

Factors underlying the use and survival of NCs in an IE language

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Numerical Classifiers (NC) have been extensively researched since Greenberg (1972), assessing them as an areal feature of Asian languages, also found in some Caucasian, West African and American Indian languages (Dixon 1986, Bisang 1996, 1999, Seifart 2010, Gil 2013, Her 2017, Her et al 2022, etc.). Cane (2019), Cane & Hu (2020) have provided evidence for the presence of sortal NCs in Albanian, which is an IE language. Firstly, the research cited above, as well as Lehmann (2000) confirm that NCs are not typically seen in the IE languages. In WALS and Grambank, Albanian has been described as a non-NC language. Secondly, Gil (2005) provides evidence from surveying about 400 languages that languages having a distinct plural marking system are non-NC ones. However, Cane & Hu (2021) proves that Albanian has both, and this is not due to any language contact, as it happens with a few peripheral IE language in contact with NC-related Asian languages.

The lifestyle relating to many basic NCs has actually discontinued, and these appear only in the narratives referring to the past usage or in the old narratives. However, the corpus data show a vast range of NCs beyond the typical usage with quantification to utilitarian ends. There are also high levels of NCs used for unitary or sampling function as well as NCs that quantify and classify abstract nouns. For e.g.,

a) *një vorbull ere*
one NC swirl wind (one swirl of wind)

b) *një tis avulli*
one NC breeze steam (a (soft) breeze of steam / a wave of steam),

The Alb. NCs can also be used for sampling with derogative or positive nuances:

c) *Ai nuk ka dy fije mend*
He does not have NUM two NC thread mind/wisdom
(negative – he does not have the minimum threshold of wisdom)

d) *Ai ka një barrë mend*
He has NUM one NC horseload wisdom
(praising) He has a load of wisdom, common sense

The retention may be attributed to the long-time usage, the mental storage still present in the speakers, and the underlying cognitive construal patterns, which remain efficient to this date. The usage-based and cognitivist approaches (Langacker 1987, Bybee 2010, Diessel 2017, etc.) provide the framework that fits in with the earlier usage and the present retention of NCs. Closer examination reveals that there is no known language contact (Latin, Slav, Turkish) in the last 2500 years, nor the earlier Greek language contact, that may relate to the emergence of NCs in Albanian. Hence Proto-Albanian remains the only source. But, this raises an additional question regarding the NC dating, considering that they have been traced to the first centuries AD in Sinitic languages (Morev 2000: 81).

Keywords: numeral classifiers, IE languages, typology, usage-based, Albanian

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