Contents

Part 1

# The discovery of nouns

1. Introduction
2. Classification of nouns in English
3. Nouns and pronouns

# Part 2

# Semantic vs. grammatical number

1. Number in specific languages

2. Obligatoriness of number marking

3. Number agreement

4. Types of number

1. Conclusion

# Part 3

Bibliography

**The discovery of nouns**

**Introduction**

The word "noun" comes from the latin nomen meaning "name." Word classes like nouns were first described by Sanskrit grammarian Pāṇini and ancient Greeks like Dionysios Thrax, and defined in terms of their morphological properties. For example, in Ancient Greek, nouns can be inflected for grammatical case, such as dative or accusative. Verbs, on the other hand, can be inflected for tenses, such as past, present or future, while nouns cannot. Aristotle also had a notion of onomata (nouns) and rhemata (verbs) which, however, does not exactly correspond our notions of verbs and nouns. In her dissertation, Vinokurova has a more detailed discussion of the historical origin of the notion of a noun.

## Different definitions of nouns

## Expressions of natural language will have properties at different levels. They have formal properties, like what kinds of morphological prefixes or suffixes they can take, and what kinds of other expressions they can combine with. but they also have semantic properties, i.e. properties pertaining to their meaning. The definition of nouns on the top of this page is thus a formal definition. That definition is uncontroversial, and has the advantage that it allows us to effectively distinguish nouns from non-nouns. However, it has the disadvandage that it does not apply to nouns in all languages. For example in Russian, there are no definite articles, so one cannot define nouns by means of those. There are also several attempts of defining nouns in terms of their semantic properties. Many of these are controversial, but some are discussed below.

### Names for things

In traditional school grammars, one often encounters the definition of nouns that they are all and only those expressions that refer to a person, place, thing, event, substance, quality, or idea, etc. This is a semantic definition. It has been criticized by contemporary linguists as being quite uninformative. Part of the problem is that the definition makes use of relatively general nouns ("thing," "phenomenon," "event") to define what nouns are. The existence of such general nouns shows us that nouns are organized in taxonomic hierarchies. But other kinds of expressions are also organized in hierarchies. For example all of the verbs "stroll," "saunter," "stride," and "tread" are more specific words than the more general "walk." The latter is more specific than the verb "move." But it is unlikely that such hierarchies can be used to define nouns and verbs. Furthermore, an influential theory has it that verbs like "kill" or "die" refer to events,[2][3] and so they fall under the definition. Similarly, adjectives like "yellow" or "difficult" might be thought to refer to qualities, and adverbs like "outside" or "upstairs" seem to refer to places. Worse still, a trip into the woods can be referred to by the verbs "stroll" or "walk." But verbs, adjectives and adverbs are not nouns, and nouns aren't verbs. So the definition is not particularly helpful in distinguishing nouns from other parts of speech.

### Prototypically referential expressions

Another semantic definition of nouns is that they are prototypically referential.[4] That definition is also not very helpful in distinguishing actual nouns from verbs. But it may still correctly identify a core property of nounhood. For example, we will tend to use nouns like "fool" and "car" when we wish to refer to fools and cars, respectively. The notion that this is prototypocal reflects the fact that such nouns can be used, even though nothing with the corresponding property is referred to:

John is no fool.

If I had a car, I'd go to Marakech.

The first sentence above doesn't refer to any fools, nor does the second one refer to any particular car.

### Predicates with identity criteria

The British logician Peter Thomas Geach proposed a very subtle semantic definition of nouns. He noticed that adjectives like "same" can modify nouns, but no other kinds of parts of speech, like verbs or adjectives. Not only that, but there also doesn't seem to exist any *other* expressions with similar meaning that can modify verbs and adjectives. Consider the following examples.

Good: John and Bill participated in the **same** fight.

Bad: \*John and Bill **samely** fought.

There is no English adverb "samely." In some other languages, like Czech, however there are adverbs corresponding to "samely." Hence, in Czech, the translation of the last sentence would be fine; however, it would mean that John and Bill fought *in the same way*: not that they participated in the *same fight*. Geach proposed that we could explain this, if nouns denote logical predicate with **identity criteria**. An identity criterion would allow us to conclude, for example, that "person x at time 1 is *the same person* as person y at time 2." Different nouns can have different identity criteria. A well known example of this is due to Gupta:

National Airlines transported 2 million **passengers** in 1979.

