

Some Collective Plural Suffixes in the Iranian Languages

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Summary: In the New Iranian languages a plural noun is differentiated from a singular noun by adding a plural suffix. In some Iranian dialects, the collective plural suffixes *-gal*, *-yal*, *-al*, *-gar* and *-yar* are used. These suffixes were reported in several studies, and were considered as grammaticalization of the collective words. This paper tries to show the development and distribution of the collective plural suffixes in the Iranian languages.

1 Introduction

The Iranian languages are classified into two, Western and Eastern, groups; furthermore, they have dialect branches. The prior group is subdivided into the northern, central and southern branches with their own linguistic characteristics. Also, the Iranian languages are historically classified into three different eras: Old Iranian (OIr), Middle Iranian (MI) and New Iranian (NI).

In the New Iranian languages, plural number is marked by different suffixes. Despite the suffixes *-ān* (as a remnant of OIr genitive **-ānām*) and *-hā* (originally from Middle Persian *-ihā*), some other plural suffixes like *-gal*, *-yal*, *-al*, *-gar*, *-yar*, *-gār*, *-yār*, *-xal*, *-xēl*, *-čāl*, *-yā* (or *-iyā*) have been used in the New Iranian languages which have no trace of such grammatical use in the old and middle Iranian languages.

In many of the studies of the New Iranian languages, the plural suffix *-gal* and other similar forms have been reported which here I refer to reports from some of the source studies. JUSTI¹, DAMES², and DARMESTETER³ referred to the plural suffix *-gal* in Kurdish and Baluchi. ZHUKOVSKI⁴ recorded the plural suffixes *-gal*, *-yal*, *-al* and *-gar* in the Shirāzi (or Fārs province) dialects and *gal-ā*⁵ in Zefre'i. According to HUART⁶, *-gar* is the plural suffix in Sivandi. MORGAN⁷ referred to the plural suffix *-gal* in some southern

¹ JUSTI 1880, pp. 123–124.

² DAMES 1881, p. 14.

³ DARMESTETER 1883, vol. 2, p. 91.

⁴ ZHUKOVSKI 1888, Section 3, p. 213.

⁵ *-gal* plus plural suffix *-ā* (short form of *-hā*).

⁶ HUART 1893, p. 250.

⁷ DE MORGAN 1904, vol. 5, pp. 60–61.

Kurdish dialects. MANN⁸ referred to the plural suffixes *-gal*, *-yal*, and *-al* in the southern Kurdish and Lur-e Bozorg (greater Lurs) dialects. HADANK⁹ referred to the plural suffixes *-gar*, *-yar*, *-gal* and *-yal* in Sivandi. LORIMER¹⁰ noted the plural suffixes *-gal*, *-gel*, *-yel* in Bakhtyāri.

2 Etymology

Historically, MORGENSTIERNE regarded the Avestan *gaēθā-* “possessions” as the root of Pashtu *yēlē* “flocks”.¹¹ SCHWARTZ referred to **garna-* developed from Indo-European **ger-* “to gather” as the origin of *gala*.¹² But EILERS claimed that **garna-* should have remained ? as *garr-*, not *gala*, in the later Iranian languages. EILERS considered the New Persian word *gala* “herd” and the plural suffixes *-gal* and *-gar* as remnants of **gēḍak* (compared to Afgan *yēlē*¹³ “herd” and *gētī* “world” < **gaiθā*¹⁴) by the change of *ḍ* to *l*.¹⁵ The Middle Persian collective word *gāl* “the gang, the peasants laboring on the estates of kings, magnates, etc” was considered by NYBERG¹⁶ to be from **garda-*. HENNING explained that the Old Persian *garda-* (from OIr **grda-* “house”, with a meaning extension to “possessions”) is a collective word.¹⁷ Later, MOLCHANOVA referred to *garda-* “house” as the origin of suffix *-gar* in Sivandi.¹⁸ In the coming sections, more attention is paid to development of the collective plural suffixes in the New Iranian languages.

