The Usage of Singular Verbs for Inanimate Plural Subjects in Persian

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Introduction

Animacy is an "extra-linguistic conceptual property…that exists independently of its realization in any particular language". It can be defined "as a hierarchy whose main components, from highest to lowest degree of animacy, are: human > animal > inanimate" (Comrie 1989:185-86). Most languages have a tendency towards manifesting animacy, and different languages display finer or rougher distinctions[1]. This distinction in Persian is among other things marked by the usage of the singular verb for inanimate plural subjects; a feature that has not been greatly studied.

As far as subject-verb agreement is concerned, one can actually find a commonly motivated paradigm cutting across a large number of languages. One relatively common paradigm is that the verb agrees with noun phrases higher in the animacy hierarchy. Persian and Turkish[2] are two examples of this common plural agreement paradigm. Persian manifests animacy not only in subject-verb agreement but also in personal pronouns: *u* "he/she", *išān/ānhā* "they", for person vs. *in/ān* "this/that", *inhā/ānhā* "these/those" for non-person[3], in interrogative pronouns[4]: *ke/ki* "who"for person vs. *če/či* "what" for non-person, in plural suffixes: *–ān* for animates with some few exceptions, and *–hā* for both animate and inanimate substantives, and in certain adjective and adverb formations. Adjectives and adverbs that are formed by the suffix *–āne* are usually related to animates, for instance: *ʿāšeqāne* "tender, tenderly", *ʿāqelāne* "rational, rationally", *sexāvatmandāne* "generous, generously".

Aitchison (2001: 104) maintains that syntactic changes usually occur at the vulnerable points, namely at those points where there is a possibility to analyse the structure in more than one way, and where a new variant thus has a chance to creep into the language. Subject-verb agreement in Persian is a typical example of such a vulnerable point, as in some cases where Persian grammar suggests a singular verb, a plural verb can be used without causing a native speaker of Persian to experience it as ungrammatical. Moreover, there are many cases in which one deliberately violates this grammatical rule and lets a plural verb co-occur with an inanimate plural subject. There are not so many clear rules for where, when and how one can violate this grammatical rule. Most Persian grammars recommend singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects just as a preferable alternative, not as a strict rule.

Language changes are usually provoked by external social factors that take advantage of those splits and gaps that already exist in a certain language. This can naturally make way for new variants to enter the language, and ultimately lead to a language change. One of the major external factors that can accelerate a language change is language contact. Tajik is a clear example of this. The usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects has almost disappeared from Tajik under the strong influence of Russian (Kāboli 1374 [1996]:46).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the usage of the singular verb for inanimate plural subjects diachronically as well as synchronically in order to find out whether this feature is on its way out of Modern Persian or not. The focus of the present study is on Modern Persian, but it was found necessary to investigate the historical usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects in Middle Persian and Classical Persian as well. For this purpose the first fifty pages of four Middle Persian texts, and the first fifty pages of four texts from the early Classical period (the tenth and the eleventh century) have been investigated, and examples of sentences with inanimate plural subjects have been extracted.

The study of the usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects in written Modern Persian includes both fiction and non-fiction. The study of this feature in fiction includes twenty works from 1921-1997 divided into three different periods during which literary productivity was particularly high. Each period includes representatives of three generations of writers in Iran. All examples of inanimate plural subjects have been extracted from every tenth page of the first 150 pages of each work. The latest works by six writers have also been compared with one of their

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[1] See Dahl and Fraurud (1996:47-50, 56) for some concrete examples of the restrictions that the animacy hierarchy imposes on grammatical rules of certain languages.
[2] See Lewis, G. L. (1967:246).
[3] Note that *in/ān* and *inhā* can in informal conversations be used for referring to persons as well.
[4] The interrogative pronoun is a category within which most languages make a distinction between person and non-person.

earliest works, in order to find out whether there is a growing tendency towards letting the verb agree with the inanimate plural subject. The study of this feature in non-fiction includes one issue of four different newspapers and four issues of one and the same sports magazine. All examples of inanimate plural subjects have been extracted from these texts as well.

The material for the study of the usage of the singular verb for inanimate plural subjects in modern spoken Persian includes free conversations, a telephone conversation, films, and radio broadcasts. The material consists of six hours of recorded radio programs (news broadcasts and entertainment), four video films with a very high content of daily spoken language, a twenty minute long telephone conversation[5], and three hours of recorded free conversations. All the extracted examples are then classified within four different patterns.

The Singular verb for inanimate plural subjects as reflected in Persian grammars

Which of the following sentences are grammatically correct?

Ex. 1
dokkān-hā   *baste*   *bud.*
Shop-PL   close   be.PAST.3 SG

"The shops were closed."

Ex. 2
dokkān-hā   *baste*   *bud-and.*
Shop-PL   close   be.PAST-3PL

"The shops were closed."

A native speaker of Persian approves both of them as grammatically correct sentences, but semantically, he/she will experience them differently. In the first clause the subject is not an agent. In the first clause the narrator informs us about the shops being in the closed state. The meaning of the second clause, however, may shift depending on the context. In the second clause the shops may represent the shopkeepers, meaning "the shopkeepers had closed their shops". In this case, the subject is an agent. This, of course, does not mean that whenever a plural verb is used for an inanimate plural subject some kind of personification is involved.

In the famous Persian grammar, *Panj ostād*, it is maintained that using a singular verb and a singular pronoun for an inanimate plural subject is preferred. Only in cases where the inanimate plural subject is personified and likened to an animate subject should the verb be in plural form (Qarib., et al. 1350 [1971]: 115-16). Mashkur (2535 [1976/77]: 82) maintains that whenever the subject is inanimate and plural, the verb can either be in singular or in plural, but it is better to use a singular verb. Mo'in (1363 [1984/85]: 168-69) referring to some other grammars including *Panj ostād*, writes: "some people who have come in contact with foreign languages do not apply this rule consistently and let all verbs agree with the subjects". He then continues by claiming that most contemporary writers, with whom he agrees, let the verb agree with an inanimate plural subject only when it performs an act that only an animate subject is able to perform. Nātel Khānlari (1363: 52) does not mention personification. He just maintains that when the subject is animate and plural then the verb should be in plural form, and when the subject is singular then the verb should be in singular form.

In a grammar written for teaching at secondary schools in Iran, Solṭāni Gerd Farāmarzi (1998: 9) maintains that if the subject is a person or an animal, agreement in number is necessary. He notes that there are some exceptions to this general rule. One can, for instance, use either a singular or a plural verb for collective nouns and nouns preceded by the indefinite pronouns *haryek* "each", *hičyek* "none of", *harkodām* "each", and *hičkodām* "none of". He then asserts that if the

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[5] The conversation was carried on between a person in Tehran and a person in Stockholm. The examples are extracted only from the Tehran part of the conversation.

subject is a plant or a thing [inanimate], then subject-verb agreement in number is unnecessary, unless the subject acts as an animate. Then the subject-verb agreement in number is necessary.

