

# Indogermanistik und Linguistik im Dialog

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# The PIE Collective Plural and the “τὰ ζῶα τρέχει rule”

H. Craig Melchert

The PIE neuter nom.-acc. plural inflectional ending is widely assumed to be historically identical with the derivational suffix that forms animate (feminine) abstracts and to have originally derived inanimate collective singulars. The only basis for the latter assumption has been agreement of neuter plural subjects with a singular verb. I present evidence that such verb agreement is not diagnostic for an original singular function of the relevant plural marker. I argue that from the earliest stages of PIE the suffix  $*(e)h_2$  derived both inanimate collective pluralia tantum and animate singular abstracts. The plural inflectional ending developed only from the former.

Most analyses of the PIE collective plural ending  $*(e)h_2$  share two premises. First, that this suffix originally had a derivational function, forming singular nouns with either collective or abstract value. Second, that it then underwent some kind of split, by which it became, already in PIE, on the one hand the inflectional ending of the neuter nominative-accusative plural and on the other a derivational suffix forming animate (later feminine) abstract nouns. Evidence for an early collective value is shown by its use to form collective plurals to count nouns (e.g. Hittite nom.-acc. pl. *alpa*, roughly ‘cloudbank’ beside regular nom. pl. *alpēš*, acc. pl. *alpuš* ‘clouds’). That these were originally singulars is purportedly shown by the fact that neuter plural subjects take singular verb agreement in Hittite, Greek, and elsewhere (the “τὰ ζῶα τρέχει rule”).

Scholars differ considerably in how they attempt to explain the putative split of the original single derivational category into use as an inflectional ending and as a derivational suffix forming exclusively animate (respectively feminine) abstracts. Schmidt (1889: 8-10) assumes that original feminine singular collectives became plurals of both animates and inanimates (cf. Semitic *plurales fracti*) and that the originally entirely singular inflection was remade for neuters after the model of the masculines. Eichner (1985: 141, n. 46) argues that original animate singular abstracts became the plurals of inanimates by suppletion and that these plurals were then extended in some cases to animate nouns. Harðarson (1987: 88-90) starts with neuter singular collectives, which became plurals of both neuters and masculines, again with an originally entirely singular inflection remade for the neuters after the masculines. According to Tichy (1993: 6-7), a pre-PIE nominative-accusative plural of a “genus indistinctum” was suppletively replaced by the collective singular (also “genus indistinctum”). For Matasović (2004: 166-70) some neuter plural collectives, because they took singular agreement, were reinterpreted as singulars and in the case of appropriate semantics became feminines (though by no means all feminines arose in this way). Finally, Ledo-Lemos (2000: 119-26) takes  $*-eh_2$  as having originally formed relational adjectives, not nouns, which became collectives/abstracts and by periphrasis feminines. He gives no account of the use as neuter nominative-accusative plural.

As is clear from their diversity, none of these treatments has convincingly shown how the supposed split of original singular collectives (or abstracts) into a neuter plural ending and a suffix forming animate (> feminine) abstracts took place. All depend on wholly unsupported suppletions or drastic realignment of inflectional paradigms in order to

explain the plural case ending, and the functional difference between attested plural collectives and singular abstracts is not explicitly accounted for. This aporia suggests that after one hundred and twenty years it may be time to reexamine the premises on which all of these proposals rest.

The status of  $*-h_2$  as an original derivational suffix is not in doubt. Several scholars have properly emphasized the ablaut and accentual patterns shown in several old instances of its use with thematic stems: Greek μηροί vs. μῆρα ‘thigh pieces’ (Schmidt 1889: 6), PIE  $*k^wék^wlos$  vs.  $*k^wék^wéh_2$  ‘wheel; set of wheels’ (Eichner 1985: 141, n. 46), PIE  $*wérdhom$  vs.  $*wṛdhéh_2$  ‘word(s)’ (Harðarson 1987: 90). I remain unpersuaded by the proposal of Litscher (2004) for  $*(e)h_2$  as an original inflectional ending.

