



Article

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The category of number in Latin: meanings of the plural with verbal nouns

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Abstract: This paper deals with the category of number in Latin, specifically with the different meanings of the plural with verbal nouns. In the first section, I establish a reference framework on the concept of number, and in particular the so-called “number anomalies”. The second part of the paper addresses the functional complexity of the category of number itself, so it presents and exemplifies the four different meanings of plural forms with verbal nouns and explains them in light of the concepts of prototype and recategorization. The third section aims to identify the factors yielding a determined plural reading; in this way, I explain the connection between some meanings of the plural and the types of events that verbal nouns describe. Lastly, in the final section, I discuss the main results of this study.

Keywords: category of number; iterativity; plural; prototype; “sorts of” reading; verbal nouns

1 Introduction

Latin presents a number system based on the opposition singular *versus* plural, where singular expresses “one” and plural designates “more than one”. Aside from structuralist discussions about which one is the marked term,¹ Latin grammars tend to deal with the study of this category by listing so-called “number anomalies”, that is, instances where singular forms are used instead of plural forms, and vice versa (Bassols 1956: 24–28; Kühner and Stegmann 1971

1 Cf. e.g. Correa (1989) and Pérez (2007).

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[1914]: II, 67–89; Löfstedt 1956 [1928]: II, 12–65; Pinkster 2015: 35–37).² These anomalies include the collective singular, generic singular, poetic uses of singular and plural, and the rhetoric plural, among other uses.³ As expected, there are specific works that focus on these number anomalies with different perspectives and purposes (cf. e.g. Correa 1989; Sánchez 1977). However, the majority of these works also take into account the typology of nouns (collective nouns, mass nouns, abstract nouns, etc.) in order to explain some of the particular meanings that the opposition singular/plural assumes in Latin. This is how examples such as (1)–(3) are explained:

- (1) (Ov. *Met.* 8.526–527)
Alta iacet Calydon: lugent iuuenesque senesque,
***uulgi**sque proceresque gemunt...*
 ‘Lofty Calydon is brought low. Young men and old, chieftains and commons, lament and groan...’⁴

- (2) (Caes. *Gal.* 5.14.2)
*Interiores plerique **frumenta** non serunt, sed lacte et carne uiuunt*
pellibusque sunt uestiti
 ‘Of the inlanders most do not sow corn, but live on milk and flesh and clothe themselves in skins’

- (3) (Sen. *Oct.* 210–211)
deus Alcides possidet Heben
*nec Iunonis iam timet **iras***
 ‘Alcides as a god possesses Hebe and now no more fears Juno’s wrath’

Example (1) contains the collective noun *uulgi*, which does not have a plural form in Latin. The anomaly that this kind of noun represents for the number system can be understood if we look at its semantic properties: these nouns denote entities interpreted as a unit or a collective but with a plural content, so in terms of semantics they include the notions of plurality and singularity at the same time. In example (2), *frumentum* appears in the plural, although this is a mass noun; here, it could be interpreted as a noun denoting different types

² For questions relating to Agreement, cf. Pinkster (2015: 1243–1301).

³ Classifications of these anomalies are varied and may cover different uses (see the pages in the manuals cited above).

⁴ Translations have been taken from The Loeb Classical Library.

of the concept expressed by its singular (i.e. ‘different kinds of corn’), thus not referring to plurality in its strictest sense.⁵ A similar situation can be seen in (3), where the noun *iras* that in principle should not admit the plural form, since it refers to an abstract concept, denotes ‘the different acts in which that feeling can show up’; indeed, the manifestations of Juno’s anger are what intimidate Alcides in the text.⁶

The particular meanings that singular (1) and plural (2)–(3) forms take on in the quoted examples are related to the semantics of the nouns themselves.

Prototypical nouns, such as *hammer* or *table*, present the following features: (i) they have a great *temporal stability*, that is, their properties change very little over repeated perceptual scans; (ii) they are *multi-featured* bundles of experience; (iii) they are *concrete*, and made out of relatively durable materials; (iv) they tend to be spatially *compact* rather than scattered all over the perceptual space, and (v) they tend to be *countable*, in contrast to non-prototypical *mass* nouns (Givón 2001: 51).