Lazard (1992: 178-79) writes:

> 1) As a general rule, when the subject represents a plurality (noun in the plural, numeral, several coordinated nouns, etc.), the verb is placed in the plural or in the singular according as the subject designates persons or things. With persons, or more usually, animated beings having will or feeling, the verb is in the plural: Ex. ... *kârgarhâ kâr mikonand* "the workmen are working," ... *parandehâ parvâz kardand* "the birds took flight."
>
> On the contrary, with inanimate objects or things considered as inanimate, the verb is in the singular: Ex. ... *čerâqhâ (čerâqâ) xâmuš šod* "the lamps went out," ... *yek lahze sarhâ be taraf-e moštari-e mozâhem bar gašt...* "for an instant, heads [of persons present in the shop] turned toward the bothersome client."
>
> 2) However, when the subject designates things which are conceived as endowed with a certain activity, or such that there is cause to insist on their plurality and the individuality of each of them, the verb is in the plural: Ex. … *in harârathâ-ye moxtalef dar badan taqyirât-e mohemme tolid mikonand* ... "these different kinds of heat (lit., These different heats) produce important changes in the body," ... *in do kafš bâ-ham jur nistand* "these shoes don't match."

Lazard (1992: 180) also writes:

> With distributive expressions (*har kas (-i), har yeki* "each", etc. ...) the verb may be in the singular or in the plural: Ex. *har kodum-šun [-šan] ye [k] čizi goft* "each of them said something" (a different thing)

Rastorgueva (1964: 48) maintains that one type of violation of agreement in number occurs when:

> The subject is in the plural, the predicate, in the singular. This is possible in case a substantive designating an inanimate object or an animal is used as the subject: ru-ye miz ketab-o dæftærha hæst "on the table are books and notebooks"; bozha amæd "the goats came".

The use of singular verb for animals, as Rastorgueva writes, is highly unlikely. A singular verb can be used for animals in cases where a collective noun such as *galle* 'flock' is present: *galle-ye bozhā āmad* "the flock of the goats came".[6]

Boyle and Lambton respectively describe subject-verb agreement in Persian as follows:

> Subject and verb agree in person and number except in the following cases:
> When a plural subject relates to inanimate things it normally takes a singular verb […].
> Note: However, when the subject consists of things which are thought of as separate entities or it is desired to stress their plurality, a plural verb may be used. Ex.:
> *xoršīd o māh o tamām-e setāregānī ke dar āsmān mī bīnīm kore-hā-ye besyār bozorgand* The sun and moon and all the stars we see in the sky are very large globes (Boyle 1966: 57).
>
> A plural subject denoting irrational beings or inanimate objects takes a singular verb,...This distinction, however, is less carefully observed in Modern than in Classical Persian (Lambton1957: 13).

What Boyle and Lambton miss is that an inanimate plural subject may function or be comprehended as animate, and as such agree with the verb. The personification process is sometimes very complicated and difficult to understand. The sentence *Dokkān-hā baste budand* may lead us, like Lambton, to declare that the distinction between animate and inanimate plural

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[6] See Lazard (1992: 179)

subject is "less carefully observed in Modern than in Classical Persian". It must also be noted that the type of the text is of great importance for the occurrence of personification. The non-fiction nature of most of the prose texts written in Classical Persian with less space for personification can certainly explain parts of Lambton's observation.

Let us look at two more examples quoted by Kāboli (1374 [1996]:46). Which of the following sentences are grammatically correct?

Ex. 3
do   parvāz-e   irāneyr   be-ham   xōrd.
Two   flight-EZ̧   Iran Air   to-each other strike.PAST.3 SG

Ex. 4
do   parvāz-e   irāneyr   be-ham   xōrd-and.
Two   fligh   Iran Air   to-each other strike.PAST-3 PL

As is seen, the two sentences are identical except for the verb. A native speaker of Persian experiences both of them as grammatically correct, but the two sentences may convey two totally different messages through the shift from a singular verb to a plural one. The word *parvāz* comes to mean *flight* in the first sentence, and *airplane* in the second sentence. The first sentence then means: "Two of the Iran Air flights are cancelled'. The second sentence means: "Two of the Iran Air airplanes crashed with each other". The inanimate subject in the second sentence functions as an animate subject and demands a plural verb. Why? What are the criteria for personification?

Criteria for personification
As was mentioned earlier, the process of personification is a relatively complicated one. In order to recognize a personified inanimate subject, one may sometimes need to involve the whole text and its meaning. Still there are some clear criteria which seem to be common to all languages, even if they are not grammaticalized everywhere:

- When an inanimate subject performs an act and has an active role the subject is personified. The subjects of transitive verbs, functioning as agents, are therefore always personified[7]. This is a clear criterion for recognizing a personified subject, and as such is the reason behind the presence of a plural verb, as in:

  Ex. 5
  va   ba'd   az   mazāre'-i   [goẕašt-and]   ke   dārōnadār-e
  And   then   from farm.PL-INDEF   [pass.PAST-3 PL]   CL LINK   wealth-EZ̧

  kāl   va   reside-y-e   xōd   rā   [...]   zir-e   āftāb   pahn
  unripe   and   ripe-G-EZ̧   self   DO TOP   […]   under-EZ̧   sun   spread

  karde bud-and (Dāneshvar1: 35:1)
  do.PAST PERF-3 PL

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[7] Studying this feature in Turkish, Kirchner (2001: 217-218) maintains: "what actually triggers plural agreement" in an example like *"Ağaçlar yüzümüze konfeti atiylar... 'The trees are throwing confetti into our face'...* is the fact that the subject *ağaçlar* has the role of an agent. The question whether the subject is human or not is of secondary importance". He continues: "Agentivity helps to explain several restrictions on plural agreement which are hard to explain on the basis of the humanness-feature", for example plural agreement in passive sentences. As a matter of fact, Kirchner's agentivity explains a great number of plural agreements, but the question is whether agentivity can be defined independently of humanness-feature or personification at all. Dahl and Fraurud (1996: 58) write: "... some semantic roles crucially involve animacy in the sense that they can only meaningfully be attributed to animate entities. The clearest cases are Agent – which is often seen as the prototypical role of the grammatical subject (in particular, of transitive subjects)". There are actually cases of plural agreement in passive sentences that are triggered only by personification, not by agentivity. See Ex. 33.

"Then, they [passed by] farms that had spread out the whole of their unripe and ripe wealth [...] under the sun."

- Another factor that controls the process of personification is the verb itself. Verbs such as will, can, cry, die, scream, and laugh belong to the realm of the animates. When an inanimate subject performs an act that only an animate subject is able to perform, then we are dealing with personification:

Ex. 6

setāre-hā	*[...]*	*nāgahān*	*mi-mord-and* (Āl Aḥmad: 68: 3)
Star-PL	[...]	suddenly	IMP-die.PAST-3 PL

"The stars [...] died suddenly."

- The third factor that governs personification is simile. When an inanimate subject is likened to an animate creature, or when it is accompanied by adjectives that belong to the realm of animates, we are dealing with personification and a plural verb.

