

Number of categories

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Abstract: Understanding of the number of words, type of number categories. About the number word category. Gender does not find any morphological expression in English. Lexicalization of the absolute plural form of the noun can be illustrated with the following examples. Different semantic types of the singular and the plural.

Keywords: Number of category, the grammatical category of number. The category of number presents a classic example.

The only category of nouns accepted by all the scholars is that of number, which is expressed by the opposition of the plural form to the singular form of the noun. The strong member of that opposition is the plural. The category of number is proper only to countable nouns. Usually words which lack a certain category have only one form, a weak form of the opposition. Some uncountable nouns may be singular or plural. They constitute a multiple lexical-grammatical opposition, which is singular only (singularia tantum) - plural only (pluralia tantum): snow, joy - police, trousers.

The category of case shows the relation of the noun with other words in the sentence and it is expressed by the form of the noun.. Languages of syntactic structure have a developed case system. Languages of analytical structure lack these morphological categories. In English the only morphologically marked case admitted by many linguists is possessive case. Its marker is the sign “ ‘s “ or “ ‘ ” for the plural. But it is not a typical case inflexion. Most scholars think that there are two cases: common and genitive. The Common case has no inflection and its meaning is very general. The possessive case denotes possession and some other meanings. The Possessive case is generally used with nouns denoting people and animals. Nouns denoting inanimate objects are not generally used in the Possessive case. The “of + noun” phrase is used with nouns denoting inanimate objects (a boy’s leg - the leg of the table). The discussion of the case problem is still an open question; there are four main approaches, which will be discussed later.

Gender does not find any morphological expression in English. The distinction of male, female and neuter can be understood from the lexical meaning of the noun (a man- a woman), the use of personal pronouns he, she, it (a she-crab soup), the use of derivational suffixes (a waiter-waitress), compounding (man servant). The problem of English articles is a long debated question. Today the most disputable questions are the following:

- the status of the article in the hierarchy of language units;
- the number of articles and
- its categorial and pragmatic functions.

There exist two basic approaches to the problem of the article status: some scholars consider the article a self-sufficient word which forms with the modified noun a syntactic syntagma; others identify the article with the morpheme-like element which builds up with the nounal stem an analytical form. In recent works on the problem of article determination of English nouns, very often an opinion is expressed that the article occupies a peculiar place - the place intermediary between the word and the morpheme, the so-called word-morpheme. Opposite to this point of view, many scholars consider that the article cannot be treated as a word-morpheme. Its position can be occupied by other words: demonstrative and possessive pronouns, numerals, nouns in the possessive case etc. Words which have distribution similar to the article are called determiners. The role of a determiner is to specify the range of reference to the noun by making it definite or indefinite. Moreover, the article plays an important role in structuring information. It is one of the means of distinguishing between facts already known – the theme, and new information – the rheme. The definite article is the marker of the theme and the indefinite article is the marker of the rheme, e.g. *There is a book on the table. The book is on the table.* Another view is that we should describe this as the absence of the article. The third view is that the very absence of the article is a special kind of article, which is termed “zero article”.

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 grammatical meaning of number may not coincide with the notional quantity: the noun in the singular does not necessarily denote one object

while the plural form may be used to denote one object consisting of several parts. The singular form may denote:

- a. oneness (individual separate object – *a cat*);
- b. generalization (the meaning of the whole class – *The cat is a domestic animal*);
- c. indiscreteness (нерасчлененность or uncountableness - *money, milk*).

The plural form may denote:

- a. the existence of several objects (*cats*);
- b. the inner discreteness (внутренняя расчлененность, pluralia tantum, *jeans*).

To sum it up, all nouns may be subdivided into three groups:

1. The nouns in which the opposition of explicit discreteness/indiscreteness is expressed : *cat::cats*;
2. The nouns in which this opposition is not expressed explicitly but is revealed by syntactical and lexical correlation in the context. There are two groups here:
 - A. Singularia tantum. It covers different groups of nouns: proper names, abstract nouns, material nouns, collective nouns;
 - B. Pluralia tantum. It covers the names of objects consisting of several parts (*jeans*), names of sciences (*mathematics*), names of diseases, games, etc.
3. The nouns with homogenous number forms. The number opposition here is not expressed formally but is revealed only lexically and syntactically in the context: e.g. *Look! A sheep is eating grass. Look! The sheep are eating grass.*

The category of number presents a classic example of a binary privative grammatical opposition and was partly described in Unit 3 (Grammatical Structure of the Word). 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. 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 (possesses a “zero suffix”). 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*), picturesqueness (*sands, waters*), etc. 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 semantic types of the singular and the plural, some of which were shown above, are dependent on the lexico-semantic differences between individual nouns, namely, the characteristics of their “quantitative structure”. 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.

The absolute singular nouns usually denote the following referents: abstract notions – *love, hate, despair*, etc.; names of substances and materials – *snow, wine, sugar*, etc.; branches of professional activity – *politics, linguistics, mathematics*; some collective objects – *fruit, machinery, foliage*, etc. 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 marks 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, being reflected by the adjacent words: 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, any, a piece, a bit, an item*, e.g.: *an item of*

news, a piece of advice, a bit of joy, etc. As mentioned earlier, this kind of rendering the grammatical meaning of number with uncountable nouns is so regular that it can be regarded as a marginal case of suppletivity. The absolute plural nouns usually denote the following: objects consisting of two halves – *scissors, trousers, spectacles*, etc.; some diseases and abnormal states – *mumps, measles, creeps, hysterics*, etc.; indefinite plurality, collective referents – *earnings, police, cattle*, etc. 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.

In terms of the oppositional theory one can say that in the formation of the two subclasses of uncountable nouns, the number opposition is “constantly” (lexically) reduced either to the weak member (*singularia tantum*) or to the strong member (*pluralia tantum*). Absolute singular nouns or absolute plural nouns are “lexicalized” as separate words or as lexico-semantic variants of regular countable nouns. For example: *a hair* as a countable noun denotes “a threadlike growth from the skin” as in *I found a woman’s hair on my husband’s jacket*; *hair* as an uncountable noun denotes a mass of hairs, as in *Her hair was long and curly*. Similar cases of oppositional neutralization take place when countable nouns are used in the absolute singular form to express the corresponding abstract ideas, e.g.: *to burst into song*; or the material correlated with the countable referent, e.g.: *chicken soup*; or to express generic meaning, e.g.: *The rose is my favourite flower (=Roses are my favourite flowers)*. The opposite process of the restoration of the number category to its full oppositional force takes place when uncountable nouns develop lexico-semantic variants denoting either various sorts of materials (*silks, wines*), or manifestations of feelings (*What a joy!*), or the reasons of various feelings (*pleasures of life – all the good things that make life pleasant*), etc. 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”; *attentions* denotes “*wooing, act of love and respect*”, etc. 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.: *cigarette after cigarette, thousand upon thousand, tons and*

tons, etc. This variety of the absolute plural, “*repetition plura*” can be considered a specific marginal analytical number form.

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