The closer a noun can be to the semantic features that configure its class (noun category), the more it can be employed within the opposition singular/plural without reading problems or restrictions (Ramos 2009: 94). Thus, the behavior of number with the analyzed nouns (*uulgus*, *frumenta* and *iras*) is utterly justified, given that these are not prototypes within the noun category: they are not static, well-delimited, concrete, compact, and countable objects or things.

We can see, then, that some nouns deviate from the values of their prototype. In this paper, I will focus on verbal nouns, that is, nouns that derive morphologically from verbs (e.g. *sartio*, ‘the process of hoeing’ < *sario*, ‘to hoe’; *uastatio*, ‘the action of laying waste or ravaging (territory, etc.)’ < *uasto*, ‘to lay waste’). The particular status of this type of nouns is that they exhibit verbal characteristics

5 Given that, in this case, the count plural of the mass noun is semantically transparent, according to Acquaviva (2008), “it is not pluralization that makes these nouns count” (Acquaviva 2008: 44). For other questions related to lexical plurals, cf. the same work.

6 According to Marouzeau (1949), the plural of *irae* can be explained by the absence of the abstract in Latin: “Un autre moyen pour l’abstrait de passer à la catégorie du concret est de prendre la forme de pluriel, ce qui revient à remplacer l’énoncé d’une qualité par celui de ses manifestations : *irae* évoque *les mouvements* de la colère, *simultates des actes* d’hostilité...” (Marouzeau 1949: 113–114). Moreover, in relation to nouns such as *ira*, and following Kühner and Stegmann (1971 [1914]: I, 77), Spevak (2014) notes that “the abstract nouns expressing feelings can be found in the plural; but in such cases, they refer to various kinds or aspects that occur in different situations or repeatedly” (Spevak 2014: 22).

(basically, the capacity to denote events, with all the consequences this might entail).⁷

Given the above, verbal nouns are undoubtedly one of the most interesting and revealing subgroups of the grammatical category of nouns. Rosén (1981) for instance, amongst other scholars, shows ways in which the category of the plural combines with verbal nouns: “there are two differing phenomena that manifest themselves in the countability of a verbal noun: concretization on one hand, and on the other hand transformation of plural or repetitive action” (Rosén 1981: 29). Given their morphological derivation, it might be expected that plural verbal nouns should designate plurality of actions, that is, repetition or iterativity – one of the phenomena mentioned by Rosén (1981: 29–33). However, this is not always the case, as I will show in this paper.

The specific questions addressed in this article are as follows: what are the other meanings that the plural form can acquire with verbal nouns? How can we explain their variety of meanings? What is the relationship between these meanings and the type of events that verbal nouns express?

To answer these questions, I will examine verbal nouns ending in *-tio* (such as *certatio*, ‘struggling for superiority’, or *aedificatio*, ‘an act or process of building; a building or structure’) within a reference corpus that comprises the complete works of Plautus, the first and second books of Cicero’s *Philippicae*, books 1–4 of Livy’s *Ab urbe condita*, and Columella’s *De re rustica*. Nevertheless, in order to extend the results of this study, this corpus has been amplified through examples extracted from other works dating from the period under scrutiny (archaic and classical Latin).⁸

2 Meaning of the plural with verbal nouns

As mentioned before, the plural form with verbal nouns (also called “action nouns”) is associated with the repetition or iteration of the event denoted by the noun itself. This iterative reading of the plural has been clearly described by typological studies: “number is normally shown only when it can be understood

⁷ Of these consequences, I highlight the fact that these nouns can mirror the semantic structure of their corresponding base verbs (for example, through the use of subjective and objective genitives).

⁸ Specifically, the following list of authors and works are quoted in this article: Caesar (*De bello ciuili*), Cicero (*Epistulae ad Atticum*, *Epistulae ad familiares*, *Pro Milone* and *Tusculanae disputationes*), Seneca the Younger (*Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*), Petronius (*Satyrical*), Tacitus (*Annales*) and Suetonius (*De uita Caesarum*).

as signalling ‘occurrences’, or ‘cases’ of ‘verbing’” (Comrie and Thompson 2007 [1985]: 354).

In my corpus, a significant group of verbal nouns is interpreted in this way, as shown in the following examples:

(4) (Col. 3.21.5)

... *quae plerumque **populationibus** uolucrum pluuiisque aut uentis
laccessita dilabitur*

‘... [the early vintage], which, being assailed by the plunderings of birds and by rains or winds, usually comes to ruin’

(5) (Liv. 21.8.7)

*Nihil tumultuariae pugnae simile erat, quales in **oppugnationibus** urbium
per occasionem partis alterius conseri solent ...*

‘It was not at all like the mellays that commonly occur in sieges, where one side gets an opportunity ...’