However, the basis for  $*-h_2$  as forming **singular** collectives is extremely weak. All paradigmatic evidence argues that  $*(e)h_2$  was already in PIE a plural ending. Hittite nom.-acc. *warpa* ‘enclosure’ is resumed by dat.-loc. plural *warpaš*, and Lycian nom.-acc. *arawazija* ‘memorial’ is resumed by dat.-loc. plural *arawazije* (the claim of number indifference by Matasović 2004: 35 for Old Hittite is entirely false). That is, these nouns are pluralia tantum. That  $*-h_2$  was already in PIE a plural ending is effectively conceded by the scenarios sketched above. Furthermore, in Old Hittite agreement of attributive and predicative adjectives and anaphoric pronouns is consistently plural (contra Harðarson 1987: 84, Tichy 1993: 9, Prins 1997, and Matasović 2004: 156—for singular predicative adjective agreement as a Neo-Hittite innovation see van den Hout 2001).

As per Harðarson (1987: 89), after Nussbaum (1986: 129-130) and Szemerényi (1970: 155&159), lengthened-grade holokinetic plurals in  $*-ōR$  reflect pre-PIE  $*-oRh_2$ . Hittite plurals of this type to mass nouns function as **count** plurals (false Matasović 2004: 158): *widār* ‘instances of water’, *huidār* ‘sets/species of wild beasts’ (see Appendix 1). These are examples of so-called “recategorization”: i.e., since collectives to mass nouns make no sense, the regular collective marker is used to form a count plural (with either an “instance” or “sort” reading). See Corbett (2000: 84-87 & 117, n. 33) and compare English ‘kindnesses’ (instances) or ‘rices’ (sorts). The lengthened-grade type was formally opaque already by PIE: thus  $*-h_2$  must have marked the plural in **pre-PIE!**<sup>1</sup>

This leaves singular subject-verb agreement as the sole basis for the inanimate (collective)  $*(e)h_2$  ever having been singular, but the diagnostic value of subject-verb agreement is weak. As part of the universal “animacy hierarchy”, inanimate nouns marked morphologically as plural may take singular subject-verb agreement, or more correctly **inanimate nouns do not control verbal agreement**—the singular verb is merely the “default” value (Patri 2007: 62). See Corbett (2000: 71) on Muna (Indonesia) and Ngalakan (Australia) and (2000: 188-89, n. 10) on the contrastive usage in British English with “corporate nouns”: animate ‘The committee is/are...’, but inanimate ‘The forest is/\*are...’.

<sup>1</sup> As Silvia Luraghi has reminded me, not all formal plurals to mass nouns have an “instance” or “sort” meaning, but the meaning is still quite distinct from that of the singular. One can say ‘I have drunk the water of the Mississippi’, but one cannot say ‘\*I have drunk the waters of the Mississippi’, because the plural has an extensional and implied inclusive sense. The Hittite collocation *šehelliyaš widār* ‘waters of purification’ (referring to several containers of specially sacralized water) appears to have a similar value, and we may entertain such also for PIE. When the total quantity of the mass noun is limited, the objective difference between singular and plural in this usage is slight. This may help explain cases like Greek ὕδωρ, where the old plural has been generalized, a development that would be hard to understand beginning from an instances or sorts value.

The diagnostic value of singular subject-verb agreement is further weakened by the existence of similar agreement even with **animate** subjects, as in the so-called “Pindaric schema” of Greek and Hittite. As per Schmidt (1889: 3), this usage is clearly an innovation, but it confirms typologically that the number of the subject is not determinative for the number of the verb. As noted by N. Oettinger (pers. comm.), all Hittite examples of the Pindaric schema occur with intransitive predicates, and this is true also of 20 of 22 examples in Greek (see Appendix 2; Greek material after Chantziara 2000).<sup>2</sup> Thus with Oettinger, the conditioning factor is not the number of subject, but rather **non-agency** (for neuters as non-agents in PIE see Patri 2007: 171-175). Note further with Chantziara (2000: 35) and Watkins (2000: 14) the usual restriction to **non-determined** nouns. See the well-known correlation of agency with animacy, control, and specificity (Lazard 1998: 210 & 233).

