

Plurals of Plural Pronouns in Turkish

Sinn und Bedeutung 31 (SuB 31)

Yağmur Sağ¹ and Ryan Walter Smith²

1-4 September 2026, Nantes Université

¹Swarthmore College, ²Rutgers University

What is this talk about?

Turkish allows plural pronouns to bear additional plural morphology:

- (1) **biz-ler, siz-ler**
 1.PL-PL, 2.PL-PL
 ‘we, you’

- (2) Siz(-ler) bu ülke-nin geleceği-siniz.
 you-PL this country-GEN future-2PL
 To young people: ‘You are the future of this country.’

Question:

- ★ What is the nature of these pluralized forms of already plural pronouns?

Our Proposal, in a nutshell

Core claim

- ★ Such apparent pluralized plural pronouns are **pronoun-noun constructions** (PNCs) headed by a null noun with a contextually supplied interpretation.

(3) **biz kadın-lar**
we woman-PL
'we women'

pronoun-noun constructions

(4) **biz kadın-ler**
we woman-PL
'we (women)'

pluralized pronoun constructions

Our Proposal, in a nutshell

We offer a unified kind-based analysis of pluralized plural pronouns and PNCs, on which:

- ★ person features compose with a noun to denote a kind
- ★ the property correlate of the kind is presupposed to possess the individual encoded in the person feature.

Roadmap

1. The puzzle of pluralized plural pronouns
2. The core analysis
3. Comparing plain and pluralized pronouns
4. Further discussion
 - ★ Why no plural of *on/ar* 'they'
 - ★ Why no plurals of English plural pronouns
5. Concluding remarks

The Puzzle of Pluralized Plural Pronouns

Pluralized Plural Pronouns & Social Identity

Pluralized plural pronouns, like PNCs, occur in contexts that invoke a salient social group, typically:

- ▶ in statements highlighting a shared identity as in (5) & (6)¹

(5) **Siz-ler/ Siz genç-ler** bu ülke-nin geleceği-siniz.
you-PL you young-PL this country-GEN future-2PL
'You young people are the future of this country.'

(6) **Biz-ler/ Biz kadın-lar** hak-lar-ımız-a her zaman
we-PL we woman-PL rightPL-1PLPOSS-DAT every time
sahip çık-acağ-ız.
stand.up-FUT-1PL
'We women will stand up for our rights all the time.'

¹Göksel and Kerslake (2005); cf. Ketrez (2007); Paparounas and Akkuş (2024)

Pluralized Plural Pronouns & Social Identity

Pluralized plural pronouns, like PNCs, occur in contexts that invoke a salient social group, typically:

- ▶ in generic contexts, as in (7)

(7) **Biz-ler/ Biz Türk-ler** sigara içme-yi çok sever-iz.
we-PL we Turk-PL cigarette smoking-ACC very like-AOR-1PL
'We Turks like to smoke a lot.'

- ★ The plain pronouns (*biz*, *siz*) are also felicitous in these contexts, but the pluralized forms emphasize a stronger sense of collective identity.

Ordinary Episodic Contexts

In episodic contexts where the referents do not constitute a salient social group or identity, pluralized plural pronouns become infelicitous or at best awkward, unlike the plain pronoun:

Ali: Kim geldi? 'Who came?'

- (8) Cem: Biz(#-ler) gel-di-k.
we-PL come.PST-1PL
'We came.'

Ali (later to the others in the house):

- (9) Siz(#-ler) bulaşıkları yıkarken, Cem, Sevgi ve Melek
you-PL dishes while.washing Cem Sevgi and Melek
gel-di.
come-PST
'While you were washing the dishes, Cem, Sevgi, and Melek came.'

The Puzzle of Pluralized Plural Pronouns

Key question

- ★ Why is plural morphology on already plural pronouns licensed in generic collective reference but becomes infelicitous in ordinary episodic contexts?

Analysis

Pluralized Plural Pronouns as PNCs

Pluralized plural pronouns are underlyingly identical to PNCs.