In examples (4) and (5), the plural of *populationibus* and *oppugnationibus* refer, respectively, to repeated plundering by birds, rains, and winds, and the numerous occasions upon which cities are besieged. Thus, here plurality denotes repetition of the event and has a lexical aspectual function: it expresses iteration. It is worth noting that the circumstances and participants involved in these events are, in principle, the same in each instance or, at least, there are no key differences between the distinct occurrences of the event.

Nevertheless, for various languages, including Latin, the meaning addressed above is neither the only reading of the plural with verbal nouns nor the most frequently documented: plural forms can also take on references to different entities, that is, refer to more than one entity (which, in Rosén’s terms is called “concretization”).

In the cases of “concretization”, verbal nouns present the highest degree of nominality, mainly because they denote the result or effect of the event expressed by their corresponding base verbs (e.g. *aedificatio* meaning ‘a building, a structure’, derived from *aedifico*, ‘to build’). This is also true of nouns that refer to participants of the events: for example, an instrument (*munitio* as ‘a defence work’ or ‘a fortification’ from *munio*, ‘to provide [a place] with defensive works’), a location (*cenatio*, ‘dining room’ from *ceno*, ‘to have dinner [with place or host indicated]’) or any other similar content (*supplicatio* meaning

‘thanksgiving’, is a lexicalized noun deriving from *supplico*, ‘to make propitiatory offerings’).⁹

As one would expect, the meaning of the plural as a reference to different entities is also documented within my corpus. The examples (6)–(8) illustrate this meaning with result nouns:

- (6) (Cic. *Mil.* 53)
*Ante fundum Clodi quo in fundo propter insanas illas **substructiones** facile hominum mille uersabatur ualentium ...*
 ‘Was it in front of Clodius’s manor – a manor in which, thanks to those gigantic basements, a thousand able-bodied men were easily accommodated ...’
- (7) (Tac. *Ann.* 6.45)
*Milies sestertium in munificentia ea conlocatum, tanto acceptius in uulgum, quanto modicus priuatis **aedificationibus** ne publice quidem nisi duo opera struxit ...*
 ‘One hundred million sesterces were invested in this act of munificence, which came the more acceptably to the multitude that he was far from extravagant in building on his own behalf [lit.: private buildings]; whilst, even on the public account, the only two works erected were ...’
- (8) (Sen. *Ep.* 109.3)
*Praeter haec aliquas **cogitationes** suas exprimet: docebit, quae inuenerit*
 ‘Besides, he can develop some of his own ideas; he can impart what he has discovered’

On the one hand, in examples (6) and (7), *substructiones* and *aedificationibus* make reference to those objects (basements and buildings) that are created as a result of the actions described by their base verbs: *substruo* and *aedifico*, respectively. On the other hand, in (8) the noun *cogitationes*, ‘ideas’, is understood as an abstract product of the general event of thinking (cf. its base verb *cogito*, ‘to think’). This interpretation as a product – and not as an event noun – is reinforced by the adjective *aliquas*, ‘some’, which determines the noun. It is also unlikely that the action or, rather, actions of thinking can be literally ‘expressed’ (*exprimet*). The plurality of these verbal nouns simply denotes that the number of entities is more than one, regardless of whether they are concrete entities, as in (6) and (7), or abstract entities like in (8).

⁹ Indeed, the plural has been taken as a criterion to distinguish between result and event readings of verbal nouns (cf. particularly, Grimshaw 1990).

Examples (9) and (10) show that verbal nouns that denote a component of their base verbs (such as, for instance, a location or an instrument) contain the same plural reading:¹⁰

(9) (Petr. Sat. 77.4.3)

*Habet quattor **cenationes**, cubicula uiginti, porticus marmoratos duos, susum cellationem, cubiculum in quo ipse dormio ...*

‘It has four dining-rooms, twenty bedrooms, two marble colonnades, an upstairs dining-room, a bedroom where I sleep myself ...’

(10) (Liv. 1.33.4)

*nam et urbs tuta **munitioibus** praesidioque firmata ualido erat...*

‘for the city was protected by fortifications and was defended by a strong garrison...’