Ex. 7

kalam-āt digar	*haqiqi*	*na-bud-and,*	*faqaṭ*	*engār*	*meṣl-e*	*daste-i*
Word-PL anymore	real	NEG-be.PAST-3 PL	just	seem	like-EẒ	swarm-INDEF

magas	*[...]*	*bālā-y-e*	*sar-emān*	*parvāz*	*mi-kard-and* (Ravānipur: 35: 3)
fly	[...]	over-G-EẒ	head-PR SUFF.1 PL	flight	IMP-do.PAST-3 PL

"The words were not real anymore, they just seemed like a swarm of flies that flew over our heads."

- The fourth factor governing personification is the connection made between a series of inanimate subjects and the human beings behind them. In these cases the inanimate subject embodies human beings[8]. This includes cars, trains, shops, countries, sports teams, bodily organs, and so on. This explains the plural verb in:

Ex. 8

čand	*dokkān-e[9]*	*digar*	*ham*	*bāz*	*karde bud-and* (Golshiri2: 88:14)
Some	shop-EẒ	other	too	open	do.PAST PERF-3 PL

"Some other shopkeepers (lit. shops) had also opened."

In connection with this fourth factor, I have come across a very interesting sentence in Doulatābādi's book *Ruzgār-e separi šode-ye mardom-e sālxorde*:

Ex. 9

pas	*panjtir-hā-y-e*	*rusi-ye*	*čālang-hā*	*va*	*hājkalu-hā*	*če*
Then	pistol-PL-G-EẒ	russian-EẒ	čālang-PL	and	hājkalu-PL	what

šode-and?	*hame-šān*	*zang*	*zade-and?* (Dōlatābādi2: 58: 10)
become.PERF-3 PL?	All-PR SUFF.3PL	rusty	get.PERF-3 PL?

"What has then happened to *Čālang*s' and *Hājkalu*s' Russian pistols? Have they all rusted?"

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[8] Kirchner (ibid.) claims that "agentivity explains agreement in sentences with subjects such as 'planes' or 'ships' as well."

[9] Note the use of a singular noun after the indefinite pronoun *čand*.

In this sentence the author is not asking about the pistols as pistols, but about those who used to carry those pistols. He could have written: *pas čalang-hā va hājkalu-hā bā panjtir-hā-ye rusi-šān če šode-and? Hamešān zang zade-and?* "What has happened to *Čalang*s and *Hājkalu*s with their Russian pistols? Have they all rusted?"

These four criteria are relatively easy to recognize, however personification in Persian texts is not limited only to these criteria. It is sometimes necessary to involve the whole text in order to understand what the author of the text aims to convey. There is usually a kind of interplay between these four factors, but it is not always possible to take a sentence out of its context and try to identify the process of personification based on these factors. Sometimes one needs to find the reason behind the use of a plural verb for certain inanimate subjects such as stars and planets in Modern Persian within Iranian mythology. This will be discussed further in the section on Middle Persian.

Written language
Middle Persian

Middle Persian belongs to the south-western branch of the Middle Iranian languages which were in use from about the end of the Achaemenian dynasty in 331 BC until the beginning of the Islamic era in the seventh century AD. Writing in these languages continued until the tenth century, in the case of Khwārazmiān until the thirteenth century. Middle Persian was the official language of the Sasanians (226-651). The four Middle Persian works used in the present study are the followings:

1. *Kār-nāmak ī Artaxšēr ī Pāpakān*; a legendary book written at the end of the Sasanian era in the seventh century. The oldest preserved copies, however, must be from much later, as they display a very simple prose style and are very much influenced by New Persian.

2. *Pahlavi Rivāyat*; a kind of religious encyclopaedia from the eleventh century.

3. *Menōy ī xrat*; a book on Zoroastrian faith written sometime at the end of the Sasanian era in the seventh century.

4. *Bundahišn*; also a kind of religious encyclopaedia on creation according to Zoroastrian faith. The first version must have been written at the end of the Sasanian era. The last writer of this book is Farnbag, who was active in the tenth century.

All examples in the first fifty pages of these works have been extracted. This has resulted in 83 sentences, of which 43 sentences show agreement between the subject and the verb. They are then classified within four different patterns. The same classification has been applied to all examples extracted from other texts, as well as to examples extracted from the spoken material.

Pattern 1: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/singular verb (39 sentences)
Ex. 10

ud	*sē*	*zrēh*[10]	*ī*	*meh, ud*		*wīst*	*zrēh*	*ī*	*keh,*	*az-iš*	*būd.*		*dō*
And	three	sea	EZ	great, and		twenty	sea	EZ	small,	from-it	be-PAST.3 SG,		two

čašmag	*ī*	*zrēh*	*az-iš*	*ō*	*paydāgīh*	*mad* (*Bd*: VI, B.16)
fountain	EZ	sea	from-it	to	manifestation	come.PAST.3 SG

"And three great seas and twenty small seas arose therefrom; two fountains of the sea came into manifestation therefrom."

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[10] Note the use of singular nouns after cardinal numerals.

Ex. 11

zarduxšt	*az*	*ohrmazd*	*pursīd*	*kū*	*mihrdrōz*	*čand*	*ēwēnag*[11]
Zoroaster	from	Ohrmazd	ask.PAST.3 SG	that	covenant-breaking	how many	kind

ast
be.PRES.3SG (*PRDd I&II*: 6.1).

"Zoroaster asked Ohrmazd: 'How many kinds of covenant-breaking are there?'"

Pattern 2: Inanimate, personified plural subject/singular verb (1 sentence)
Ex. 12

mihr	*ud*	*māh*	*ī*	*tamīg,*	*ham-paymānagīh*	*abāg*	*rah*	*ī*	*xwaršēd*	*ud*
Sun	and	moon	EZ	dark,	contact	with	radiance	EZ	sun	and

māh	*rāy*[12],		*wināhgārīh*	*kardan*	*nē-tuwānist* (*Bd*: V, B.12)
moon	POST	POS.on-account -of	harm	do.INF	NEG-can.PAST.3 SG

"The dark Sun and Moon could-not perpetrate any-harm, on-account-of the contact with the radiance of the Sun and the Moon."

Pattern 3: Inanimate, personified plural subject/plural verb (19 sentences)
Ex. 13

awēšān	*abāxtar-ān,*	*čiyōn,*	*pad*	*ēn*	*ēwēnag,*	*andar*	*spihr*
These	planet-PL	as	in	this	manner	into	firmament

dwārist-hēnd,	*abāg*	*axtar-ān*		*ō*	*kōxšišn*	*ēstād-hēnd...* (*Bd*: V, A.3)
enter.PAST-3 PL,	with	constellation-PL		to	contest	stand.PAST-3 PL

"As, these Planets entered the Firmament, in this manner, they were engaged in contest with the Constellations."

Ex. 14

awēšān	*abāxtar-ān,*	*čand-išān,*		*tuwān,*	*az-iš*	*appar-ēnd,*
Those	planet-PL,	much-PR SUFF.3 PL		possible,	from-it	plunder.PRES-3 PL

ud	*pad*	*ōy*	*nērōg*	*ī*	*dēw-ān*	*ud*	*druz-hā*	*ud*	*wattar-ān*
and	to	it	strength	EZ	demon-PL	and	demoness-PL	and	bad-PL

dah-ēnd (*MX*: XII, 9-10)
give.PRES-3 PL

"Those planets plunder from it as much as is possible for them, and will give it for the strength of the demons, and demonesses and the bad."

