

# Bangla Associative Plural *-ra*: A Cross-linguistic Comparison with Chinese *men* and Japanese *-tachi*

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## 1. Introduction

Typologically, associative plurals have been reported to be ‘exceptional’ plural markers that attribute to their nominals a ‘group’ reading, instead of a ‘sum’ reading pertaining to the regular plurals (Moravcsik 1994, Corbett 2000). For example, in Hungarian, a proper noun with the associative plural marker *-ék* denotes a group comprised of the referent of the proper noun and associated members (friends, family, etc.), whereas, the same proper noun marked with the plural marker *-ok* refers to a sum of referents who have the same name (Corbett 2000). Crosslinguistically, associative plurals are found to be restricted to pronouns, proper names and human nouns, with the focal referent interpreted as definite (Vassilieva 2005). Mandarin Chinese *men* and Japanese *-tachi/tati* have been analyzed as associative plural markers (Li 1999, Ishii 2000, Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Hosoi 2005, Kurafuji 2004, Nakanishi & Ritter 2008, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008, Ochi 2012 a.o.). Similarly, Bangla<sup>1</sup> *-ra* has been argued to be an associative plural marker (Chacón 2011, Dasgupta 2013, Dayal to appear). It shares several properties with Mandarin *men* and Japanese *-tachi*. I discuss the associative plurals of Bangla in comparison to Mandarin and Japanese, with a particular focus on their compatibility with generic predicates and their (in)definite interpretations, two issues that have remained not well understood. I offer novel data that suggests that associative plurals in Bangla can also be interpreted as definite descriptions. Additionally, I show that the availability of the (in)definite interpretation of the associative plural-marked nouns in these languages regulate their compatibility with generic predicates. Finally, I suggest a new analysis of the structure of associative plurals that accounts for the data presented in the literature and the new data in this paper.

In Section 2, I discuss the associative plurals in Bangla in comparison to Mandarin *men* and Japanese *-tachi*. I present data in Bangla that shows that the associative plural-marked noun phrases are not necessarily indefinite in Bangla. Section 3 discusses the compatibility of associative plural-marked noun phrases with generic predicates. I present the analysis in section 4. I explain the relation between (in)definiteness and compatibility with generic predicates. Section 5 concludes with questions for future research.

## 2. Associative plurals and (in)definite interpretations

Bangla has two markers of plurality, *-gulo* and *-ra*, analyzed as plural classifiers (Chatterji 1926, Dasgupta 1983, 1985, 2005, Bhattacharya 1999, 2000, 2001; Ghosh 2010; Dayal 2012, to appear). Only *-ra* has an associative interpretation, first mentioned in Dasgupta (1985), in comparison with Japanese *-tachi* (see also Chacón 2011, Dayal to appear). *-ra* has several properties similar to

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<sup>1</sup> Bangla is spoken in parts of India and Bangladesh. Data in this paper represent a variety spoken near Kolkata, India.

Mandarin *men* and Japanese *-tachi*<sup>2</sup> (Li 1999, Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008, a.o.). As typologically attested for an associative plural, a proper noun with *men* (Mandarin), *-tachi* (Japanese) or *-ra* (Bangla) is interpreted as a group represented by the referent of the proper noun. A similar interpretation obtains when these markers combine with pronouns. However, when associative plurals co-occur with human<sup>3</sup> common nouns, the resulting interpretation is similar to that of regular plural markers. Relevant examples are in (1)-(3), Mandarin and Japanese ex. from Ueda & Haraguchi (2008).

- |        |                          |          |    |                        |            |    |                       |            |
|--------|--------------------------|----------|----|------------------------|------------|----|-----------------------|------------|
| (1) a. | rito- <i>ra</i>          | (Bangla) | b. | xiaoqiang-men          | (Mandarin) | c. | taro-tachi            | (Japanese) |
|        | Rito <sub>name</sub> -RA |          |    | XiaoQiang-MEN          |            |    | Taroo-TACHI           |            |
|        | ‘Rito and others’        |          |    | ‘XiaoQiang and others’ |            |    | ‘Taro and others’     |            |
| (2) a. | am- <i>ra</i>            | (Bangla) | b. | wo-men                 | (Mandarin) | c. | watashi-tachi         | (Japanese) |
|        | I-RA                     |          |    | I-MEN                  |            |    | I-TACHI               |            |
|        | ‘we’                     |          |    | ‘we’                   |            |    | ‘we’                  |            |
| (3) a. | chatro- <i>ra</i>        | (Bangla) | b. | xuesheng- <i>men</i>   | (Mandarin) | c. | gakusei- <i>tachi</i> | (Japanese) |
|        | student-RA               |          |    | student-MEN            |            |    | student-TACHI         |            |
|        | ‘(the) students’         |          |    | ‘the students’         |            |    | ‘(the) students’      |            |