In phrase (9), *cenatio* refers to the place where the event described by its base verb (‘to have dinner’) takes place; its plural form expresses a number of real-world entities that are always more than just one; moreover, in this example, the number is specified by the quantifier *quattor*. Similarly, example (10) shows how the plural noun *munitioibus*, meaning ‘fortifications’, denotes the instrument of its base verb *munio*, that is, something with which someone fortifies a place. Here, again, this plural noun refers to the plurality of concrete entities.

Finally, according to example (11), the plural marker of *supplicationes*, ‘thanksgivings’, functions in a similar way: the plural noun is understood as ‘different ceremonies of thanksgiving’:

(11) (Tac. Ann. 14.59)

*Decretae eo nomine **supplicationes**, utque Sulla et Plautus senatu mouerentur*

‘On that ground, a national thanksgiving was voted, together with the expulsion of Sulla and Plautus from the senate’

In view of examples (6)–(11), the verbal nouns whose plural can refer to different entities denote either the result of the events described by their base verbs or a component or particular event related to the verbs in some way. Consequently, in

¹⁰ It is important to note that these components can not only be typical arguments (which are necessarily expressed at syntax level). Following the classification of arguments by Pustejovsky (1996 [1995]: 63–64), they can also be interpreted as *default arguments* (parameters that participate in the logical expressions but are not necessarily expressed syntactically) and *shadow arguments* (parameters that are semantically incorporated into the lexical item; they can only be expressed by operations of subtyping).

these examples, the nouns never adopt a reference to the event described by their base verbs in a strict sense.

In the corpus studied, however, there are some examples in which a plural verbal noun does not carry an iterative meaning nor refer to several entities. Instead, the noun is associated with other values. This is the case of example (12), where the plurality of *sationes* does not refer to repeated actions of sowing nor the cultivated lands (understood as a result of sowing):

(12) (Col. 3.13.5)

*Sed hae, quas rettulimus, uinearum **sationes** pro natura et benignitate cuiusque regionis aut usurpandae aut repudiandae sunt nobis*

‘But these methods of planting vineyards, as we have given them, are ours to employ or reject according to the nature and favourableness of each region’

The only way to correctly interpret (12) is by understanding the plural as referring to different ‘sorts of’ sowing (here reflected in the English version through ‘methods’); this interpretation becomes evident by the relative clause *quas rettulimus*, which makes clear that these types of sowing have been addressed by Columella in previous sections. In this example, we could say that the plural carries the meaning of ‘sorts of’ (sometimes ‘types of’ or ‘kinds of’).

In all of these cases, the plurality of verbal nouns makes reference mainly to the particular ways or manners in which a certain process can be carried out. A clear example can be seen in (13), with the same verbal noun *sationes*:

(13) (Col. 2.10.29)

*Viciae autem duae **sationes** sunt: prima, qua pabuli causa circa aequinoctium autumnale serimus septem modios eius in unum iugerum, secunda, qua sex modios mense Ianuario uel etiam serius iacimus semini progenerando*

‘Of vetch, however, there are two sowings: the first about the time of the autumnal equinox, for the purpose of forage, in which we sow seven modii to the iugerum; the second in the month of January or even later, when we scatter six modii for the production of seed’

This example clearly shows that the plural form of the noun *sationes*, determined by the numeral quantifier *duae*, once again refers to the two ways or methods of carrying out the event described by the verbal noun: the sowing. In fact, the noun is followed by an explanation of the characteristics that define both processes in terms of time, purpose, and quantity of grains. Thus, in comparison with the iterative reading of the plural, and even if the Object is the same in both types of sowings (cf. *uiciae*), the circumstances that surround the event are relatively different in each case.

In terms of prototypes, Corbett (2000) considers that “the likely interpretation of a number form depends in part on the position of the head noun in the Animacy hierarchy (speaker > addressee > 3rd person > kin > human > animate > inanimate)” (Corbett 2000: 86). According to this proposal, verbal nouns are at the bottom of this hierarchy (they are inanimate) and so are good candidates for recategorizing readings of the plural “since the ‘normal’ singular–plural opposition is typically not required” (Corbett 2000: 86). In principle, those nouns that refer specifically to events are not expected in the plural; nevertheless, as we have shown, they may not only occur in the plural but also designate different contents.