Pattern 4: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/plural verb (24 sentences)
Ex. 15

čiyōn	*alburz*	*frāz*	*waxšīd,*	*harwisp*	*kōf*	*ō*	*rawišn*
As	Alborz	up	grow.PAST.3 SG	every	mountain	in	motion

ēstād-hēnd;	*čē,*	*hamāg*	*az*	*rēšag*	*ī*	*alburz*	*frāz*
stand.PAST-3 PL;	for,	all	from	roots	EZ	Alborz	up

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[11] Note the use of the singular noun after an indefinite pronoun.
[12] *Rā* or *rād* is a postposition meaning on behalf of, for the sake of, for, because of. See Nyberg, H. S. (1974), p. 164.

waxšīd-hēnd (*Bd*: VI, C.1)
grow.PAST-3 PL

"As Alborz grew up, all the mountains were in motion; for, they have all grown up from the roots of Alborz."

Ex. 16

ēg	*dānest*	*kū*	*ēn*	*kēš*	*ud*	*wurrōišn*	*ud*	*ĵud*	*dastwarīh*
Then	know.PAST.3 SG	that	this	religion	and	belief	and	different	custom

kē,	*pad*	*ēn*	*gēhān,*	*ēk*	*andar*	*did,*	*ēdōn*	*hambasān-hēnd,*
which	in	this	world,	one	among	another,	such	antagonist.be.PRES-3 PL

nē	*az*	*dahišn*	*ī*	*yazd*	*sazāg*	*būdan* (*MX*: I, 38)
NEG	from	creation	EZ	God	worthy	be.INF

"Then he knew that these religions, and beliefs, and different customs which, in this world, among one another, are such antagonists, are not worthy to be from the creation of God."

The predominance of inanimate subjects followed by a singular verb shows that already in Middle Persian texts, singular verbs were used for plural subjects that stood lower in the animacy hierarchy. The high number of sentences belonging to pattern 3, with personified inanimate plural subject and plural verb, shows that personification has been a current phenomenon. It occurs in all the four texts. The high number of sentences belonging to pattern 4, with non-personified inanimate plural subject and plural verb, demands some additional attention. As was mentioned earlier, in cases where there is a wish to emphasize plurality or individuals or individual characteristics, or in the presence of distributive pronouns such as *harkodām*, *haryek*, *hičkodām*, and so on, one can use a plural verb[13], but this alone can not explain the high number of sentences belonging to pattern 4.

As is observable, 18 sentences out of the 24 are from *Bundahišn*. *Bundahišn* "primordial creation" is a book on the creation from Zoroastrianism's dualist point of view, according to which everything in our universe is created either by *Ahurā Mazdā* or *Ahriman*. They are in constant war with each other. Already in the primordial creation, they were created in order to destroy each other:

> 13   Ôhr-mazd knew, through omniscience: "*The* Evil Spirit exists, *who* will-defeat and seize, *and* even intermingle, with envious-desire, *the* eminent supporters, with several eminent agents, to *the* end;" He created, spiritually, those creatures which were-requisite as those agents.
> 14   *For* three thousand years, *the* creatures remained in *the* spiritual-*state,* – that *is*, *they* were unthinking, unmoving and intangible.
> 15   *The* Evil-Spirit, on-account-of after-wit, was unaware of *the* existence of Ôhr-mazd;... 17 He, [then,] saw valour and fortitude, which *were* greater than *his*-own, returned to darkness, *and* miscreated many Dîvs, destroyers of *the* creatures, and rose for battle (*Bundahišn* 1956:7).

As is seen the creatures of the two sides have the predetermined task of fighting each other. They play an active role. This inherent personification causes the verb to be in the plural even in sentences where no direct personification of the inanimate subject is observable. From the same starting point, namely, the content, one can also explain the distribution of sentences in *Kār-nāmak ī Artaxšēr ī Pāpakān*. In the first fifty pages of this text, there is only one sentence in which the subject is plural and inanimate and the verb is in the plural. This is probably due to the fact that *Kār-nāmak ī Artaxšēr ī Pāpakān* is an epic work in which it is usually heroes that act and are in focus. Inanimate subject do not occur so often.

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[13] See page 4.

The main conclusion to be drawn from this section is that already in Middle Persian texts singular verbs were preferred for inanimate plural subjects, and plural verbs for personified inanimate plural subjects.

Classical Persian
Classical Persian refers to the written literary New Persian that emerged in the tenth century, about three hundred years after the Arab conquest, and continued down to the fifteenth century. It is written in Arabic script and includes many Arabic loanwords. For the study of the usage of the singular verb for inanimate plural subjects in Classical Persian, four texts from the tenth and the eleventh century have been chosen:

1. *Tarjome-ye tārix-e ṭabari* by Abu ʿAli Moḥammad ebn-e Moḥammad Balʿami. One of the oldest Early New Persian prose works from the tenth century, and a free translation of Ṭabari's world history from Arabic into Persian.

2. *Tārix-e Beyhaqi* by Abu al-Faẓl Moḥammad ebn-e Ḥoseyn Beyhaqi. A book on history from the eleventh century. It is a detailed description of the reign of Solṭān Masʿud between 1030 and 1041.

3. *Kašf al-Maḥjub* by Abu al-Ḥasan ʿAli ebn-e ʿOs̱mān Hujviri. A book from the eleventh century on the life and faith of Sufi mystics.

4. *Siāsatnāme* by Neẓām al-Molk. A book of fifty chapters from the eleventh century on the art of ruling.

All examples in the first fifty pages of these works have been extracted. This has resulted in 77 sentences, of which 7 sentences show agreement between the subject and the verb.

Pattern 1: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/singular verb (70 sentences)
Ex. 17
| *va* | *nāme-hā* | *ke* | *az* | *ġazneyn* | *reside bud* (*Tārix-e beyhaqi*: 6: 18) |
| And | letter-PL | that | from | Ġazneyn | come.PAST PERF.3 SG |

"And those letters that had come from Ġazneyn."

Ex. 18
| *va* | *nešān-e* | *in* | *ān* | *ast* | *ki* | *zar* | *o* | *sang* | *o* | *sim* | *o* | *kolux* |
| And | sign-EẒ | this | that | is | that | gold | and | stone | and | silver | and | clod |

| *ān*[14] | *be nazdik-e* | *man* | *yeksān* | *šod* (*Kašf al-maḥjub*: 39: 8) |
| this-PR.3 SG | before-EẒ | me | equally valuable | become.PAST.3 SG |

"And the sign of this is that gold, stone, silver and clod all became equally valuable before me."