Common nouns co-occurring with associative plurals have been argued to be definite in Mandarin (Li 1999, Cheng & Sybesma 2005, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008, a.o.), whereas in Japanese, they can be either indefinite or definite depending on the context (Nakanishi & Tomioka 2004, Ueda & Haraguchi 2008 a.o.). Bangla *-ra*-marked nouns have been reported to be indefinite (Dasgupta 1983, Chacón 2011, Dayal 2012, to appear). I present data that shows that Bangla *-ra*-marked common nouns can also have a definite interpretation. Consider the following examples.

- |        |   |           |            |   |        |          |
|--------|---|-----------|------------|---|--------|----------|
| (4) a. | tin-Te  | bacca     | aSbe.      | *bacca- <i>ra</i> / <sup>OK</sup> bacca-gulo        | okhane | boSbe    |
|        | Three-cla   | child     | will-come. | child-RA / child-GULO                               | there  | will-sit |
|        | ‘Three children will come. The children will sit there.’ (Dayal to appear: ex. (61a)) |           |            |   |        |          |
| b.     | tin-jon   | mohila    | aSben.     | <sup>OK</sup> mohila- <i>ra</i> / #mohila-gulo      | okhane | boSben   |
|        | three-cla <sub>hum</sub>  | lady      | will-come. | lady-RA / lady-GULO                                 | there  | will-sit |
|        | ‘Three ladies will come. The ladies will sit there.’                                  |           |            |   |        |          |
| c.     | tin-jon   | oddhapOk  | aSben.     | <sup>OK</sup> oddhapOk- <i>era</i> / #oddhapOk-gulo | okhane | boSben   |
|        | three-cla <sub>hum</sub>  | professor | will-come. | professor-RA / professor-GULO                       | there  | will-sit |
|        | ‘Three professors will come. The professors will sit there.’                          |           |            |   |        |          |

Based on the judgments in (4a), Dayal concludes that NP-*ra* is interpreted as indefinite. Indeed, with a common noun like *bacca* ‘child’, the plural *-gulo* is preferred in anaphoric contexts. However, minimal adaptation of (4a) shows that *-ra* is compatible with a definite interpretation for common nouns, as shown in (4b-c). In these cases, *-gulo* (also *-Te*, in (4a)) has a pejorative interpretation (Dasgupta 2013) and so *-ra* is preferred. Kinship terms and profession names<sup>4</sup> prefer *-ra* as the plural marker in episodic contexts where *-gulo* has a pejorative interpretation. Crosslinguistically, profession

<sup>2</sup> Ghosh 2010 and Dayal to appear compare Bangla plural marker *-gulo* with Mandarin *men* and Japanese *-tachi*. Although *-gulo* shares some plural properties with *men* and *-tachi*, it is categorically different from associative plurals. See Biswas to appear and Dayal to appear for details.

<sup>3</sup> Anthropomorphized non-human nouns in Mandarin and Bangla can appear with associative plurals (Katherine Huang, p.c., for Mandarin)

<sup>4</sup> Dayal’s (to appear) judgments in (4a) perhaps reflect a preference for *-gulo* over *-ra*. My informants (5 in number) find both *-gulo* and *-ra* acceptable. In case of high level occupations (e.g., professor, officer etc.) and kinship terms (e.g., uncle, nephew etc.), they prefer *-ra* over *-gulo*.



- c. Doktor-(ra) Obolupto (hoye gEche) [Kind, capacity]  
 doctor-RA extinct become  
 ‘Doctors are extinct.’

Nonetheless, Bangla *-ra* poses a restriction on the type of human nouns with characterizing predicates. *-ra* is mandatory with capacity nouns<sup>6</sup>, but is optional with any other common animate noun. Consider (8).

- (8) a. hati-(ra) buddhiman (prani) [Characterizing, non-human]  
 elephant-RA intelligent (animal)  
 ‘Elephants are intelligent (animals).’
- b. puruS-(ra) SaktiSali (hOn) [Characterizing, human]  
 man-RA powerful be  
 ‘Men are powerful’
- c. Doktor-\*(ra) SOhomorni (hOn) [Characterizing, capacity]  
 doctor-RA compassionate be  
 ‘Doctors are compassionate.’

