

Lesson 4

Plural

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[Verb CP–S]

In this and subsequent Pattern models, we will assume that the Type-of-Sentence Word is present at the beginning of the model sentence and that the Evidence Word is at the end. With that assumption (and allowing for abbreviations) you will notice that this model is exactly the same as that in Lesson 2.

me–

Prefix (on verb): plural

To make a sentence plural in Láadan, only the verb is affected. To make a verb plural, put the prefix “me–” at the beginning of the word. Notice that the shape of the noun phrase doesn’t change in the plural.

Láadan insists that consonant sounds and vowel sounds occur in strict alternation. No two consonant sounds may occur together, and no two vowels may occur together (except for this special case: *within the same indivisible word unit*—for example, in the word *áath*—a vowel may be doubled *if* one or the other of them is high-toned). To accomplish this alternation, Láadan inserts an “h” to separate two vowels or an “e” to separate two consonants. So, if the verb being made plural begins with a vowel, we must insert an “h” between the final “e” of “me–” and the verb’s initial vowel.

There used to be a variant plural form which is now obsolete, though you may encounter it in older texts. When the verb being made plural began with a “d,” it could be pluralized using the variant plural prefix “n–.” This “n–” was known as a “syllabic n;” it was a syllable unto itself—like the last syllable of the English word “*button*.” As a syllable unto itself, no inserted “e” was necessary to separate it from the following “d.” Nevertheless, that gave rise to a “n-grade” plural prefix “ne–” that was sometimes used on verbs beginning with “d.” This caused a lot of confusion, and was finally deemed counterproductive in what was intended to be a global language. We mention these variant plural forms here only so you won’t be confused if you see them; we will be using “me–” exclusively in these lessons.

Pronouns

le

I (first person pronoun, singular)

lezh

we (first person pronoun, several: 2 to 5)

len

we (first person pronoun, many: more than 5)

Pronouns, as in English, fill the position of nouns and are treated, grammatically, like nouns—except that Láadan pronouns, unlike Láadan nouns, have plural forms. Unlike English pronouns that have only a singular and a plural form, each Láadan pronoun has three forms: a single form, a few-to-several (defined as 2 to 5) form, and a many (defined as more than 5) form. They’re all perfectly regular, so for pronouns introduced in future lessons, we’ll be given the single form and the plurals will be easy to work out.

New Evidence Word

wáa

Evidence Word: assumed true by speaker because speaker trusts source

In connected sentences uttered by the same speaker where the Evidence Word remains the same—“wa” (my perception) or “wáa” (trusted report)—from sentence to sentence, it may be omitted after the first sentence. Repetition of the same Evidence Word is permissible (for emphasis or clarity), but is not required.

Gender

-id

Suffix: male

-izh

Suffix: female

The male suffix, “-id,” defines the noun or pronoun to which it is applied as male. Similarly, the female suffix, “-izh,” defines the noun or pronoun to which it is applied as female. Without either of these suffixes, the noun or pronoun is gender-neutral. So, to specify “man” we would use “with” (person) and apply the male suffix, giving “withid.” And, to specify “woman” we would apply the female suffix, giving “withizh.”

Originally, in the mid-1980s when Suzette Haden Elgin began creating Láadan, she felt the need, as a reaction to a profoundly male-dominated language and culture, for Láadan to be female-default. That is, all nouns and pronouns for which gender was a consideration were deemed to be female unless the male suffix, “-id,” was applied (or context made it obvious that a male was being discussed). So, “with” could as easily be translated “woman” as “person,” and “man” would have to be “withid.” Since Suzette has died and a second generation is continuing the development of Láadan, we’ve added “-izh” (female suffix) and now consider nouns and pronouns non-gendered by default. The result is a more gender-balanced language.

Examples

Bíi hal le wa.

I work.

Bíi mehal lezh wa.

We (few) work.

Bíi mehal len wa.

We (many) work.

Note that there is only one plural form of the verb, used with both the “few/several” form and the “many” form of a pronoun.

Bíi hal withizh wáa.

The woman works (I’m reliably informed).

Bíi mehal withizh wáa.

The women work (I’m told).

Bíi áya withid wa.

The man is beautiful (my perception).

Bíi meháya withid wa.

The men are beautiful (my perception).