Pattern 2: Inanimate, personified plural subject/singular verb (0 sentences)

Pattern 3: Inanimate, personified plural subject/plural verb (5 sentences)
Ex. 19

| *pas* | *dō* | *deraxt*[15] | *be-bud* | *bar sān-e* | *mardom* | *yeki* | *nar* |
| Then | two | tree | PREV-be.PAST.3 SG | like-EẒ | human being | one | male |

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[14] Note the use of the singular pronoun to refer to the non-personified inanimate plural subject.
[15] Note the use of singular nouns after cardinal numerals.

va	*yeki*	*māde*	*pas*	*išān*[16]	*ḥarekat*	*kard-and*	*va*	*az*	*išān*
and	one	female	then	they	move	do.PAST-3 PL	and	from	them

farzand-ān	*āmad-and* (*Tārix-e ṭabari*: 7: 2)
child-PL	come.PAST-3 PL

"And there were two trees like human beings, one male and one female; then they moved and children came to existence from them."

Ex. 20

va	*se*	*rustā*	*rā*	*banā*	*kard*	*va*	*ān*	*emruz*
And	three	village	DO TOP	build	do.PAST.3 SG	and	that	today

ābādān	*ast*	*va*	*be*	*divān-e*	*baġdād*
flourishing	be.PRES.3 SG	and	to	chancellery-EẒ	Baghdād

xarāj	*mi-dah-and*[17] (*Tārix-e ṭabari*: 45: 12).
tribute	IND-give.PRES-3 PL

"And he built three villages and they are flourishing today and pay tribute to Baghdād's chancellery."

Pattern 4: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/plural verb (2 sentences)
Ex. 21

va	*čun*	*ān*	*be-stad-and*	*be*	*tan*	*o*	*māl*	*ō*	*zan*
And	as	that	PREV-take.PRET-3 PL	for	life	and	fortune	and	wife

ō	*farzand*	*imen*	*bāš-and*	*va*	*asbāb*	*va*	*ẕiyā'-e*	*išān*
and	child	safe	be.PRES-3 PL	and	belonging.PL	and	land-EẒ	they

imen	*bāš-and* (*Siāsatnāme*: 35: 3)
safe	be.PRES-3 PL

"And as that was taken, their lives, fortune, wives and children, as well as their belongings and lands should be safe."

Comparing the results from Classical Persian with the results from Middle Persian, one finds that the number of sentences with a plural verb is much higher in Middle Persian texts. 43 sentences out of 83 extracted sentences in Middle Persian texts have a plural verb, while the proportion in Classical Persian texts is only 7 sentences out of 77. The reason behind this difference should be found in the specific content of Classical texts.

As is known, Persian prose texts from the tenth and eleventh century are usually non-fiction texts, in which there is little space for personification. As the results show, personification occurs in only 5 sentences. All of these five sentences are from *Tarjome-ye tārix-e ṭabari*. Four of them are from the first pages of the book, where Bal'ami writes about the creation, planets, stars, and so on. This section is very similar to *Bundahišn* with its inherent personification. From page 7, the text changes character and takes the form of a history book, in which persons are in focus and the writer reports on events. As such there is not much space for inanimate subjects and personification.

Modern Persian
Modern Persian refers to the language which has been written and spoken in the twentieth century. One distinguishing feature of written Modern Persian is its simple style, and its closer proximity to

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[16] Note the use of the plural pronoun to refer to the personified plural subject.
[17] Note the shift from a singular verb into a plural one for one and the same inanimate plural subject. The "three villages" are not conceived as agents of the process in the first part of the sentence, but are agents in the second part (See Lazard 1992: 179).

the spoken language. This simple style has its roots in the official correspondences of Qā'em Maqām, the chief minister of the Qajar prince, ʿAbbās Mirzā, in the early nineteenth century, in which flowery rhetorical phrases are eliminated. The study of written Modern Persian includes both fiction and non-fiction.

Fiction

Twenty works by three generations of writers under the following three periods have been selected:

1. 1921-1953
These writers are included: Moḥammad ʿAli Jamālzāde, Moḥammad Ḥejāzi, Moḥammad Masʿud, Ṣādeq Hedāyat, Zeyn al-ʿAbedin Moʿtamen, Bozorg 'Alavi, and Jalāl Āl Aḥmad.

2. 1954-1978
These writers are included: ʿAli-Moḥammad Afghāni, Ṣādeq Chubak, Gholām Ḥoseyn Sāʿedi, Esmāʿil Faṣiḥ, Hushang Golshiri, Simin Dāneshvar, and Maḥmud Dōlatābādi.

3. 1979-1997
These writers are included: Jaʿfar Modarres Ṣādeqi, Moniru Ravānipur, Farkhonde Āqāyi, Manuchehr Karimzāde, Faride Golbu, Reẓā Julāyi, and 'Abbās Maʿrufi.

All examples of sentences with inanimate plural subject in every tenth page of the first 150 pages of each work have been extracted. This has resulted in a total of 430 sentences, of which 70 sentences show agreement between the subject and verb.

Pattern 1: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/singular verb (356 sentences)
Ex. 22

xabar-hā-y-e	*rangārang-i*	*ke*	*az*	*kermānšāh*	*jāygāh-e*
News-PL-G-EZ	manifold-INDEF	CL LINK	from	Kermānšāh	place-EZ

kas ō kār	*mi-resid* (Jamālzāde: 62: 1)
family and friends	IMP-arrive.PAST.3 SG

"Those manifold pieces of news that were arriving from Kermānšāh, the place of the family and friends."

Ex. 23

češm-hā-y-e	*xākestari-ye*	*zan*	*sard*	*šod* (Julāyi: 72: 11)
Eye-PL-G-EẒ	grey-EẒ	woman	cold	turn.PAST.3 SG

"The woman's grey eyes turned cold."

Pattern 2: Inanimate, personified plural subject/singular verb (8 sentences)[18]
Ex. 24

dar	*tāriki*	*bud*	*ke*	*afkār-e[19]*	*gomšode-am,*	*[...]*	*hame*
In	dark	be.PAST.3 SG	CL LINK	thought.PL-EZ	lost-PR SUFF.1 SG	[…]	all

az sar-e nō	*jān*	*mi-gereft,*	*rāh*	*mi-oftād*	*va*
again	life	IMP-get.PAST.3 SG	way	IMP-set out.PAST.3 SG	and

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[18] All eight sentences are from the first period. Four of the sentences occur in Hedāyat's text, one occurs in Ḥejāzi's text and three in Masʿud's text. Except for three of the sentences in this group, a Persian speaker's native intuition finds the rest of the sentences strange or incorrect.

[19] Lazard (1992: 180) writes: "Certain plurals with a collective value (particularly 'broken' plurals of the Arabic type), may be followed by a verb in the singular".

be   man   dahankaji   mi-kard (Hedāyat: 84: 9)
to   me   face   IMP-make.PAST.3 SG

"It was in the dark that my lost thoughts […] all again got a lease of life, set out and made faces at me."

Ex. 25

*deraxt-ān-e sabz va   xorram-i   ke   az   vazeš-e   bād
 Tree-PL-EZ green and   fresh-INDEF CL LINK   from blowing-EZ wind

Helhele   mi-kon-ad[20] (Masʿud: 92: 2)
joy   IND-do.PRES-3 SG

"Those green and fresh trees that shout with joy in the blowing of the wind."