I therefore conclude that there is no evidence that the PIE suffix *\*(e)h<sub>2</sub>* ever formed inanimate singular nouns. The unexplained split between animate singulars and inanimate collective plurals is a pseudo-problem. We should begin with a new premise: that these two types were separate from the beginning. It is well established that gender and number are not always independent categories. A strong correlation exists between animacy, individuation and number (see e.g. Corbett 2000: 55-56). As per Ostrowski (1985: 316) and Matasović (2004: 186), the PIE accusative singular ending *\*-m* marked not only patient but also individuation; it was used with all animates and some inanimates (cf. Ledo-Lemos 2000: 27 without a solution).<sup>3</sup> See Matasović (2004: 200-202) for a typological comparison with Ket (Yeniseyan), where only mass nouns and fluids are neuter. PIE does not show such a strict division, since it undeniably had some inanimate count nouns (e.g. *\*pédom* ‘place’). The clear generalization, however, is that in PIE and Ket, grammatical “animacy” correlates with individuation, not with the natural animacy of the referent. See also Lazard (1998: 194-195) for the animacy hierarchy as rather an individuation hierarchy.

Based on this premise, I offer the following hypothesis: *\*(e)h<sub>2</sub>* originally derived concrete nouns from action nouns. If these were viewed by speakers as [+bounded, –internal structure] (see Jackendoff apud Corbett 2000: 80), these took *\*-m* (and thus necessarily were classified as grammatically animate). If they were seen as [+bounded, +internal structure], they were treated as inanimate collective pluralia tantum. E.g., from the root noun *\*h<sub>2</sub>ó/éh<sub>1</sub>s-* ‘burning’ (concretized in Hitt. *hāšš-* ‘ash; soap’) was derived *\*h<sub>2</sub>éh<sub>1</sub>s-eh<sub>2</sub>* ‘hearth, place of burning’ (Hitt. *hāšša-*, necessarily animate already in PIE, as per Harðarson 1994: 35 and Melchert 1994: 235, n. 5). But from the action noun *\*wórbh-o-* ‘enclosing’ (see Driessen 2001) was derived *\*w(o)rbhéh<sub>2</sub>-* ‘enclosure’, an inanimate collective plurale tantum preserved in Hitt. *warpa/warpaš*. Not only Hittite but also Lycian

<sup>2</sup> Chantziara reviews in painstaking detail the philology of every alleged example of the Pindaric schema in Greek and critically evaluates their respective validity. While I am sure that some of her individual decisions are arguable, in order not to prejudice the results I have for my purposes accepted her list of probative examples.

<sup>3</sup> I intentionally avoid here the term “common” gender (including for Hittite), which has no currency outside of certain subfields of Indo-European and which can potentially be confusing (see Corbett 2000: 247 and Nissen 2002: 253-4). The fact that many grammatically “animate” nouns refer to inanimate objects in early PIE and in Hittite is no different from the fact that in a language like French many “masculine” and “feminine” nouns have inanimate referents. The only possible source of confusion is that Starke (1977) claimed that Hittite has a grammatical category of animacy distinct from grammatical gender. Although a number of scholars unfortunately continue to cite this as a fact, all of his arguments have been repeatedly falsified (see most recently Hoffner/Melchert 2008: 64-66). Hittite has no category of animacy, only grammatical gender.



shows that these two types were maintained as distinct in Anatolian: contrast Lycian animate *prīnawa-* '(grave-)house' (acc. sg. *prīnawā*) versus inanimate plurale tantum *marazija* 'court (of law)'. Since the Lycian examples clearly are innovations and not inheritances, they show that both formations remained productive in Anatolian.