The functional complexity of the category of number in Latin does not end at this point. Exceptionally, in certain contexts, some verbal nouns in *-tio* intensify the event that they designate through the plural, such as, for instance, *palpationes* (14) and *expectationes* (15):

(14) (Pl. *Men.* 607)
Aufer hinc palpationes
 ‘None of your caresses!’

(15) (Cic. *Att.* 1.4.1)
Crebras expectationes nobis tui commoues
 ‘You keep on raising our hopes of seeing you’

In (14), *palpationes* is not limited to designating repeated actions of touching or caressing (an iterative aspectual reading), but seems to intensify the way in which these actions occur, thus granting, in this specific case, a value of reprimand.¹¹ Similarly, the plural form *expectationes* in (15) adds an intensification of the emotion (‘feeling of hope’) to its meaning, an interpretation that is reinforced by the adjective *crebras*. This value of intensification¹² has been recognized in several languages as a special use of the plural and can have different effects such as dissatisfaction, affectivity, politeness, etc. (Corbett 2000: 235–239). As Corbett (2000: 238) has noted, these effects are typically produced because the receiver usually knows (from the context or from his general knowledge) the real-world number of the referent. This way, there is a discrepancy between the sender’s presentation of the situation and the receiver’s knowledge.

¹¹ For verbal nouns in Early Latin, this pejorative connotation has been pointed out by Rosén (1981).

¹² “Intensificative usage comes under various names: it can be called ‘augmentative’ (as in Sten 1949), ‘emphatic’ (as in Löfstedt 1956 [1928], 36–38, who gives Latin examples), and ‘hyperbolic’” (Corbett 2000: 235).

In short, the plural forms of verbal nouns seem to have at least four meanings (or functions) in Latin: (i) reference to different entities (prototypical plural), (ii) repetition, (iii) reference to different sorts of the verbal noun, and (iv) intensification.

Given this variety of meanings, the question that arises now is what factors determine the particular reading awarded to the plural of a verbal noun? For the first plural reading the answer is easy: the prototypical plural is limited to verbal nouns that either denote the result or effect of the event described by their base verbs, that is, verbs with an effected or affected Object (*substructiones*, ‘basements’), or that refer to participants of the events (the location in *cenationes*, ‘dining rooms’) or lexicalized nouns (*supplicationes*, ‘different ceremonies of thanksgiving’). However, I would argue that value (4), seen in *palpationes*, ‘caresses’ in (14), should not be included in our description here, since this seems to be a marginal interpretation: in my corpus, only a very limited number of plural verbal nouns carry a value of intensification.¹³ Therefore, in the next section, I limit myself to comparing the factors yielding iterative readings, such as *populationibus*, ‘the reiterated plunderings’, in example (4), versus those yielding ‘sorts of’ or ‘type of’ interpretations, such as *sationes*, ‘ways of sowing’, in (13). As we shall see, in these two examples we are dealing with situations in which plural verbal nouns specifically describe the event designated by their base verbs.

3 Factors that determine how the plural is interpreted

To determine these factors, I will start with *satio*, a verbal noun whose plural form can either be interpreted according to the ‘sorts of’ reading (cf. example [13] examined above) or as an iteration, as shown in (16):

(16) (Col. 2.10.7)

*Sunt etiam, qui putent, in arvis hanc eandem uice stercoris fungi; quod sic ego interpretor, ut existimem non **sationibus** eius pinguere humum, sed ...*

‘There are people, too, who think that in cultivated land this same plant takes the place of manure – a belief which I take as meaning, not the ground is enriched by the sowing of it [lit.: the sowings of it], but ...’

¹³ From this perspective, intensification has a lower hierarchical status in relation to the other values and, to some extent, is subordinated to repetition.

In examples (13) and (16) *satio* is related to the same meaning as its base verb *sero*, ‘to sow’. Thus, the recategorization to one interpretation or another of its plural must not be down to the meaning of the verb, but to a series of compositional factors related to the specific noun meaning that is activated in a given discourse. The first point to consider, then, is which characteristics are associated with iterativity and then compare them with the two meanings of the plural verbal nouns, that is to say, iteration and the ‘sorts of’ value.

According to Comrie (1976), iterativity is “the repetition of a situation, the successive occurrence of several instances of the given situation” (Comrie 1976: 27). With this in mind, the iterative interpretation of *sationes* in (16) refers to a number of *individual and completed occurrences* of *sero* that take place at different times. That means that in order for an event to be followed by another equal one, this first event must end. Only an ended event may be repeated. As a result, we can verify that it is in such a context that the plural of *satio* designates different individual events.