Pattern 3: Inanimate, personified plural subject/plural verb (38 sentences)
Ex. 26
abr-hā-y-e   tārik az   ofoq-e   xiyāl-aš
Cloud-PL-G-EZ   dark from horizon-EZ   imagination-PR SUFF.3 SG

farār kard-and (Ḥejāzi: 60: 17)
escape do.PAST-3 SG

"The dark clouds escaped from the horizon of his imagination."

Ex. 27
ṣandali-hā-y-e   čarxdār   mi-āmad-and   va   mi-raft-and (Āqāyi: 52: 9)
Chair-PL-G-EZ   with wheel   IMP-come.PAST-3 PL   and   IMP-go.PAST-3 PL

"Wheelchairs were coming and going."

Pattern 4: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/plural verb (32 sentences)
Ex. 28
va   dast-hā-y-aš   […] be   do   taraf-e   badan-aš
And   arm-PL-G-PR SUFF.3 SG […] to   two   side-EZ   body-PR SUFF. 3 SG

āvizān   bud-and (Dōlatābādi1: 18: 4)
hanging   be.PAST-3PL

"And his arms […] were hanging from both sides of his body."

Ex. 29
kuče-hā   va   xiyābān-hā hame xalvat   bud-and (Faṣiḥ1: 62: 3)
Alley-PL   and   street-PL   all   empty   be.PAST-3 PL

"Alleys and streets were all empty."

As is observable, pattern 1 with 356 sentences is the largest group. Pattern 2 with 8 sentences is the smallest group, and all the sentences are from the first period. Pattern 3 with 38 sentences is the next largest group, and pattern 4 with 32 sentences is the next smallest group. Comparing the results with the results from Classical Persian, one finds that the proportion of sentences with a plural verb in Modern Persian texts is twice that in Classical texts. Can this be interpreted as a sign of language change? The fact is that in three of the four Classical Persian texts no cases of personification occur, while personification occurs in 19 out of the 21 Modern Persian texts. This difference is mostly due to the content and the type of the texts. The Modern Persian texts are all

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[20] This sentence is among those that a native speaker of Persian judges as grammatically incorrect.

exclusively literary texts in which there is much more space for personification than in history books, in which persons are in focus.

The results from the study of Modern Persian texts do not indicate any tendency towards a higher degree of agreement. The only noticeable change is, in contrast to the texts from the first period, that the texts from the second and third periods do not allow a singular verb to follow a personified plural subject.

Non-fiction

The increasing need for processing and spreading information demands the rapid translation of non-fiction texts. This means that non-fiction texts are highly exposed to the influence of foreign languages. The non-fiction texts of this study are limited to newspapers and sports magazines. The reason for selecting newspapers and sports magazine is that they are among the primary media in which a great deal of rapid translations are included. Almost all examples of sentences with an inanimate plural subject in one particular issue of four different newspapers and four issues of one and the same sport magazine have been extracted. This has resulted in 311 sentences, of which 74 show an agreement between the subject and the verb:

Pattern 1: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/singular verb (247 sentences)
Ex. 30

ātašsuzi-hā-ye	*'amdi*	*yek*	*sā'at*	*pas az*	*nime šab... āḡāz šod* (*Resālat*: 16)
Firebrand-PL-EZ	intentional	an	hour	after	midnight… start.PAST.3 SG

"The intentional firebrands started an hour after the midnight."

Ex. 31

majmu'an	*27*	*tup*	*az*	*xaṭṭ-e*	*darvāze-hā*	*'obur kard* (*Key-varzeši*1: 17)
A total of	27	ball	from	line-EZ	goal-PL	pass.PAST.3 SG

"A total of 27 balls passed the goal-line."

Pattern 2: Inanimate, personified plural subject/singular verb (0 sentences)

Pattern 3: Inanimate, personified plural subject/plural verb (43 sentences)
Ex. 32

hašt	*mō'assese-ye*[21]	*entešārāti*	*dar*	*eslāmbōl*	*ṭeyy-e*	*telegrām-i*
Eight	house-EZ	publishing	in	Istanbul	through-EZ	telegram-INDEF

eqdām-e	*ruznāme-ye*	*"indinliq"*	*rā*	*dar*	*entešār-e*	*baxš-hā-y-i*
attempt-EZ	newspaper-EZ	"Indinliq"	DO TOP	in	publishing-EZ	part-PL-G-INDEF

az	*ketāb-e*	*āyāt-e*	*šeytāni*	*maḥkum kard-and* (*Jomhuri*: 2)
from	book-EZ	vers.PL-EZ	satanic	condemn.PAST-3 PL

"In a telegram, eight publishing houses in Istanbul condemned Indinliq newspaper's attempt at publishing parts of the book *Satanic Verses*."

Ex. 33

in	*"padide-hā"*	*na-bāyad*	*"nāpadid"*	*šav-and* (*Key-varzeši*1: 33)
This	phenomenon[22]-PL	NEG-should	disappear	(SUBJ)-become.PRES-3 PL

"These phenomena should not disappear."

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[21] Note the use of singular nouns after cardinal numerals.

[22] Note that the word phenomenon refers to football players. The text is about talented football players.

Pattern 4: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/plural verb (21 sentences)

Ex. 34

forušgāh-hā-ye	*šahr o rustā,*	*qods,*	*ta ʿāvoni-ye*	*ettekā*	*dar*
Store-PL-EẒ	Šahr o rustā,	Qods	Cooporative-EẒ	Ettekā	in

punak šo ʿbe	*na-dār-and* (*Eṭṭelā ʿāt*: 13)
Punak branch	NEG-have.PRES-3 PL

"The stores Šahr o rustā, Qods, and Cooperative Ettekā do not have any branches in Punak."

Ex. 35

ṣādeq,	*eḥsāsāti*	*va*	*šurangiz*	*va*	*qalb-i*	*bāz*	*xoṣuṣiyāt-i*
Honest	sensitive	and	enthusiastic	and	heart-INDEF	open	characteristic.PL-INDEF

hast-and	*ke*	*dar*	*uli*	*jam ʿ*	*šode-and* (*Key-varzeši*3: 38)
be.PRES-3 PL	CL LINK	in	Uli	gather	become.PERF-3 PL

"Honest, sensitive, and enthusiastic and having an open heart are the characteristics that have gathered in Uli."

As the results show, the usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects is predominant. The results from the study of non-fictional texts are in broad outline in accordance with the results from modern Persian literary texts. As a matter of fact the frequency of personification in non-fictional texts is higher. The frequency of sentences belonging to pattern 4 is almost the same.

