

Dual or not? 1st person inclusive “dual” and typology

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Languages with dual number as one of their grammatical categories differ in the extent to which the dual pervades the language system. Sometimes it spreads over various word-classes, sometimes it is restricted to one word-class-with more than chance frequency this will be the personal pronoun. Within pronouns it may show up in all persons, or is (in a typologically constrained way) limited to only a subset of persons. Quite a number of languages have a dual (roughly defined as grammaticalized reference to semantic twoness) in the 1st person inclusive only. It has, however, been argued (see, e.g., Greenberg 1988) that 1st person inclusive duals which are not accompanied by any other dual in the pronominal system (and preferably not anywhere else in that language) are better not dealt with in terms of number but in terms of person: the dyad of the speaker and a single addressee is claimed to constitute a “basic” person despite their semantic duality and is treated on a par with the other (semantically singular) persons. Paradigms rearranged accordingly have an extra member in the category “person” but do away with the dual number. Data from Orokaiva, a non-Austronesian language of New Guinea (Healey, Isoroembo, & Chittleborough 1969: 63), illustrate this point:

	singular	dual	plural	basic	extended
1 st incl.	ungae	ungote	1 st +2 nd	ungae	ungote
excl.	na	dago	1 st	na	dago
2 nd	umo	ungo	2 nd	umo	ungo
3 rd	emo, etc.	enana	3 rd	emo,etc.	enana

Assuming that languages with dual number behave typologically different, at least in some parameters, from languages lacking such elaboration of their number system-and a brief look into the literature (e.g., Plank 1989, 1990) shows that this assumption is a sensible one-there should be a split between 1st-person-dual-inclusive-only languages and languages with duals in more persons (and/or other word-classes) in the relevant parameters. If the basic/extended analysis is correct we should expect 1st-person-dual-inclusive-only languages to behave like languages without dual. Among the relevant parameters are the pronominal dual’s fondness of SVO as opposed to SOV order and the increase in deictic complexity of demonstratives triggered by the presence of a dual only in pronouns, just to name two.

Whether 1st-person-dual-inclusive-only languages team up with languages lacking a dual or not will be assessed using our Dual Database. It contains information on every dual language we could get hold of (at present slightly more than 900). 173 well-documented languages (i.e., where the published sources answer most of the 154 items of our questionnaire) make up a genetically diversified sample but other bits of information on less exhaustively described languages are also stored. In addition there is a control sample of 107 languages without a dual.

References

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