The case of (13), where the plural noun *sationes* gets the ‘sorts of’ reading, can be interpreted in a different way. Here, this verbal noun makes reference to any event of sowing of vetch (i.e. just to the pure action). Under this type of reading, the noun behaves in a generic way, as in those situations that are referred to, for instance, by infinitives such as *errare humanum est*, where *errare* designates not a situation but the pure action of ‘erring’. In cases like this, the only possibility for expressing plurality would be to designate different acts of *errare*, that is to say, ‘ways of *errare*’. In the same way, *sationes uiciae* does not designate individual events, but different pure actions of *serere uiciam*; it denotes *generic or potential events* whose effective realizations are not relevant. Thus, it is not an “event” noun in a strict sense, but a noun naming the pure “action”.

To summarize, the difference between an iterative reading and a ‘sorts of’ reading is that the former requires a reference to a series of ended occurrences and the latter does not refer to any instance at all, but to a generic action. Such a distinction does not depend on the meaning of the verb; in fact, it is not even due to the context, although the linguistic conditions of the contexts of these two plurals can determine the change.

In the first type, the verbal noun *sationes* is temporarily anchored to the construction *pinguere humum*. This means that in (16) the sowings are located relative to the time expressed by *pinguere*; in fact, to the extent that the reiterated sowings lead to the ground being enriched, they are previous events. In this way, the iteration expressed by the plural is only possible if the verbal nouns refer to events anchored to a determined time somehow: only an event that happens, has happened or is supposed to happen may be repeated (i.e. have an iterative reading). In the second case (i.e. the ‘sorts of’ reading), the same noun *sationes*

functions as a topic of its sentence and, thus, is not located in a specific time; consequently, the effective realization of the different types of sowings is not at all guaranteed. It is important to note that even if *sationes* has an Object encoded in the genitive (cf. *uiciae*), this participant does not delimit the action of *serere*.

A consequence of these syntagmatic conditions is that, in principle, all verbal nouns must receive one interpretation or the other. The iterative reading will always be associated with a determined time because it refers to actual events, whereas the ‘sorts of’ reading will not, mainly because it does not refer to any specific instance of the event.

To support the idea that a relationship exists between a reference to individual instances of the events and iteration, on the one hand, and between a reference to generic events and a ‘sorts of’ reading, on the other, I offer below some examples of both.

Firstly, examples (17)–(19) are indicative of those cases in which only an iterative reading of the plural nouns is available. This way, according to our previous analysis, the events described by these nouns are supposed to be understood as individual instances of the same event:

- (17) (Cic. *Fam.* 13.8.2)
si ea praedia diuidentur quae ipse Caesar uendidit, quae tandem in eius uenditionibus esse poterit auctoritas?
 ‘If those very estates which Caesar himself has sold are dispersed, what possible right of property, I ask you, can his sales carry?’
- (18) (Suet. *Aug.* 54.1)
Interdum ob immodicas disceptantium altercationes e curia per iram se proripienti quidam ingesserunt ...
 ‘Several times when he was rushing from the House in anger at the excessive bickering of the disputants, some shouted after him ...’
- (19) (Caes. *Ciu.* 2.2.6)
crebrae etiam per Albicos eruptiones fiebant ex oppido ignesque aggeri et turribus inferebantur
 ‘Moreover, frequent sorties from the town were made by the Albici, and firebrands were flung upon the earthwork and the towers’

Indeed, the plural noun *uenditionibus* in (17) refers to different occurrences of the action of selling carried out by Caesar (cf. *eius*). This is the case because the previous phrase mentions that Caesar sold different estates (and dispersed, by the way), something that supposes more than one individual occurrence of this event. The nouns *altercationes* and *eruptiones* in (18) and (19) admit the same analysis:

e.g. in (19), the sorties from the town and the firebrands by the *Albici* happened several times, as *crebrae* specifies.

In addition, from the quoted examples we can confirm that, in a broad sense, the verbal nouns describe events that are carried out or repeated in the same way and by the same participants, as it is specified in the syntax (cf. *disceptantium*). The only change here is the time of the occurrence.

