

Formal and Functional Peculiarities of the Singular/Plural Forms of Nouns

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Abstract: The article deals with the information about formal and functional peculiarities of the singular/plural forms of nouns in English. Moreover, important features of noun, its different types according to different categories were mentioned in the article.

Key Words: nominative, principle, existence, quantitative structure, subclasses, Morphological features, stems, predicate.

The noun is the central lexical unit of language. It is the main nominative unit of speech. As any other part of speech, the noun can be characterised by three criteria: semantic (the meaning), morphological (the form and grammatical categories) and syntactical (functions, distribution). Semantic features of the noun. The noun possesses the grammatical meaning of thingness, substantiality. According to different principles of classification nouns fall into several subclasses:

1. According to the type of nomination they may be proper and common;
2. According to the form of existence they may be animate and inanimate. Animate nouns in their turn fall into human and non-human.
3. According to their quantitative structure nouns can be countable and uncountable.

This set of subclasses cannot be put together into one table because of the different principles of classification [1]. Morphological features of the noun. In accordance with the morphological structure of the stems all nouns can be classified into: simple, derived (stem + affix, affix + stem – thingness); compound (stem+ stem – armchair) and composite (the Hague). The noun has morphological categories of number and case. Some scholars admit the existence of the category of gender. Speaking about noun combinability, we can say that it can go into right-hand and left-hand connections with practically all parts of speech. That is why practically all parts of speech but the verb can act as noun determiners. However, the most common noun determiners are considered to be articles, pronouns, numerals, adjectives and nouns themselves in the common and genitive case.

The grammatical category of number is the linguistic representation of the objective category of quantity. The number category is realized through the opposition of two form-classes: the plural form :: the singular form. The category of number in English is restricted in its realization because of the dependent implicit grammatical meaning of countableness/uncountableness. The number category is realized only within subclass of countable nouns. The category of number presents a classic example of a binary privative grammatical opposition. The category of number is expressed by the paradigmatic opposition of two forms: the singular and the plural. The strong member in this opposition, the plural, is marked by special formal marks, the main of which is the productive suffix *-(e)s* which exists in three allomorphs - *[s]*, *[z]*, *[ɪz]*, e.g.: *cats, boys, roses*. The term “productive” means that new nouns appearing in English form the plural with the help of this suffix [2].

Non-productive means of expressing the plural are either historical relics of ancient number paradigms, or borrowed, e.g.: the suppletive forms with interchange of vowels (*man – men, tooth – teeth*), the archaic suffix *-en* (*ox – oxen*), a number of individual singular and plural suffixes of borrowed nouns (*antenna – antennae, stratum – strata, nucleus – nuclei, etc.*); in addition, a number of nouns have a plural form homonymous with the singular (*sheep, fish, deer, etc.*). The singular is regularly unmarked (weak member). The grammatical meaning of the singular is traditionally defined in a simplified way as “one”, and the meaning of the plural – as “many (more than one)”. This is true for the bulk of the nouns, namely those denoting simple countable objects (*table – tables*). But the noun in the singular can denote not only “one discrete separate object”, but also substances (*water*), abstract notions (*love*), units of measure (*hour*) and other referents. The same applies to the meaning of the plural: plural forms do not always denote “more than one object”, but express some other meanings, such as feelings (*horrors of war*), sorts of substances (*wines*), landscape (*sands, waters*), etc[3]. Thus, the broader understanding of the grammatical meaning of the singular can be defined as the non-dismembering reflection of the referent and the grammatical meaning of the plural as potentially dismembering reflection of the referent; or, in other words, the singular forms of nouns present their referents as indivisible, and the plural forms – as divisible. Different

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semantic types of the singular and the plural are dependent on the lexico-semantic differences between individual nouns, namely, the characteristics of their “quantitative nature”.

- For countable nouns the category of number is a variable feature category, or relative, since countable English nouns have both singular and plural correlative forms (*table – tables*).
 - Uncountable nouns can be used either only in the singular or only in the plural; for them the category of number is absolute, or a constant feature category. The two groups of uncountable nouns are respectively defined as *singularia tantum*, or, absolute singular nouns and *pluralia tantum*, absolute plural nouns.
1. The absolute singular nouns usually denote the following referents: - abstract notions (*love, hate, despair*); - names of substances and materials (*snow, wine, sugar*); - branches of professional activity (*politics, linguistics, mathematics*); - some collective objects (*fruit, machinery, foliage*). There are some other *singularia tantum* nouns, that are difficult to classify, e.g., *advice, news* and others. As the examples above show, the nouns themselves do not possess any formal markers of their *singularia tantum* status: their form may either coincide with the regular singular – *advice*, or with the regular plural – *news*. Their *singularia tantum* status is formally established in their combinability: all *singularia tantum* nouns are used with the verbs in the singular; they exclude the use of the numeral “one” or of the indefinite article. Their quantity is expressed with the help of special lexical quantifiers *little, much, some, and any, a piece, a bit, an item*, e.g.: *an item of news, a piece of advice, a bit of joy*, etc.
 2. The absolute plural nouns usually denote the following: - objects consisting of two halves (*scissors, trousers, spectacles*); - some diseases and abnormal states (*mumps, measles, creeps, and hysterics*); - indefinite plurality, collective referents (*earnings, police, and cattle*). The nouns belonging to the *pluralia tantum* group are used with verbs in the plural; they cannot be combined with numerals, and their quantity is rendered by special lexical quantifiers *a pair of, a case of*, etc., e.g.: *a pair of trousers, several cases of measles*, etc[4].

In conclusion it should be noted that, lexicalization of the absolute plural form of the noun can be illustrated with the following examples: colours as an absolute plural noun denotes “a flag”. Oppositional neutralization also takes place when regular countable collective nouns are used in the absolute plural to denote a certain multitude as potentially divisible, e.g.: The jury were unanimous in their verdict. Cases of expressive transposition are stylistically marked, when *singularia tantum* nouns are used in the plural to emphasize the infinite quantity of substances, e.g.: the waters of the ocean, the sands of the desert, etc. This variety of the absolute plural may be called “descriptive uncountable plural”. A similar stylistically marked meaning of large quantities intensely presented is rendered by countable nouns in repetition groups, e.g.: thousand upon thousand, tons and tons, etc[5]. This variety of the absolute plural, “repetition plural” can be considered a specific marginal analytical number form.

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