- ▶ Building on Alexiadou et al. (2024), both constructions are plural kind-denoting expressions derived via a variant of the kind-forming operator $\cap$, adapted from Chierchia (1998), that carries person features.²

Core Claim

- ★ PNCs are DPs involving an NP denoting a sum-closed property, with person features ($\pi_{1/2}$) introducing the presuppositional content of the $\cap$ operator.

²See also Jenks and Konate (2022), cf. Paparounas and Akkuş (2024)

Background: Plural Kinds

Chierchia (1998):

- ★ English bare plurals are kind terms and **plural kind reference** is derived via $\cap$.³

For any P and w , where P_w is the extension of P in w

$$\cap P = \begin{cases} \lambda w. \iota x. P_w(x), & \text{if } \lambda w. \iota x. P_w(x) \text{ is in } K, \text{ the set of kinds} \\ \text{undefined,} & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

$\rightsquigarrow$ a function from properties to functions from worlds w to the maximal entity satisfying that property in w

For example:

- (10) Dinosaurs are extinct.
 $\rightsquigarrow \text{extinct}(\lambda w. \iota x. * \text{dinosaur}_w(x))$

³The kind literature builds on Carlson (1977).

Background: Plural Kinds

- ★ The reverse of $\cap$ is $\cup$.
- ★ takes the extension of the kind in w and returns the set of singular and plural entities that instantiate the kind in w .

Let k be a kind. Then for any world w , where k_w is the plural individual that comprises all of the atomic members of the kind

$$\cup k = \begin{cases} \lambda x. x \leq k_w, & \text{if } k_w \text{ is defined} \\ \lambda x. \text{FALSE}, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Background: Plural Kinds

In generic predication, plural kinds type-shift via $^{\cup}$ and the Gen operator quantifies over worlds w and the set of instantiations of the kind in w .

- (11) Birds fly.
 $\leadsto \text{Gen } x, w [^{\cup} birds_w(x)] [fly_w(x)]$

Background: Plural Kinds

In episodic predication, Derived Kind Predication (DKP) occurs:

- ▶ DKP provides sort adjustment by introducing a local $\exists$ -quantification over the instantiations of the kind provided by U in a given w .

Derived Kind Predication

If P applies to objects and k denotes a kind, then

$$P(k) = \exists x [^U k(x) \wedge P(x)]$$

(12) Dogs are barking.

$$\rightsquigarrow \exists x [^U \text{dogs}_w(x) \wedge \text{bark}_w(x)]$$

- ▶ DKP results in a narrow scope construal:

(13) Dogs aren't barking today.

$$\rightsquigarrow \neg \exists x [^U \text{dogs}_w(x) \wedge \text{bark}_w(x)]$$

Background: Plural Kinds in Turkish

Sağ (2019, 2022):

- ▶ Turkish bare plurals are kind terms derived via $\cap$, as in English, allowing direct kind predication and generic predication.

(14) **Dinozor-lar** 250 milyon yıl önce evrimleşmiştir.

‘Dinosaurs evolved 250 million years ago.’

(15) **Ayı-lar** genelde saldırgan olur.

‘Bears are generally aggressive.’

Background: Plural Kinds in Turkish

- ▶ In episodic contexts, Turkish bare plurals are ambiguous in yielding definite and DKP-based existential readings.
- ▶ Definiteness is due to covert IOTA type-shifting, as Turkish lacks an overt definite article.

- (16) **Köpek-ler** bugün çok havladı.
DKP: 'Dogs barked a lot today.'
IOTA: 'The dogs barked a lot today.'

The Indexed $\cap$ Operator

Proposal

★ $\cap$ has an indexed version that carries person features.

- ▶ The indexed $\cap$ takes a (plural) predicate P and an individual and returns a kind, iff the individual is in P .⁴

$$(17) \quad \llbracket \cap \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda P. \lambda y. \lambda w. \iota x. P_w(x), \text{ defined iff } P_w(y)$$

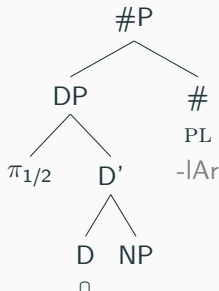
- ▶ This parallels the distinction between plain (weak) and indexed (strong) definite determiners (Schwarz, 2009),⁵ but with the output of the function being a kind rather than an ordinary individual.