A final interesting example can be seen in (20), which illustrates those cases where the plural admits an iteration reading even though the verbal noun describes an event that has not actually happened. This reading is possible because the verbal noun appears in a general instruction:

- (20) (Col. 2.4.2)
Sed et compluribus iterationibus sic resoluatur ueruactum in puluerem ...
 ‘But fallow land should be so pulverized by much re-ploughing that ...’

In (20), the plural form *iterationibus* takes an iteration reading because it designates a series of actions of *iterare* that happen every time somebody wants to *resoluere ueruactum in puluere*. The situation in which it is included is an instruction; in this sense, the noun *iteratio* is inserted in a determined but virtual (not factual) time and space, since the instruction has not actually occurred but is only destined to be accomplished.

In contrast, the following passages exemplify plural forms with the ‘sorts of’ meaning:

- (21) (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.59)
Earum igitur perturbationum, quas exposui, uaria sunt curationes. Nam neque omnis aegritudo una ratione sedatur; alia est enim lugenti, alia miseranti aut inuidenti adhibenda medicina
 ‘The means then of attending to the disorders I have enumerated are varied. For not every distress is assuaged by one method; for there is one remedy to be applied to the mourner, another to the compassionate or envious’

- (22) (Col. 9.16.2)
Sed iam consummata disputatione de uillaticis pecudibus atque pastionibus, quae reliqua nobis rusticarum rerum pars superest ...
 ‘Having now finished the discussion of the animals kept at the farmhouse and their feeding, the part of husbandry which still remains to be treated ...’

In these examples, *curationes* (21) and *pastionibus* (22) are not participants of actual events, but the topic of their sentences. In both cases, *curationes* and

pastionibus are presented as the pure actions of *curare perturbationes* and *pasci uillaticos et pecudes*, respectively.

Plurality in cases like these can only express different plural actions and not repeated events. This means that they express different ways in which the actions can be carried out. In (21), specifically, the methods of attending (*curationes*) are said to be varied (*uaria*), because every distress or disorder requires a different one. Example (22) also admits the same interpretation, although due to space constraints the description of the methods of feeding is not quoted in here.

A similar example is *insitionum* in (23), where the noun appears as determiner of *tria genera*, already containing the sort reference:

(23) (Col. 5.11.1)

*Tria genera porro **insitionum** antiqui tradiderunt: unum, quo resecta et fissa arbor insertos surculos accipit. Alterum ...*

‘Further, the ancients have handed down to us three kinds of grafting; one in which the tree, which has been cut and cleft, receives the scions which have been cut; the second ...’

It is important to note that, in general, this interpretation of verbal nouns appears in contexts that contain instructions about some processes or events. Such instructions are widely documented within my corpus in Columella’s work.

After my commentary of examples (17)–(23), it should be noted that the plural verbal nouns discussed so far could, in principle, receive the other reading in precise syntagmatic conditions, even if this is not attested in my corpus. The conditions that must be met are: (i) they must be a nominal predicative of an event conceived as having an end point; or (ii) be a noun naming the “action”, that is, denoting a generic event.

All in all, an examination of the plural with verbal nouns and, specifically, with these event nouns, shows that in Latin this marker can carry two different meanings: iterative meaning and a ‘sorts of’ meaning. Under the first interpretation, the events described by verbal nouns are understood as a series of individual instances of the same event, while under the second, the verbal noun is not the head of an event expression, but simply the generic designation of this event.

4 Conclusions

The principal conclusions drawn by this study are as follows:

1. There are at least four types of interpretation for the category of number with verbal nouns: reference to different entities, iteration meaning, ‘sorts of’ meaning, and intensification.

2. The interpretation of the plural as referring to different entities is reserved for verbal nouns that denote the result or effect of the event expressed by the base verb or that assume the reference of an entity (an instrument, location, etc.) or of a particular event (e.g. a celebration) associated with this verb.
3. The other interpretations of plural forms, that is, the iteration meaning, ‘sorts of’ meaning, and intensification value are linked to verbal nouns referring to an event.
4. Two of the meanings attributed to the plural with verbal nouns can be explained through linguistic conditions: the iterative interpretation of the plural is connected to nouns describing specific events (anchored to a determined time somehow), while the ‘sorts of’ interpretation is related to nouns denoting generic events (not located in a specific time).
5. Finally, as a reflection, the analysis of the category of number with verbal nouns has proven that these nouns are far more complex in their behavior than expected, given the limitations of their own category.

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