3 Plural suffixes

Following HENNING’s assumption, the collective word *gala* (or *gale*) could be developed from *garda-* by change of the *rd* cluster to *l* which is regular among Iranian dialects. In some dialects it lost the final vowel and appeared as *gal* “group, crowd”, which is similar to the Middle Persian *gāl*.¹⁹

⁸ MANN 1904, p. 1181.

⁹ MANN/HADANK 1926, p. 226.

¹⁰ LORIMER 1930, p. 352.

¹¹ MORGENSTIERNE 1927, see „yele (flocks)”.

¹² SCHWARTZ 1970, footnote No. 14, p. 292.

¹³ MORGENSTIERNE 2003, see „yele (flocks)”.

¹⁴ BARTHOLOMAE 1904, pp. 476–479.

¹⁵ EILERS 1974, p. 490.

¹⁶ NYBERG 1974, vol. 2, see „gāl”.

¹⁷ In: GERSHEVITCH 1985, pp. 158–159.

¹⁸ MOLCHANOVA 2004, p.30.

¹⁹ NYBERG 1974, vol. 2, see „gāl”.

Like *gala*, the word *xēl* or *xayl* “group, tribe, clan” is collective in meaning and has been grammaticalized to show the plural number. In the Persian dictionaries, the word *xayl* has been introduced as a word borrowed from Arabic with the meaning “a herd of horses”. MORGENSTIERNE claimed that Pashtu *xēl* is from the Arabic-Persian *xayl*.²⁰ It is also linguistically supposable that *xēl* “tribe, family members” could have been developed from Iranian *x^vēš* “family, family members” by *š > l*.²¹ MURTONEN²² following GUIDI²³ noted that *xayl* “herd of horses” (also extended to horsemen) in Arabic²⁴ may be borrowed from another language because it is not found in other Semitic languages. Like the suffix *-gal*, the collective plural suffix *-xēl* has been used in the New Eastern and Western Iranian languages (see below). However, I leave the discussion of *xēl* as borrowed from the Arabic language.

The plural suffix *-gal* is used typically in the (South-) West Iranian dialects.²⁵ Also, it has been used in some East Iranian languages such as Shoghni.²⁶ Among the North-West Iranian dialects, the northern Baluchi and the southern Kurdish dialects use the plural suffix *-gal*. Some central dialects as Āshtiāni²⁷, Āmorei²⁸ and Zefre’i also use *-gal*. Other forms of suffix *-gal* are *-yal*, *-yel*, *-al* and *-el*. The plural suffix *-gal* changed as to *-gal > -yal > -al*. The sound changes which developed the Old Persian *garda-* to word *gal(a)* and further to suffixes *-yal* and *-al* are *g > y > -* and *rd > l*. The plural suffix *-gal* has not been used (or used rarely) in the northern dialects such as Kurmānji, Tāti, Tāleshi, Gilaki, Māzandarāni, Semnāni.

The plural suffixes *-xal* and *-xēl* (or *-xayl*) are used in a few of the Eastern and Western Iranian languages: in Sarikoli (as the eastern-most Iranian dialect) and Shoghni *-xēl* or *-xayl*;²⁹ in Sangsari, *-xal*.³⁰ The collective word *xēl* or *xayl* has been grammaticalized as *-xal* and *-xēl*.

In the South Iranian dialects, the cluster of consonants *rd* has changed in three ways: 1. *rd* to *l* (*rd > l*); 2. *rd* to *r* by deletion of *d* (*rd > r*); 3. *rd* to \emptyset or deletion of all *rd* cluster (*rd > -*). Deletion of *d* or *rd* occurred in some of Fārs dialects as well as many other Iranian dialects.³¹

²⁰ MORGENSTIERNE 1927, p. 96.

²¹ ASATRIAN/HAKOBIAN 2018.

²² MURTONEN 1986, Part 1, Section A, p. 70.

²³ FRAENKEL 1886, p. 239

²⁴ IBN MANZUR 1992/1412, vol. 4, see „al-xayl“.

²⁵ See WINDFUHR 1992, p. 29.