I therefore assert that the original locus of the plural ending *\*(e)h<sub>2</sub>* lay in inanimate pluralia tantum of the above type—it never had anything directly to do with the animate nouns in *\*-eh<sub>2</sub>*. As is typical in cases of what is now widely termed “grammaticalization”, the details of the steps by which the derivational suffix became a grammatical ending elude us. We may speculate, however, that in some cases concretization of the base action noun (e.g. TochAB *warp/\*werpe* ‘enclosure’) led to reanalysis of the originally derived collective as the alternative plural of the base noun beside the count plural (*\*w(o)rbhéh<sub>2</sub>* beside *\*wórbhōs/wórbhoms*). That is, *\*wórbho-* replaced *\*w(o)rbhéh<sub>2</sub>* in the sense of ‘(an) enclosure’. Rather than disappearing, *\*w(o)rbhéh<sub>2</sub>* became a collective (more accurately a set) plural alongside the count plural.<sup>4</sup> This pattern was then extended to other non-mass nouns where such a distinction was useful: hence *\*wřdhéh<sub>2</sub>* ‘set of words’ to *\*wěrdhom* ‘word’ and *\*k<sup>w</sup>ék<sup>w</sup>léh<sub>2</sub>* ‘set of wheels, chariot’ to *\*k<sup>w</sup>ék<sup>w</sup>los* ‘wheel’. Note that a set plural only truly makes sense for count nouns, not mass nouns. By “recategorization” the new ending was also used already in pre-PIE to form count plurals to mass nouns: *\*\*wédorh<sub>2</sub>* > *\*wédōr* ‘instances of water’.

### Appendix 1: Hittite Holokinetic Count Plurals

KBo 3.4 ii 64-65 = 16.1 iv 18-19 (NH): *nu pāun*<sup>URU</sup> *Purandan anda waḥnunun* [*n=an=kan anda*] *ḫatkešnunun nu=šši=kan wid(ā)]r arḫa dahḫun* ‘I proceeded to encircle P. I besieged it and took away its sources of water.’

VBoT 58 i 8-10 (OH/NS): *ḫa[ḫīmas] utnē ḫūman tinut widār ḫatnut...ḪUR.SAG.MEŠ-aš widār* ‘Frost has paralyzed the entire land. He has dried up the waters...the waters of the mountains.’

KBo 10.23 iii 9"-11" (OH/NS): *kuitman=ma ḫuitār ḫūmanda uttanašš=a BELU*<sup>MEŠ</sup> *PANI LUGAL šamešiyanzi* ‘But while the sets of wildlife (i.e. various species) and the lords of the word disperse themselves before the king.’ (i.e. arrange themselves at intervals).

### Appendix 2: Hittite Examples of the Pindaric Schema<sup>5</sup>

1. KUB 19.30 i 17-18 (NH): *nu=šmaš ḫalkiuš namma [tepaw]ešzi* ‘and furthermore grain supplies were becoming short for them’ (a besieged city).

2. KuT 49:4-5 (MH/MS): *ANA SAG.DU DUMU*<sup>MUNUS</sup> *SANGA=wa ūrkiēš idālawešketta nu=wa kē ūrkiēš kišandati* ‘Signs were coming out unfavorably for the person of the priestess’s son, and these signs occurred.’

<sup>4</sup> It is unfortunate that I and others habitually cite as an example of this type for Hittite the word for ‘cloud’ (as I did above), because this word is actually quite atypical. It happens that when a number of individual clouds come together to form a set, they tend to become an indistinguishable mass. For most such nouns this is not true, and the individuality of the parts that make up the set remains transparent. See the examples cited above of ‘thigh pieces’, ‘wheels’, and ‘words’. The same is true for the use of the Hittite collective plural *AŠR<sup>HI.A</sup>* (= *pēda\**) to refer to the well-defined set of “sacred” places in a temple, which are then subsequently named individually. See e.g. KUB 11.21 iv 16-21, cited by Güterbock/Hoffner 1997: 332-33.