Table 1 shows the distribution of the above mentioned four types of sentences in Middle Persian, Classical Persian and Modern Persian; Fiction and Non-Fiction texts:

Table 1. Middle, Classical and Modern Persian

Pattern	Middle Persian	Classical Persian	Modern Written Persian	
			Fiction	Non-fiction
Inanim non-pers pl. subj/sing. verb	39 (47 %)	70 (91 %)	356 (84 %)	247 (79 %)
Inanim pers pl. subj/sing. Verb	1 (1 %)	0 (0 %)	8 (2 %)	0 (0 %)
Inanim pers pl. subj/pl. verb	19 (23 %)	5 (6.5 %)	28 (6.5 %)	43 (14 %)
Inanim non-pers pl. sub/pl. verb	24 (29 %)	2 (2.5%)	32 (7.5 %)	21 (7 %)
TOTAL	83	77	424	311

As the above table shows, the usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects is an old feature of written Persian. Nothing in the table indicates a tendency towards an extension of plural agreement in Persian.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the above mentioned four types of sentences in Modern Persian Fiction texts 1921-1997:

Table 2. Modern Persian Fiction (1921-1997)

Pattern	1921-1953	1954-1978	1978-1997	TOTAL
Inanim non-pers pl. subj/sing. verb	123 (79 %)	117 (83.5 %)	116 (90 %)	356 (84 %)
Inanim pers pl. subj/sing. Verb	8 (5 %)	0 (0 %)	0 (0 %)	8 (2 %)
Inanim pers pl. subj/pl. verb	15 (10 %)	4 (3 %)	9 (7 %)	28 (6.5 %)
Inanim non-pers pl. sub/pl. verb	9 (6 %)	19 (13.5)	4 (3 %)	32 (7.5 %)
TOTAL	155	140	129	424

As the table shows, the use of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects is predominant. As far as the number of non-personified subjects followed by plural verb is concerned, the table shows the fewest occurrences in the texts from the third period.

Comparison between the most recent works of six writers to one of their earliest works
For this purpose the latest works of the following six writers of fiction have been compared to one of their earliest works: Bozorg ʿAlavi, ʿAli Moḥammad Afghāni, Esmāʿil Faṣiḥ, Hushang Golshiri, Simin Dāneshvar, and Maḥmud Dōlatābādi. The reason for choosing these writers is that they have been writing over a long period of time. In some cases almost fifty years have passed between the two works to be compared; enough to search for signs of a possible language change.

Bozorg ʿAlavi and Esmāʿil Faṣiḥ have also been chosen for their long stays abroad, in order to find out whether their contacts with foreign languages have had any effect on the use of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects. Bozorg ʿAlavi was living in Germany for about fifty years and finished his latest work in Berlin. Esmāʿil Faṣiḥ has also been living in the USA over a long period of time. Both of them have been in direct contact with languages in which a consistent agreement between the subject and verb is applied.

Except for Dōlatābādi in his first work, none of these writers show any tendency towards letting a plural verb follow a plural inanimate subject. It is only in Dōlatābādi's work that a change is observable, and that is in the opposite direction. Of those 14 sentences with a non-personified inanimate plural subject and a plural verb in both his works, 8 sentences belong to his *Bašobeyro* from 1972/73, and 6 to his latest book, *Ruzegār-e separi šode-ye mardom-e sālxorde* from 1991/92. In 5 out of the 8 sentences in *Bašobeyro*, the plural verb can be replaced by a singular verb without causing a native speaker of Persian to experience it as ungrammatical. As a matter of fact, Dōlatābādi in his latest work uses a singular verb for the same inanimate plural subject, for which he had used a plural verb in his earlier work:

Ex.36
jāsem jelō-v-e   dokkān-e   ʿaraq-foruši ke   resid
Jāsem front-G-EZ̦   store-EZ̦   liqour-sale   CL LINK   arrive.PAST.3 SG

zānu-hā-y-aš   sost   šod-and (Dōlatābādi1: 68: 1)
knee-PL-G-PR SUFF.3 SG weak   become.PAST-3 PL

"When Jāsem arrived in front of the liquor store, his knees became weak."

Ex. 37
Tu-y-e   dālān   pā-y-e   dar   nešast,   zānu-hā-y-aš
In-G-EZ̦   vestibule   near-G-EZ̦   door   sit.PAST.3 SG   knee-PL-G-PR SUFF.3 SG

sost   šod (Dōlatābādi2: 8: 19)
weak   become.PAST.3 SG

"He sat down near the door in the vestibule, his knees became weak."

Spoken Persian
Spoken Persian, here, refers to the language used by all speakers of Persian in Iran in different contexts. As is known, the majority of the Iranian population are by definition bilinguals, while Persian is the only official language and almost all broadcasts are in Persian. This causes the spoken Persian of a majority of the population to be strongly influenced by the Persian used in broadcasts and films. It is therefore both important and justified to include material from radio broadcasts in this part. It must also be taken into consideration that there are always occasions when people speak spontaneously in these broadcasts. Thus, the study of spoken Persian includes free conversation as

well as films and different types of prepared and structured radio broadcasts. As usual, all examples of sentences with an inanimate plural subject have been extracted. This has resulted in 347 sentences, of which 29 display an agreement between the subject and the verb.

Pattern 1: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/singular verb (319 sentences).
Ex. 38

in-ā	*hame*	*bahān-as*[23] (*Zir-e pust-e šahr*)
This-PL	all	excuse-be.PRES-3 SG

"These are all just excuses."

Ex. 39

un	*kafš-ā-y-i*	*ke*	*šab-e 'arusi*	*pā-m*	*bud* (*Șobh-e jom'e*)
Those	shoe-PL-G-INDEF	CL LINK	night-EZ wedding	foot-PR SUFF.1 SG	be.PAST.3 SG

"Those shoes that I was wearing on my wedding night."

Pattern 2: Inanimate, personified plural subject/singular verb (1 sentence)
Ex. 40

in	*lebās-ā*	*bāyad*	*ādam-ō*	*ahli*	*kon-e* (*Mārmulak*)
This	cloth-PL	must	person-DO TOP	domestic	(SUBJ)-do.PRES-3 SG

"These clothes must domesticate everyone."

Pattern 3: Inanimate, personified plural subject/plural verb (18 sentences)
Ex. 41

in	*māšin-ā-y-i*	*ke*	*mi-y-ā-n*	*pā-y-e*	*deraxt-ā*	*rō*
This	tanker-PL-G-INDEF	CL LINK	IND-G-come.PRES-3PL	foot-G-EZ	tree-PL	DO TOP

āb	*mi-d-an,*	*gozari*	*az*	*un*	*xiābun*	*rad mi-š-an,*
water	IND-give.PRES-3PL,	by chance	from	that	street	pass IND-become.PRES-3 PL,

tā	*rad mi-š-an*	*ō*	*šilang-ō*	*vā*	*mi-kon-an*
as	pass.IND-become.PRES-3 PL	and	hose-DO TOP	open	IND-do.PRES- 3 PL

mi-gir-an	*ru*	*māšin* (Teleph Con)
IND-hold.PRES-3 PL	over	car

"[One of] those tankers that water the trees, pass[es] that street by chance, as they pass, they open the hose and hold it over the car."

This example is quite an interesting one. It is obvious that it is only one tanker that passes the street. Still, the narrator refers to it in plural form. The reason behind the usage of plural form is that the driver is usually accompanied by a co-driver who takes care of the hose and the watering. The narrator is clearly referring to the persons operating the tanker when she uses the word "tanker".