It has been claimed that Mandarin NP-*men* cannot be arguments to generic predicates (Ijic 1994 a.o.). Recently, Jiang (2012) showed that Mandarin NP-*men* can be arguments to characterizing predicates<sup>7</sup>, but they cannot be arguments to kind predicates. Consider (9).

- (9) a. hao nanren(\*/?-men) yijing kuai juezhong le. [Kind]  
 good man-MEN already soon extinct asp  
 ‘Good men are becoming extinct very soon.’
- b. haizi-men shi zuguo de weilai. [Characterizing]  
 child-MEN is nation De future  
 ‘Children (in general) are the future of our nation.’ (ex. from Jiang 2012)

The availability of Japanese *-tachi*-marked common nouns with generic predicates is also debated. Although Nakanishi & Tomioka (2004) claim that *-tachi* marked nouns are ‘hardly available’ with generic predicates, data from native speakers (by Hajime Hoji, 7 speakers) confirms that NP-*tachi* can be arguments to characterizing generic predicates. However, the availability of the same with kind predicates is only possible with modified nouns, not the ‘well-established kinds’.

- (10) a. ziipan-o haita bokusi-tachi-wa mezasarii [Kind]  
 blue-jeans wore priest-TACHI-top rare  
 ‘Priests who wear blue jeans are rare.’ (Hajime Hoji, p.c.)
- b. Itariazin-tachi-wa yooki-da [Characterizing]  
 Italian-TACHI-top cheerful-Cop  
 ‘Italians are cheerful.’

The data from Bangla, Mandarin and Japanese show that the associative plural marked nouns in all these three languages can be arguments to characterizing predicates. Additionally, unlike Mandarin, Bangla *-ra*-marked nouns are also fully compatible with kind predicates, whereas only modified nouns are compatible in Japanese. Since modified nouns do not refer to the species, but a modified part of it,

<sup>6</sup> Dayal (to appear) shows that both common nouns and capacity nouns cannot appear bare in generic predicates (ex. 67-68). I specify that the restriction only applies to the bare capacity nouns in characterizing predicates.

<sup>7</sup> Speakers of Mandarin prefer bare capacity nouns with characterizing predicates (Iris Ouyang, p.c.).





In support of my proposal, note the following. First, the fact that pluralization of pronouns involves associative plurals cross-linguistically (Corbett 2000, Moravcsik 2003), or, in other words, the fact that plural pronouns are inherently associative (e.g., *we* = ‘I and you/others’), similarly to the proper nouns, suggests that associative plurals are different than regular number marking. This also hints that the associative plural is not situated at the level of NumP, rather higher in the structure. Secondly, as Chacón (2011) points out for Bangla *-ra*, pronouns and proper nouns conjoin with *-ra*. Pronouns and proper nouns are considered D-elements (Longobardi 1994). Third, the universal determiners (e.g., *prottek* ‘each’ and *SOb* ‘all’) also co-occur with the NP-*ra*, likewise the numerals. However, they co-occur only when the determiners have incorporated an agentive<sup>9</sup> marker, as in (15a). In the fronted word order, NP-*ra* can co-occur with weak determiners (e.g., *some*, *few*), however, the determiners must be marked with human features (e.g., attaching to a human classifier etc.), as in (15b). The base order is for all determiners with the bare noun is Num/Q NP, e.g., *SOb chele* ‘all boy’, *prottek chele* ‘each boy’, *kichu chele* ‘few boys’, *kOyek-jon chele* ‘a few boys’ etc.

- (15) a. chatro-ra {prottek-e/SOb-ai} paS koreche [Universal quantifier]  
 student-RA {each-agt/ all-agt} pass did  
 ‘Each of the students passed (the test).’  
 ‘All of the students passed (the test).’
- b. chatro-ra {kOyek-jon / \*kichu} paS koreche [Weak quantifier]  
 student-RA few-Cl<sup>human</sup> / some pass did  
 ‘The students, few in number, passed (the test).’

Consider the morphological forms of the universal determiners in the following. The ‘standalone’ form, i.e., *SOb-ai* ‘all’, which also co-occurs with NP-*ra*, incorporates an agentive marker in Bangla.

- (16) {prottek-*e* / SOb-*ai*} / \*{prottek/SOb} paS koreche  
 each-agt/ all-agt each/all-agt pass did  
 ‘All passed (the test).’  
 ‘Each (of them) passed (the test).’