²⁶ EDELMAN/DODYKHUOEVA 2009, p. 793.

²⁷ YARSHATER 1985, p. 849.

²⁸ LECOQ 1985, p. 986.

²⁹ PAYNE 2009, p. 793.

³⁰ CHRISTENSEN 1915, p. 294.

³¹ WINDFUHR 1999, p. 368; ADIB-TUSI 1344, p. 151.

In Sivandi, the plural suffixes are *-gar* and *-yar* besides *-gal* and *-yal*. Like the plural suffix *-gal* which changed to *-yal* (*-gal* > *-yal*), the suffix *-gar* also changed to *-yar* (*-gar* > *-yar*), but *rd* has not changed to *l*. In Sivandi, the plural suffixes *-gar* and *-yar* have been developed from *garda-* by the sound changes *g* > *y* and *rd* > *r* (or the deletion of *d*).

Decreasing the *rd* cluster of *garda-* to *r* can result in lengthening of the preceding vowel.³² So, plural suffixes such as *-gār* and *-yār* are expectable. Plural suffixes *-gārān* and *-yārān* have been reported in some classical Persian texts.³³ I consider them to be *-gār-ān* and *-yār-ān*. In the Persian language and some other Iranian dialects, two plural suffixes may be added to a noun.³⁴ By this way, the suffixes *-gār* and *-yār* are the plural suffixes followed by another plural suffix *-ān*. The suffixes *-gār* and *-yār* are similar to the Sivandi suffixes *-gar* and *-yar* derived from *garda-*. So, we can suppose another pattern of the plural suffixes that *rd* has not changed to *l*, but it lost the consonant *d*.

In the northern Luri dialects, *-yā* (for the inanimate nouns) is a collective plural suffix.³⁵ In Lāri dialect, the collective plural suffix is *-iyā*.³⁶ It seems that this suffix extended to some of the northern Iranian dialects (see below). The suffixes *yā* and *iyā* are very similar to the Middle Persian plural suffix *-īhā* and the New Persian *hā* and appears to be developed by *h* > *y* (between the vowels). But, development of *-iyā* and *-yā* is contrary to *-īhā* and *-hā*. It is clear that *-īhā* changed to *-hā*, and further to *-ā*. In Persian and many of the Iranian dialects, the plural suffix *-hā* changed similarly by deletion of *h* and preserving the nucleus vowel *-ā* as the suffix, while as we see in the following paragraph some dialects developed the plural suffixes *-iyā* and *-yā* by keeping the consonant *y* and weakening of the vowel *ā*.

Some of the northern and central Iranian dialects use the collective plural suffixes developed in the southern dialects; for example, (direct case) plural suffix *-ehā* is used in Tāti dialect of Eshtehārd.³⁷ These northern or central dialects borrowed the plural suffix *-(i)yā* and developed it more: among the dialects of Tafresh, plural suffix *-iyā* changed to *-iye* (feminine) or *-iya* (masculine) in Vafsi and to *-īya* in Kahaki.³⁸ There is tendency to shorten and

³² See PAUL 1995, p. 168.

³³ SADEGHI/HAJI SEYYED AGHAEI 2011, pp. 64–65, regarded them as reading errors in the text.

³⁴ SADEGHI/HAJI SEYYED AGHAEI 2011, pp. 70–72.

³⁵ MACKINNON 2011.

³⁶ SKJAERVO 1989, pp. 364–366.

³⁷ YARSHATER 1969, p. 75.