<sup>5</sup> See Watkins (2000: 3ff.) on the Greek Pindaric schema as diffused from Anatolian.

3. KUB 8.1 iii 8-9 (NS): *hēwēš kiša* ‘Rains will occur.’
4. KUB 29.1 iv 10-11 (OH/NS): *kī=wa wallēš mahhan arlīpa artari* ‘As these *w.* stand *arlīpa*’. This is the only attested Hittite example with a determined noun.
5. KUB 33.12 iv 16 (OH/NS): *n=ašta* [*anda*] MU.KAM.ḪI.A GĪD.DA *k[(tta)*] ‘In it lie long years.’ (cf. for the verb form KUB 17.10 iv 29-34)

### Appendix 3: Greek Examples of the Pindaric Schema<sup>6</sup>

1. ἀνεται...λαίαι ‘prayers are fulfilled’ (Olympian 8,8). 2. ὕμνοι...ἀρχαί...τέλλεται ‘hymns are the beginning’ (Olympian 11,4-6). ★3. τέλεσεν ἄν πλαγαί σιδάροῦ ‘which strokes of iron have fashioned’ (Pythian 4,246). 4. οὐ κεχείμανται φρένες ‘(whose) mind remains unshaken’ (Pythian 9,32). 5. κείται...κυβερνάσιες ‘governance rests’ (Pythian 10,72). ★6. δαπάναι...ἔκνις ὄπιν ‘costs have vexed the zeal’ (Isthmian 5,57-58). 7. κατάρχει...ὄμβροι τυπάνων ‘the whirlings of the tambourines lead off’ (Fragment 70b,8-9). 8. στονοχαί...ὄρίνεται ‘groans are aroused’ (Fragment 70b,12-13). 9. βάλλεται...ἴων φόβαι ‘tresses of violets are cast’ (Fragment 75,16-17). 10-11. ἀχεῖ τ’ὄμφαί... ἀχεῖ τε...χοροί ‘voices (re)sound...choruses (re)sound’ (Fragment 75,18-19). 12. θύεται ἄνδρες ‘men are offered’ (Fragment 78). 13. ἰαχεῖ...ἀγέλαι λεόντων ‘herds of lions resound’ (Fragment 239). 14-15. μελιρροθῶν ἀνθέων ἔπεται πλόκαμοι – διοίγετο σάρκες ‘Tresses of honey-sweet flowers flow – fleshs are opened’ (Fragment 246a-b). 16. κόμαι κατενήνοθεν ‘tresses spread down’ (Hymn to Demeter). 17. δέδοκται...τλήμονες φυγαί ‘(our) woeful exile is/has been determined’ (Euripides, *Bacchae* 1350). 18. εἰσιγάθη σᾶς ἔσοδοι νύμφας ‘your bride’s entry was greeted in silence’ (Euripides, *Phoenissai* 349). 19. ἦλθε <ν> δὲ λαοὶ μυριοί ‘there came thousands of warriors’ (Fragmentum Tragicorum Adespoton 191). 20. προσξυνεβάλετο...αἱ Πελοποννησιῶν νηες ‘The Peloponnesian ships contributed to...’ (Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 3.36). 21. οὐδέ τι ἦδειν νήπιοι ‘the fools knew nothing’ (Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautica* 2.65-66). 22. αὐτοῖ...ἠεῖδειν οὐδ’ ὄσσαν ‘They knew nothing at all’ (Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautica* 4.1699-1700). 23. ἀναγέγραπται...ὁμοιοι τομέες ‘similar sectors are drawn’ (Archimedes, *On Spiral Lines*).

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<sup>6</sup> Readings follow Chantziara (2000). I am responsible for the translations. Examples three and six marked with a star are the only examples showing a plural subject with a singular transitive verb, and example twenty is the only one with a determined subject noun phrase. I do not regard ‘know’ in example twenty-two as a truly transitive verb.

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