Similar phenomenon of changing morphological forms of the determiner due to syntactic movement is seen in Hebrew. The morphological form of the Hebrew universal determiner changes when it moves and incorporates an agreement clitic, as exemplified in (17a,b) (originally, due to Shlonsky 1991 for Hebrew, cf. Sportiche 1988 for French).

- (17) a. kol ha-yeladim halxu la-yam  
 ALL the-child.masc.pl went to-the-sea  
 ‘All the children went to the sea.’
- b. ha-yeladim (kol-am) halxu (kol-am) la-yam  
 the-child.masc.pl ALL.3.masc.pl went ALL.3.masc.pl to-the-sea  
 ‘The children all went to the sea.’ (Spector 2009: 521, ex (2))

I suggest similar movement for Bangla. Bhattacharya *et al.* (2006) suggests that a DP is projected with universal/strong quantifiers, rather than a NumP. Thus, *SOb* ‘all’ and *prottek* ‘each’ are situated higher than a DP and select the DP as a complement. The DP moves to a functional projects for incorporating the agreement clitic, similarly to Hebrew. Eventually, it moves to the Spec, *-ra*P. Note that the co-occurrence of the NP-*ra* with the numeral classifiers and weak determiners follows a pattern. In both cases, the determiners are compatible only when they are marked with human properties. For example, the human classifier *-jon* is mandatory with the numerals and determiners

<sup>9</sup> *-e* is debated in Bangla linguistic literature. Thompson (2010: 110) considers this a marker of human properties, whereas it is homophonous to the locative case marker. It is usually found in the subject position of action verbs.

when they co-occur with NP-*ra*. I suggest that weak determiners are adjoined structures, similar to what has been reported for Mandarin *men* with numeral classifier constructions (Jiang 2012). The numeral and the determiners provide additional information about the associative plural marked nominals. The matching of the human properties is a prerequisite for external merge.

Bangla *-ra* has been argued to be a plural classifier, similarly to *-gulo* (Dayal to appear). *-gulo* itself has been analyzed as an exclusive plural classifier (Dayal 2012, to appear) or an exclusive plural marker (Biswas 2012). Nonetheless, regardless of the category of *-gulo*, there is evidence that *-gulo* and *-ra* are categorically different. Crosslinguistically, associative plurals are distinct from regular number marking. In several languages, the associative plural co-occurs with the regular plural and the associative plural precedes the regular plural in such cases (see Corbett & Mithun 1996, Vassilieva 2005 for details). As mentioned earlier, usually the associative plurals pluralize the pronouns and proper nouns, obtaining an associative reading and optionally a plural/sum reading, as observed in Li (1999) for Mandarin, whereas, the regular plural always results in a sum reading. The same is the case for Bangla *-ra* and *-gulo*. Moreover, NP-*gulo* is always interpreted as definite, whereas, NP-*ra* can have both definite and indefinite readings. Structural asymmetry between *-ra* and *-gulo* arises in the nominal ellipsis and gapping constructions. This also provides evidence for the distinction between *-ra* and *-gulo*. As originally observed in Dasgupta (2013), nominal ellipsis is allowed with *-gulo* but not with *-ra*, as in (18). I show that nominal gapping construction also follows the same pattern, as in (19).

- (18) a. amar bEg-gulo SOktopokto. amar-Δ-gulo chiMrbe na.  
I-gen bag-GULO sturdy. I-gen-GULO rip-fut neg  
'My bags are sturdy. My (bags) would not rip.'
- b. \*amar bondhu-ra SoltiSali. amar-Δ-ra harbe na  
I-gen friend-RA strong I-gen-RA defeat-fut neg  
Intended: 'My friends are strong. My (friends) would not be defeated.'
- (19) a. maya-r ganer boi-gulo ar robi-r kobita-r ~~boi-gulo~~ nao  
Maya-gen song-gen book-GULO and Robi-gen poem-gen book-GULO take  
'Take Maya's books of songs and Robi's books of poems.'
- b. \*maya-r kOlej-er bondhu-ra ar robi-r paRa-r ~~bondhu-ra~~ aSbe  
Maya-gen college-gen friend-RA and Robi-gen area-gen friend-RA come-fut  
'Maya's college friends and Robi's neighborhood friends will come.'

According to Yoshida (2012), the ellipsis in nominal gapping constructions targets a segment of the category (e.g., NP, NumP, or any functional projection in DP) to which the remnant phrase adjoins. Thus, in the case of *-gulo*, the NP moves to the Spec, DP and then the NP gets elided, whereas, the whole DP moves to Spec, *-raP* in the case of *-ra*. The NP is deleted in case of *-gulo* whereas, the DP is deleted in case of *-ra*. The ellipsis precludes when the elided element is the DP. Thus, this is evidence that *-ra* attaches to a DP.

