simulative plurals holds little theoretical significance. The same argument applies to Iranian languages, where echo-reduplication is productively used to convey simulative plural interpretations.

Beyond echo-reduplication, certain simulative plural markers, such as the Iranian suffix *-melān* and its variants, lack reliably documented historical origins. By contrast, the plural marker *-hā*, which has functioned as a simulative plural in Persian, can be traced to a derivational adverbial suffix in Middle Persian. Nevertheless, earlier/ultimate source of this derivational morpheme remains unattested in the historical record. The only simulative plural markers for which historical data is entirely unambiguous are those that derive from lexical sources meaning ‘thing’.

7. Conclusion

As an ad hoc category, simulative plurals exhibit significant context-dependence, driven largely by pragmatic factors. Their avoidance in formal contexts explains their underrepresentation in corpora and grammatical descriptions.

I identified four principal strategies for simulative plurality in Western Iranian languages:

1. Echo-reduplication (the most pervasive, with dialectal phonological and pragmatic variation);
2. Complementary use of echo-reduplication and suffixation;
3. Functional extension of the default plural suffix *-hā* to a simulative marker;
4. Non-morphological constructions.

Notably, multiple strategies coexist within a single language (e.g., Persian and Kurdish use strategies 1 and 3 in parallel). My findings chal-

lence animacy-based accounts, showing that similitive plurals can sanction [+human] heads — albeit with pejorative/evaluative overtones.

Diachronically, Western Iranian languages both align with and diverge from Mauri and Sansò's [2023] cross-linguistic patterns. While some markers follow expected lexical sources (e.g., 'thing'-derived forms), Persian *-hā* defies typological expectations, grammaticalizing from **adverbial suffix** → **ordinary plural** → **similitive marker** — inverting the cross-linguistic unidirectional pathway (**similitive plural** → **ordinary plural**).

This study expands the typology of heterogeneous plurals, demonstrating Iranian similitive constructions as more widespread and functionally nuanced than previously recognized.

Abbreviations

ACC — accusative; EZ — eżāfe; IMP — imperative; INDF — indefinite; LNK — linker; NEG — negation; PFV — perfective; PL — plural; PROH — prohibitive; PRS — present tense; RED — reduplicant; SG — singular.

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