

When lexical semantics blurs inflectional morphology: the case of Baat num noun class suffix a

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The noun class suffix -a is used both as singular marker in gender a~i as well as plural marker in gender du~a. This idiosyncrasy disturbs the stability of the singular~plural pairings and challenges linguistic theory as to whether it is a case of syncretism or polysemy. Neither the former nor the latter position is defensible. I argue that -a is basically a singular marker and besides that inflectional function, it denotes genericity. The latter semantic property conveys collective reading which is not actually a plural form. This analysis is supported by a range of empirical evidences such as coexistence of true plurals of gender du~a with a~collective nouns in the lexicon yielding du~a/nu, as well as distributional properties of the two forms.