#### 4.2. Generic interpretations of the associative plurals

Recall that bare nouns (without the associative plural) are preferred as arguments to both types of generic predicates in Bangla, Japanese and Mandarin Chinese. Additionally, all three associative plural marked noun phrases can be arguments to characterizing predicates, but not all can be arguments to kind predicates. Only Bangla *-ra*-marked noun is compatible with a kind predicate, Mandarin NP-*men* is incompatible with kind predicates, whereas, in Japanese, only modified nouns can appear as subjects to kind predicates. Since kind terms denote 'well-defined' kinds or species, modified nouns cannot be considered kind terms semantically. Crosslinguistic comparison on the basis of compatibility with different types of generic predicates shows that Bangla NP-*ra* is similar to definite generics in Romance languages; whereas, NP-*men/-tachi* are similar to Romance indefinite generics (cf. Longobardi 2001). However, the data from these languages showed that the kind terms do not

necessarily associate with definiteness. It is the function of *-ra* that allows Bangla NP-*ra* to be subjects to kind predicates, whereas, the meaning of *-tachi* and *men* preclude it. An NP-*ra* always denotes in the taxonomic domain, which allows it to be subjects to both kind and characterizing predicates, although the latter does not require it to be a taxonomic one for achieving generic reading.

The fact that Bangla *-ra* is mandatory with capacity nouns in characterizing predicates is unusual as capacity nouns typically appear bare in languages. This is in parallel with the distribution of bare common nouns in Bangla, as shown in Dayal (to appear). *-ra* is mandatory with bare common nouns in Bangla episodic sentences, similarly to the mandatory appearance of *-ra* in capacity nouns with characterizing predicates. If Bangla *-ra* is an identity function on kind terms, as proposed in Dayal (to appear), the optional appearance of *-ra* with kind predicates is explained. But, the questions why *-ra* is mandatory only with capacity nouns with characterizing predicates, whereas optional otherwise, still require further probing. In the following paragraphs, first I summarize the basic assumptions, and then I present an outline of the proposal.

According to Longobardi (2001), the generic reading in the kind predicates is obtained through due to the referential nature of the kind terms, whereas, it is the object-level quantification in characterizing predicates that induces the generic reading. The kind terms are referential, i.e., they are like proper names, whereas, the subjects of characterizing predicates (i.e., the object denoting generics) are quantificational arguments. Either a generic or an existential reading is obtained for the latter in the presence of an external operator, (e.g., GEN for generic or Ex for existential). For example, Italian definite generics denotes in the kind domain, whereas, the indefinite generics denotes in the object - domain. Thus, in the presence of an external operator GEN, only the latter can be arguments to characterizing predicates. They cannot be arguments to kind predicates, as the generic interpretation needs to be obtained from the denotation of the noun. If the bare common noun denotes both in the taxonomic domain and the individual domain (Dayal 2004), they can be compatible in both types of generic predicates.

The capacity nouns in Bangla, I suggest, are atomic individuals. Capacity nouns are similar to the bare singulars in Czech, Russian and Hindi in its distribution. They have uniqueness presupposition. They are incompatible with quantificational adverbs like *everywhere* (e.g., *there is dog everywhere*, ex. from Dayal 2004). The singular kinds are infelicitous with the quantificational adverbs because it implies that a single entity is simultaneously everywhere. Similar evidence comes from Bangla bare capacity nouns in the subject position, as given below.

- (20) #Daktar carpaSe ghoraphera korche  
 Doctor around roam doing  
 Intended meaning: 'Doctors are roaming around.'

A bare capacity noun denoting an atomic individual is incompatible in characterizing predicates, as the predicate expresses generalizations about a group. Hence, *-ra* maps to a predicate of plural individuals which can be quantified by the GEN operator to achieve a generic interpretation.

## 5. Conclusions

I revisited data concerning the associative plurals in Bangla, Mandarin and Japanese, and added new observations to the existing ones. Careful consideration of the data led me to conclude that, contrary to previous reports, the associative plurals in these three languages are similar structurally. I argued that associative plurals are situated higher than the DPs. This proposal highlights some previously unnoticed parallels in the interpretation of the associative plurals. Furthermore, I added new data with respect to generic predicates and capacity nouns. I discussed the semantic functions of Bangla *-ra* and provided a novel line of analysis. I leave the details of the semantic analysis for future work.

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