⁴Follows analyses of 1st/2nd person plural pronouns as pluralities including the speaker/addressee (e.g., Cooper, 1983; Schlenker, 2003).

⁵See also Elbourne (2008); Jenks (2018), *et seq.*

Number and Person Features

- ▶ Number features are introduced above DP in a dedicated # head, as in Sauerland (2003).
- ▶ Person features are introduced in the specifier of DP.



- ▶ PL (spelled out by -lAr) denotes an identity function on individuals, whether kind or object-level.⁶ $\leadsto$ PL: $\lambda x.x$
- ▶ First (π_1) and second-person (π_2) features are spelled out as **biz** and **siz** in the context of a D head introducing the kind-forming operator.

⁶cf. SG, which has an atomicity presupposition. See Sağ (2025) for Turkish; cf. Scontras (2022)

PNCs vs. Pluralized Plural Pronouns

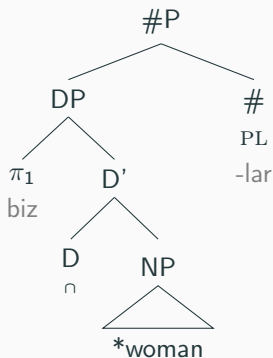
PNCs and pluralized plural pronouns differ only in the nature of the NP component of the syntax.

- ▶ In PNCs, the NP is headed by an overt noun, e.g. *kadın* ‘woman.’
- ▶ In pluralized pronouns, the NP is a null noun whose interpretation (i.e. a sum-closed P) is supplied by context.

On this analysis, *bizler* ‘we-PL’ is the null-NP counterpart of *biz kadınlar* ‘we women.’

Syntax and Semantics for PNCs

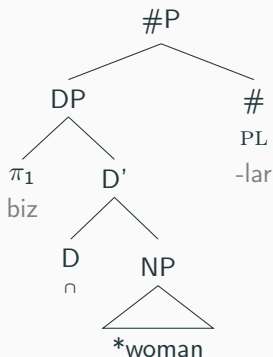
(18) *biz kadın-lar* 'we women'



$\llbracket (18) \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda w. \iota x. *woman_w(x)$
defined iff $*woman_w(speaker(c))$

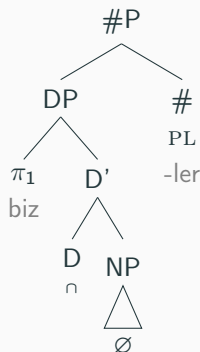
Syntax and Semantics for PNCs

(18) *biz kadın-lar* 'we women'



$\llbracket (18) \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda w. \iota x. *woman_w(x)$
 defined iff $*woman_w(speaker(c))$

(19) *biz-ler* 'we-PL'



$\llbracket (19) \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda w. \iota x. *P_w(x)$
 defined iff $*P_w(speaker(c))$

Pluralized Plural Pronouns and PNCs as Kind Terms

Analyzing PNCs and pluralized pronouns as kind terms aligns with their use in generic or collective identity statements.

- ▶ PNCs can directly be involved in kind predication as in:

(20) **Siz-ler/ Siz genç-ler** bu ülkenin geleceğisiniz.
 ‘You young people are the future of this country.’
 $\leadsto$ *future.of.this.country*($\lambda w. \iota x. *young_person_w(x)$),
 defined iff $*young_person_w(addresssee(c))$

Pluralized Plural Pronouns and PNCs as Kind Terms

PNCs can directly be involved in generic predication as in:

- (21) **Biz-ler**/ **Biz Türk-ler** sigara içmeyi çok severiz.
'We Turks like to smoke a lot.'
 $\leadsto \text{Gen } y, w [\cup^{\cap} \text{Turk}(y) \text{ in } w] [\text{like.smoking}(y) \text{ in } w],$
defined iff $*\text{Turk}_w(\text{speaker}(c))$

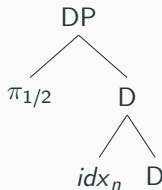
- Generic predication involves instantiation of the kind via the $\cup$ operator, which maps a kind to the set of entities instantiating it in a given world ($\cup: \lambda k. \lambda x. x \leq k_w$).