Note the “h” that has been inserted to separate the final “e” in “me-” from the initial “á” in “áya.” Also note that it wasn’t necessary when pluralizing “hal,” which begins with the consonant sound “h.”

Bíi meháya thom i hesh wa.

The pillow and the grass are beautiful.

Bíi mezháadin Ana i Bétheni wáa.

Anna and Bethany are menopauseing (I’m told).

Of course, with a compound Subject, the verb must be plural.

Bíi áya i thal with wa.

The person is beautiful and good (my perception).

Bíi meháya i methal with wa.

The people are beautiful and good (my perception).

Notice the compound verbs in the examples in the set above. When the sentence is plural, of course, both verbs have to be plural.

Vocabulary

dathim

to needlework

di

to say; to talk; to speak

do

to be strong

leyi

to be blue

liyen

to be green

lula

to be purple

míi

to be amazed

owa

to be warm

rul

cat

yod

to eat

The verb “**di**” (to say; to talk; to speak) is a very general word. It becomes much more specific when a Type-of-Sentence word is attached to it. So, adding the declarative Type-of-Sentence word, “**bíi**,” we arrive at “**dibíi**” (to state; to declare). When used as a noun, it would mean “**statement; declaration**.”

Exercises

Make the following sentences singular; translate into English before and after.

1 **Bíi** memíi thul wáa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

2 **Bíi** mezháadin with wáa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

3 **Bíi** meháya thili wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

4 **Bíi** meliyen thom wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

5 **Bíi** mehina lezhizh wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

6 **Bíi** medoth hena wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

In #2, the Subject, “**with**” is not marked as female, so it would be formally translated “**person/people**,” however, it’s generally women who menopause, so this would be correctly translated “**woman/women**.” It has been pointed out that trans-men might also experience menopause-like symptoms during their transition, though care is taken in the medical process to avoid or mitigate those symptoms. If we’re discussing a trans-man experiencing such symptoms, the form “**with**” might be translated “**man**” or “**person**”—or “**withid**” would be specifically “**man**.”

In #5, “**lezh**” is marked as female. We don’t have an easy way to render this in English; we’ll have to make do with “**we few women**.”

Make the following sentences plural; translate into English before and after.

7 Bii héeya mid wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

8 Bii wii mudahizh wáa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

9 Bii yod withid wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

10 Bii thal rana wáa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

11 Bii di le wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

12 Bii u áath wa.

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

Translate these into Láadan (all according to your own perception).

13 The boars are tired.

L: _____

14 The songs are good.

L: _____

15 Carol and Matthew needlework.

L: _____

16 We (many) speak.

L: _____

17 The stones are blue and purple.

L: _____

18 The mothers are menopausal.

L: _____

Answers

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|----------------------------|
| 1 | The parents are amazed.
Bíi míi thul wáa.
The parent is amazed. | 17 | Bíi meleyi i melula ud wa. |
| 2 | The women are menopauseing.
Bíi zháadin with wáa.
The woman is menopauseing. | 18 | Bíi mezháadin thulizh wa. |
| 3 | The fish are beautiful.
Bíi áya thili wa.
The fish is beautiful. | | |
| 4 | The pillows are green.
Bíi liyen thom wa.
The pillow is green. | | |
| 5 | We (few women) sleep.
Bíi ina lehizh wa.
I (female) sleep. | | |
| 6 | The siblings follow.
Bíi doth hena wa.
The sibling follows. | | |
| 7 | The animal is afraid.
Bíi mehéeya mid wa.
The animals are afraid. | | |
| 8 | The sow (female pig) is alive.
Bíi mewíi mudahizh wáa.
The sows are alive. | | |
| 9 | The man eats.
Bíi meyod withid wa.
The men eat. | | |
| 10 | The drink is good.
Bíi methal rana wáa.
The drinks are good. | | |
| 11 | I speak.
Bíi medi len (lezh) wa.
We-many (we-few) speak. | | |
| 12 | The door is open.
Bíi mehu áath wa.
The doors are open. | | |
| 13 | Bíi mehóoha mudahid wa. | | |
| 14 | Bíi methal lom wa. | | |
| 15 | Bíi medathim Hérel i Máthu wa. | | |
| 16 | Bíi medi len wa. | | |