³⁸ LECOQ 1989b, p. 314.

delete the ending vowel *ā* of the plural suffix *-(i)yā*; so that, it has changed further to Semnani (masculine) *-zy*³⁹ and Harzandi *-oy*⁴⁰. In Sorxei dialect (in Semnān province), the plural suffix *-iyā* has been preserved beside the plural demonstrative pronouns.⁴¹ Vowel *-i* preceding the suffix *-yā* might be a case marker which had lost its function somehow similar to the neutralization of the oblique plural suffix *-ān* and the suffix *-hā* added to the plural suffix *-gal* as *-gal-ān* in the Āštiyāni dialect⁴² and *gal-ā* in Zefre'ī (mentioned before). Other forms are *-hā-ān* and *-ān-ān* in Persian.⁴³ In a number of the Iranian languages, suffixes *-i* and *-e* are case markers.⁴⁴ The plural suffix *-ehā* in the Eshtehardi (Tāti) dialect seems to be composed of *-e* and *-hā* as the suffix *-e* is a case marker in this dialect. The plural suffix *-iyā* can be broken into *-i* and *-yā* which *-i* should have been a case marker fossilized in the plural suffix *-yā*. It sounds to me that the case markers *-i* and *-e* have not been distinguished as distinct affixes near the plural suffix *-yā* (or its other short forms), because some of the case markers in the Iranian languages have lost their case function when used as (or with) a plural suffix.

As mentioned before, some southern Iranian dialects delete the *rd* cluster which may result in lengthening of the preceding vowel. Then, a southern type of development from *garda-* to the plural suffix *-(i)yā* is probable. But, I leave it as a question if the plural suffix *-(i)yā* has been developed from *garda-* by change of the beginning *g* to *y* and deletion of the coda cluster *rd* (as *gard > ga[rd] > -yā*) ?

In sum, in Sivandi the sound *d* of *garda-* has been deleted and appeared as suffixes *-gar* and *-yar*. The plural suffixes *-gār* and *-yār* used in some classic Persian texts, and the suffixes *-gar* and *-yar* in Sivandi have been developed from *garda-*. This pattern has been developed as *garda- > -gār, -gar > -yār, -yar* (by *g > y* and *rd > r*).

MORGENSTIERNE described the suffixes *-gal* and *-xēl* as New Iranian suffixes developed from the collective words *gala* and *xēl*.⁴⁵ On the basis of what mentioned above, contrary to *-gal* and *-xēl*, other collective plural suffixes *-gar* and *-yar* lack new corresponding words.

As a conclusion, sound changes of the collective plural suffixes are presented in the following table:

³⁹ MORGENSTIERNE 1958, p. 162.

⁴⁰ LECOQ 1989a, p. 301.

⁴¹ FAKHRO/ESMAEILI 2010, p. 53.

⁴² YARSHATER 1985, p. 849.

⁴³ See SADEGHI/HAJI SEYYED AGHAEI 2011, pp. 70–72.

⁴⁴ See WINDFUHR 1992, p. 29.

⁴⁵ MORGENSTIERNE 1958, p. 162.

Table 1: the *gal*-type sound changes

<i>garda</i>	<i>g ></i>	<i>y ></i>	–
<i>rd > l</i>	<i>-gal</i>	<i>-yal</i>	<i>-al</i>
<i>rd > r</i>	<i>-gar, -gār</i>	<i>-yar, -yār</i>	
<i>rd > –</i>		<i>(-yā)?</i>	

The *gal*-type suffixes (*g > y > –* and *rd > l*) have been distributed largely among the West Iranian dialects (typically the South-West dialects) and a few of the East Iranian languages. The suffixes *-gar/-gār* and *-yar/-yār* are other types which developed in Sivandi and classic Persian dialects. As noted before, *-(i)yā* seems to be derived from *garda-* but it remains open to question, and for this purpose it is marked by a question sign.

There are some other plural suffixes similar to the suffixes *-gār* and *-yā*. One other plural suffix in the classical Persian texts is *-kār*.⁴⁶ It has been regarded by SADEGHI/AGHAEI as a written form of *-gār* due to the script characteristics of the classical Persian texts,⁴⁷ but a plural suffix like *-kā* (see below) shows that *-kār* is a different plural suffix. The plural suffix *-kā* has been used by Persian speakers in Tāybād, Torbat-e Heydariye and Birjand regions in Khorāsān for example *lab* (lip) ~ *lab-kā* (lips), *sine* (chest) ~ *sine-kā* (chest), *gam* (grief) ~ *gam-kā* (griefs)⁴⁸, and rarely in Sirjan in Kerman; Ex., *zen-kā* (women)⁴⁹. The single forms lack the suffix *-ak*, so it might be a simple plural suffix. However, this similarity does not prove anything. They are marked by a question mark in table (2) to show that it is not clear whether they are distinct plural suffixes or forms of other morphemes. In Nā'ini (as a central) dialect, a rare plural suffix has been *-čāl*.⁵⁰

In Koroshi dialect, the basic plural suffix is *-bar* (or *-bār*)⁵¹ developed from the collective word *bərr(a)* or *borr(a)* “herd, group, clan” which is found in many of New Iranian dialects.