In rhetorical discourse, the speaker invokes a socially salient kind whose instances include the conversational participants to emphasize a sense of belonging.

On Plain vs. Pluralized Pronouns

Plain Plural Pronouns

- ▶ In contradistinction to pluralized plural pronouns, the plain plural pronouns **biz** and **siz** are ordinary DPs.
- ▶ Person features remain in the specifier of DP.

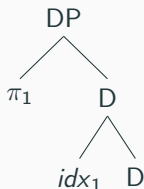


D is similar to $\cap$ in taking the person feature as an argument and presupposing something about its referent.

- ▶ D differs from $\cap$ by virtue of presupposing that this referent be part of another individual, contributed by an anaphoric index.⁷

⁷Building on similar proposals in Ahn (2022) and Jenks and Konate (2022), cf. Elbourne (2005, 2013).

(22) *biz* 'we'



(23) $\llbracket D \rrbracket^{c,g} = \lambda x. \lambda y. x$, defined iff $y \leq x$

- (24)
- a. $\llbracket biz \rrbracket^{c,g} = g(1)$, defined iff $speaker(c) \leq g(1)$
 - b. $\llbracket siz \rrbracket^{c,g} = g(1)$, defined iff $addressee(c) \leq g(1)$

Plain vs. Pluralized Pronouns

It is now incumbent on us to explain the difference in distribution between plain and pluralized plural pronouns.

- ▶ In particular, why are pluralized plural pronouns infelicitous in episodic contexts?

(25) **Context:** Cem, Sevgi, and Melek are ringing the bell.

Ali: Kim geldi? 'Who came?.'

Cem: Biz(**#-ler**) gel-di-k. 'We came.'

- ▶ Since kind terms can be instantiated, and instantiation is available to pluralized plural pronouns, we might expect them to be felicitous in episodic contexts if their referents belong to a shared kind (e.g. if Cem, Sevgi, and Melek are all children, students, etc.).

Solution: *Minimize Restrictors!*

To rule out episodic uses of pluralized pronouns, we appeal to Schlenker's (2019) *Minimize Restrictors!* (MR!) constraint.

Minimize Restrictors! (MR!)

A definite description *the A B* is deviant if A is redundant, i.e. if

1. *the B* is grammatical and has the same denotation as *the A B*, and
2. A does not serve another purpose.

- ▶ MR! accounts for the oddness of the adjective in *John's (#blond) father has arrived* in out-of-the-blue contexts.

Pluralized plural pronouns are disfavored in immediate situation contexts because they have an additional property restrictor, while the plain pronoun denotes the same individual without this restrictor.

- ▶ Since such contexts do not require the pragmatic function of highlighting a socially salient group identity, the simpler form (*biz*, *siz*) is preferred.
- ▶ In generic or collective-identity contexts, pluralized pronouns are acceptable because they serve exactly this pragmatic function of highlighting group identity.

Pluralized Pronouns in Episodic Contexts

If group identity is made salient in the context, MR! will no longer apply, because the restriction provided by the null noun serves a pragmatic purpose.

- ▶ We thus predict that pluralized pronouns and PNCs can be used episodically in the right context.
- ▶ One way to capture this on our analysis is to have the kind denoted by the #P undergo **Derived Kind Predication**, which introduces local $\exists$ quantification over instances of the kind.⁸

⁸Carlson (1977); Chierchia (1998) e.g., *dogs are barking outside*.

Pluralized Pronouns in Episodic Contexts

★ This prediction is borne out!

- For example, (26) can mean that some, but not all, earthquake victims received food aid.

(26) Ünlü bir iş adamı biz-ler-e/ biz
famous one business man we-PL-DAT we
depremzede-ler-e yiyecek yardımında bulun-du.
earthquake.victim-PL-DAT food aid provide--PST
'A famous businessman provided food aid to us earthquake victims.'