Ex. 42

do	*tā*	*teran*	*bā-ham*	*šāx*	*be*	*šāx*	*šod-an* (*Ejāre nešinhā*)
Two	piece	train	with-each other	horn	to	horn	become.PAST-3PL

"Two trains have had a head-on collision"

In this sentence the trains are likened to two bulls fighting with each other.

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[23] Contracted colloquial form av *bahāne ast*.

Pattern 4: Inanimate, non-personified plural subject/plural verb (9 sentences).
Ex. 43

film-hā-y-e	*bačče-hā-ye*	*āsmān..*	*va*	*abr*	*ō*	*aftāb*
film-PL-G-EZ	child-PL-EZ	heaven...	and	cloud	and	sunshine

be	*namāyeš*	*dar-mi-ā-y-and* (*Axbār*)
to	showing	PREF-IND-come.PRES-G-3 PL

"The movies *Bačče-hā-ye āsmān...* and *Abr o aftāb* will be shown."

Ex. 44

hičyek az	*dō*	*e'telāf*	*dārā-y-e*	*aksariyat*	*naxāh-and*
None of	two	coalition	holder-G-EZ	majority	NEG-will.PRES-3 PL

bud (*Axbār*)
be.PAST.3 SG

"None of the coalitions will have a majority."

Table 4 shows the distribution of the above mentioned four types of sentences in the spoken material

Table 4. Modern Spoken Persian

Pattern	Modern spoken Persian
Inanim non-pers pl. subj/sing. verb	319 (92 %)
Inanim pers pl. subj/sing. verb	1 (0 %)
Inanim pers pl. subj/pl. verb	18 (5 %)
Inanim non-pers pl. sub/pl. verb	9 (3 %)
TOTAL	347

As the table shows the results are in accordance with the results from the written material.

Conclusion
The results from the study of Written Persian texts show that the usage of the singular verb for inanimate plural subjects is an old feature of Persian. Already in Middle Persian texts, one can observe this feature. The data also show that this old feature has not undergone any drastic changes, although other significant morphological and syntactic changes, such as the disappearance of the ergative construction, have occurred.

As was mentioned earlier, syntactic changes usually occur at the vulnerable points: at those points where there is a possibility for new variants to creep into the language. This inherent structural factor can be influenced by external factors of different types. One of the main driving forces behind the emergence of new variations in a language, and language changes is language contact.

Persian has always been in close contact with foreign languages. Arabic and Turkish are among the languages with which Persian has been in close contact over a very long course of time. It has been influenced by them in many respects, but as far as the usage of the singular verb for inanimate plural subjects is concerned, none of these languages could have any effect on Persian, as they themselves do not demand agreement in number between the subject and the verb in all cases. Arabic is a language in which subject-verb agreement is not so important, neither for animate nor for inanimate subjects. In those cases where the verb occurs at the beginning of the sentence, which is the normal verb order in an Arabic verbal sentence, and it is in the third person, it is always in singular, whether the subject is in plural or in singular (Haywood & Nahmud1985: 97-100). Turkish, too, is a language in which the verb prefers to agree with subjects higher in the animacy hierarchy. As a matter of fact Turkish and Persian are very similar as far as plural agreement is

concerned. It is only during the last century that Persian has come into close contact with languages such as English, French, and German, in which the verb agrees with the subject in number. This is something that could have, and still can open the door for new variants and hence for a language change in the long term.

The study of more that 400 pages of Modern Persian fiction shows that the usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects follows in broad outline the same pattern from about 70 years earlier. The only observable change is a greater restriction on using a singular verb for a personified plural subject, and an extended consciousness of the stylistic power of this feature of Persian. The same pattern is observable in non-fiction texts.

The results from the study of the spoken material are in accordance with the results from the study of the written material. As a matter of fact, the percentage of plural agreement is much lower in the spoken material. The main conclusion to be drawn from this study is that, as far as the usage of singular verbs for inanimate plural subjects in Persian is concerned, no language change is in progress. This is, in my opinion, in accordance with Persian's general preference for singular forms, in cases where other Indo-European languages like English, German and French prefer plural forms. Some other examples of this preference are the use of singular nouns after cardinal numerals, as well as after the interrogative and indefinite pronoun, *čand* 'how many, some', the use of singular adjectives in front of plural nouns, as well as the use of a singular noun for expressing genericity. This last issue could be the subject of another study of how the animacy ranking refers to the choice of grammatical forms, since it has been observed that for human beings, sometimes the plural form is used to express genericity.

ABBREVIATIONS:

1	first person
2	second person
3	third person
Āl Aḥmad	Āl Aḥmad, *Did ō bāzdid*
Āqāyi	Āqāyi, *Rāz-e kučak*
Axbār	Radio Tehran, *Axbār* 'News Broadcast'
Bd	*Zand – Akāshi Iranian or Greater Bundahishn*
CL LINK	clause linker
Dōlatābādi1	Dōlatābādi, *Bāšobeyrō*
Dōlatābādi2	Dōlatābādi, *Ruzgār-e separi šode-ye mardom-e sālxōrde*
DO TOP	topicalized direct object
Dāneshvar1	Dāneshvar, *Savušun*
Ejāre nešinhā	Mehrjuyi, *Ejāre nešinhā*
Eṭṭelā 'āt	*Eṭṭelā 'āt* (1993)
EZ	eẓāfe
Faṣiḥ1	Faṣiḥ, *Šarāb-e xām*
Golshiri2	Golshiri, *Dast-e tārik dast-e rōšan*
Hedāyat	Hedāyat, *Buf-e kur*
Ḥejāzi	Ḥejāzi, *Homā*
IDO	indirect object
IMP	imperfective aspect
IND	indicative
INDEF	indefinite
INF	infinitive
Jomhuri	*Jomhuri-ye Eslāmi* (1993)
Julāyi	Julāyi, *Su'-e qaṣd be ẕāt-e homāyuni*
Jamālzāde	Jamālzāde, *Yeki bud yeki nabud*
Kašf al-maḥjub	Hujviri Ghaznavi, *Kašf al-maḥjub*
*Key-varzeši*1	*Keyhān-e Varzeši*, nr 2178
*Key-varzeši*3	*Keyhān-e Varzeši*, nr 2180

Mārmulak	Tabrizi, *Mārmulak*
Masʿud	Masʿud, *Dar talāš-e moʿāš*
MX	*The book of the Mainyo-i-khard*
NEG	negation
PAST	past tense
PAST PART	past participle
PAST PERF	past perfect tense
PERF	present perfect tense
PERS PR	personal pronoun
PL	plural
PN	personal name
PRES	present tense
PR SUFF	pronominal suffix
Ravānipur	Ravānipur, *Sanghā-ye šeyṭān*
Resālat	*Resālat* (1993)
PRDd I&II	*Pahlavi Rivāyat, Part I and II*
Ṣobḥ-e jomʿe	Radio Tehran. (1996), *Ṣobḥ-e jomʿe bā šomā*
SG	singular
SUBJ	subjunctive
Teleph Con	Telephone conversation
Zir-e pust-e šahr	Bani Eʿtemād, *Zir-e pust-e šahr*

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