All the suffixes mentioned till now can be summarized in the following table:

⁴⁶ SADEGHI/HAJI SEYYED AGHAEI, *ibidem*.

⁴⁷ SADEGHI/HAJI SEYYED AGHAEI, *ibidem*.

⁴⁸ GHAREMAN 1383, pp. 398 and 408; MAWDUDI/TAYMURI 1384, pp. 49 and 308.

⁴⁹ MOHSENI 1381, p. 111.

⁵⁰ GEIGER 1901, p. 390.

⁵¹ See WINDFUHR 1992, p. 29.

Table 2: dialects distribution⁵²

		<i>garda</i>			<i>xēl</i>	<i>borr(e)</i>	?	?	
		<i>r > l</i>	<i>rd > r</i>	<i>rd > -</i>					
West Iranian	Northern	S. Kurdish	<i>-gal, -yal, -al</i>						
		Sangsari				<i>-xal</i>			
		N. Baluchi	<i>-gal</i>						
	Central	Zefre'i	<i>-gal-ā</i>						
		Ashtiani	<i>-gal-ān</i>						
		Gazi	<i>-gal</i>						
		Na'ini							<i>-čāl</i>
	Transitional	Sivandi	<i>-gal, -yal</i>	<i>-gar, -yar</i>					
	Southern	N. Luri	<i>(-yā)?</i>						
		S. Luri	<i>-gal, -yal, -al</i>						
		Lāri	<i>(-iyā)?</i>						
		Koroshi					<i>-bar</i>		
P. D.							<i>(-kā)?</i>		
C. P.		<i>-gār, -yār</i>					<i>(-kār)?</i>		
East Iranian	Sarikoli				<i>-xēl</i>				
	Shoghni	<i>-gal</i>			<i>-xēl</i>				

This table shows the development and distribution of the collective plural suffixes in New Iranian dialects. The suffixes *-gal* and *-xal* or *-xēl* are not limited to the Eastern or Western dialects; though, suffix *-gal* is used typically in the Western Iranian dialects. Suffix *-xēl* shows a scattered distribution: *-xēl* in Sarikoli (the easternmost Iranian dialects) and Shoghni (one of the Pāmir dialects), *-xal* (or *-xali*) in Sangsari (in Semnān province). In south of Iran, there are dialects which developed *garda-* to the collective plural suffixes by the sound changes *rd > r* (or deletion of *d*) and probably deletion of the *rd* cluster (*rd > -*). The plural suffixes *-gar* and *-yar* in Sivandi dialect remained from *garda-* by the change *rd > r* (or *d > -*). Sivandi,

⁵² Abbreviations: N. (Northern), S. (Southern), P.D. (Persian dialects of Khorāsān and Kermān), C.P. (Classical Persian).

though, linguistically is a northern Iranian dialect; it is located in the southern regions of Iran and is affected by the South-West dialects. It seems that suffixes *-yā* in Lari and *-yā* in the northern Luri have been developed like *-gar/-gār* and *-yar/yār* by deletion of the *rd* cluster from *garda-* and lengthening of the preceding vowel.

Some instances supported the suffix *-(i)yā* as a form derived from *garda-* but it remained open to question. So, it is marked by a question sign. Another issue which remained unanswered is whether *-kār* and *-kā* are distinct plural suffixes developed like the suffixes *-gār* and *-yā*. If so, then can we regard the suffixes *-kār*, *-kā* and *-čāl* developed from one origin?

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