Pluralized Pronouns in Episodic Contexts

- ▶ Furthermore, if negated, (26) yields a narrow-scope reading where no earthquake victim received aid, unlike regular indefinites.
- ▶ This is readily explained by local $\exists$ -closure introduced by Derived Kind Predication.⁹

(27) Ünlü bir iş adamı **bizlere/ biz depremzedelere** yiyecek yardımında bulunmadı.

‘A famous businessman didn’t provide food aid to us earthquake victims.’

↪ There is a famous businessman who didn’t provide food aid to earthquake victims.’

Not: Some earthquake victims didn’t receive food aid from a famous businessman, while some others did.

⁹Alternatively, this could be explained by appeal to the homogeneity and non-maximality effects observed with regular plural definites and bare plurals; see Brisson (2003); Križ and Spector (2021), a.o.

Discussion

On *onlar* 'they'

In Turkish, the 3rd person plural pronoun is realized as *onlar*, which can be decomposed as *o* 'he/she/it' and the plural marker *-lar*.

- *Note: O* is also the distal demonstrative in Turkish.

- (28) *O/ Onlar* bulaşıkları yıkarken, Cem gel-di.
(s)he they dishes while.washing Cem come-PST
'While (s)he was/they were washing the dishes, Cem came.'
o and onlar as plain pronouns
- (29) *O kedi(-ler)-i* sahiplen-di-k.
that cat-PL-ACC adopt-PST-1PL
'We adopted that cat/those cats.'
o as a demonstrative

On *onlar* 'they'

Question: We don't observe an additional plural marking on **onlar** 'they' when used in PNCs. Why?

- (30) **Onlar(*-lar)/ O** politikacı-lar her zaman yalan söyle-r-ler.
 they-PL that politician-PL every time lie-AOR-3PL
 'They/the politicians always lie.'
 ~ The speaker isn't a politician and wishes to express distance from politicians.¹⁰

Proposal: *Onlar* is underlyingly a demonstrative phrase that already carries a contextually supplied null plural NP (o ‘that’ + NP + *-lar*), thus the presence of the plural marker *-lar* (cf. Elbourne 2005; Ahn 2022).

- (31) Pronominal *on-lar* as a demonstrative phrase
 [#P [DP π_3 [D [NP_C]] [#_{PL} -lar]]

¹⁰See Alexiadou et al. (2024) for a discussion of the distancing effect.

On *onlar* ‘they’

- ▶ This explains why in PNCs the pronoun *o* is not in the plural form unlike the cases with *biz* and *siz*, since they derive from the same structure:

(32) [O/ ***Onlar**] politikacı-lar her zaman yalan söyle-r-ler.
that they politician-PL every time lie-AOR-3PL
‘The politicians always lie.’ **onlar in PNCs**

(33) *on-lar* in PNCs
[#P [DP π_3 [D $\cap$ [NP *politician]] [# PL -lar]]

- ▶ Due to this shared structure of *onlar*, we also do *not* expect any competition between the plain and the PNC uses of the pronoun, resulting in a single form for both.

Question: Why are pluralized plural pronouns unavailable in other languages:

- ▶ Why is it that Turkish allows for *bizler*, but a pluralized pronoun version of *we*, **we's*, is impossible in English?

Proposal: This follows from independent constraints on the realization of plural morphology in Turkish and English.

Turkish vs. English

- ▶ The plural -s and its allomorphs can only suffix to nominals; for example, it cannot surface on adjectives within a noun phrase.

(34) I bought these white shirts, and these *reds/red ones.

- ▶ The Turkish -lar can surface as a suffix on different lexical categories:

(35) a. bun-lar

this-PL

demonstratives

b. kırmızı-lar, genç-ler

red-PL, young-PL

adjectives

Whatever is responsible for this distributional variation between English and Turkish explains the difference between English and Turkish with respect to the availability of pluralized plural pronouns.

Conclusion

We analyzed pluralized plural pronouns in Turkish, i.e., *bizler* and *sizler*, offering a unified kind-based analysis with Pronoun Noun Constructions, such as *biz kadınlar* ‘we women’.

- ▶ Pluralized pronouns are PNCs with a contextually supplied null noun.
- ▶ Like PNCs, they denote **plural kinds** whose property correlate includes the speaker/addressee.
- ▶ Their restricted distribution follows from a competition with plain plural pronouns via *Minimize Restrictors!*: Pluralized pronouns are licensed when they serve a pragmatic function, especially highlighting collective/social identity.

We showed that pronouns can participate in kind formation.

- ▶ Replicating the distinction between plain (weak) and indexed (strong) definite determiners, the intensional counterpart of the definite determiner—the $\cap$ operator —likewise comes in plain and indexed variants, the latter incorporating person features that give rise to its presuppositional nature.

Further research can investigate the crosslinguistic implications of the proposed analysis.

Thank you!

Special thanks to Muhammed İleri for encouraging us to explore the parallel nature of pluralized pronouns and PNCs. We are also grateful to the Rutgers Linguistics community for their insightful comments and feedback.

References

- Ahn, D. (2022). Indirectly direct: An account of demonstratives and pronouns. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 45, 1345–1393.
- Alexiadou, A., J. Hein, I. Ilić, and U. Sauerland (2024). The third person is present: An argument from determiners in generic statements. In *Proceedings of the 54th Annual Meeting of the North East Linguistic Society (NELS 54)*, pp. 1–14.
- Brisson, C. (2003). Plurals, 'all', and the nonuniformity of collective predication. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 26(2), 129–184.
- Carlson, G. N. (1977). *Reference to Kinds in English*. Ph. D. thesis, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

- Chierchia, G. (1998). Reference to Kinds across Language. *Natural Language Semantics* 6(4), 339–405.
- Cooper, R. (1983). *Quantification and Syntactic Theory*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Elbourne, P. (2005). *Situations and Individuals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Elbourne, P. (2008). Demonstratives as individual concepts. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 31, 409–466.
- Elbourne, P. (2013). *Definite Descriptions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Göksel, A. and C. Kerslake (2005). *Turkish: A Comprehensive Grammar*. London NY: Routledge.
- Jenks, P. (2018). Articulated definiteness without articles. *Linguistic Inquiry* 49(3), 501–536.

- Jenks, P. and R. Konate (2022). Indexed definiteness. *Glossa: A Journal of General Linguistics* 7(1).
- Ketrez, F. N. (2007). -lAr-marked nominals and three types of plurality in turkish. In *Proceedings of the 39th Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS 39)*, pp. 176–192.
- Križ, M. and B. Spector (2021). Interpreting plural predication: homogeneity and non-maximality. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 44(5), 1131–1178.
- Paparounas, L. and F. Akkuş (2024). Anaphora and agreement in the turkish dp. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 42, 633–700.
- Sağ, Y. (2025). On the (non)optionality of the turkish classifier *tane*. *Natural Language & Linguistic Theory* 43, 907–964.

- Sauerland, U. (2003). A new semantics for number. In *Proceedings of the 13th Semantics and Linguistic Theory Conference (SALT 13)*, pp. 258–275.
- Sağ, Y. (2019). *The Semantics of Number Marking: Reference to Kinds, Counting, and Optional Classifiers*. Ph. D. thesis, Rutgers University.
- Sağ, Y. (2022). Bare singulars and singularity in turkish. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 45(4), 741–793.
- Schlenker, P. (2003). Indexicality, logophoricity, and plural pronouns. In *Research in Afroasiatic Grammar II*, pp. 409–428.
- Schlenker, P. (2019). Minimize restrictors! (Notes on definite descriptions, condition C and epithets). In *Proceedings of Sinn und Bedeutung*, Volume 23, pp. 385–416.
- Schwarz, F. (2009). *Two Types of Definites in Natural Language*. Ph. D. thesis, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Scontras, G. (2022). On the semantics of number morphology.
Linguistics and Philosophy 45(5), 1165–1196.