National Airlines transported (at least) 2 million **persons** in 1979.

Given that, in general, all passengers are persons, the last sentence above ought to follow logically from the first one. But it doesn't. It is easy to imagine, for example, that on average, every person who travelled with National Airlines in 1979, travelled with them twice. In that case, one would say that the airline transported 2 million *passengers* but only 1 million *persons*. Thus, the way that we count *passengers* isn't necessarily the same as the way that we count *persons*. Put somewhat differently: At two different times, you may correspond to two distinct *passengers*, even though you are one and the same person. For a precise definition of *identity criteria*, see Gupta.

Recently, the linguist Mark Baker has proposed that Geach's definition of nouns in terms of identity criteria allows us to *explain* the characteristic properties of nouns. He argues that nouns can co-occur with (in-)definite articles and numerals, and are "prototypically referential" *because* they are all and only those parts of speech that provide identity criteria. Baker's proposals are quite new, and linguists are still evaluating them.

## Classification of nouns in English

### Proper nouns and common nouns

Proper nouns (also called proper names) are the names of unique entities. For example, "Janet", "Jupiter" and "Germany" are proper nouns. Proper nouns are usually capitalized in English and most other languages that use the Latin alphabet, and this is one easy way to recognise them. However, in German nouns of all types are capitalized. The convention of capitalizing all nouns was previously used in English, but has long fallen into disuse.

All other nouns are called common nouns. For example, "girl", "planet", and "country" are common nouns.

Sometimes the same word can function as both a common noun and a proper noun, where one such entity is special. For example: "There can be many gods, but there is only one God." This is somewhat magnified in Hebrew where EL means god (as in a god), God (as in the God), and El (the name of a particular Canaanite god).

The common meaning of the word or words constituting a proper noun may be unrelated to the object to which the proper noun refers. For example, someone might be named "Tiger Smith" despite being neither a tiger nor a smith. For this reason, proper nouns are usually not translated between languages, although they may be transliterated. For example, the German surname Knödel becomes Knodel or Knoedel in English (not the literal Dumpling). However, the translation of placenames and the names of monarchs, popes, and non-contemporary authors is common and sometimes universal. For instance, the Portuguese word Lisboa becomes Lisbon in English; the English London becomes Londres in French; and the Greek Aristotelēs becomes Aristotle in English.

### Count nouns and mass nouns

*Count nouns* (or *countable nouns*) are common nouns that can take a plural, can combine with numerals or quantifiers (e.g. "one", "two", "several", "every", "most"), and can take an indefinite article ("a" or "an"). Examples of count nouns are "chair", "nose", and "occasion".

*Mass nouns* (or *non-countable nouns*) differ from count nouns in precisely that respect: they can't take plural or combine with number words or quantifiers. Examples from English include "laughter", "cutlery", "helium", and "furniture". For example, it is not possible to refer to "a furniture" or "three furnitures". This is true, even though the furniture referred to could, in principle, be counted. Thus the distinction between mass and count nouns shouldn't be made in terms of what sorts of things the nouns *refer* to, but rather in terms of how the nouns *present* these entities. The separate page for mass noun contains further explanation of this point.

Some words function in the singular as a count noun and, without a change in the spelling, as a mass noun in the plural: she caught a *fish*, we caught *fish*; he shot a *deer*, they shot some deer; the craft was dilapidated, the pier was chockablock with craft.

### Collective Nouns

Collective nouns are nouns that refer to groups consisting of more than one individual or entity, even when they are inflected for the singular. Examples include "committee," "herd" and "school" (of herring). These nouns have slightly different grammatical properties than other nouns. For example, the noun phrases that they head can serve of the subject of a collective predicate, even when they are inflected for the singular. A collective predicate is a predicate that normally can't take a singular subject. An example of the latter is "surround the house."

Good: The boys surrounded the house.

Bad: \*The boy surrounded the house.

Good: The committee surrounded the house.

### Concrete nouns and abstract nouns

Concrete nouns refer to definite objects—objects in which you use at least one of your senses. For instance, "chair", "apple", or "Janet". Abstract nouns on the other hand refer to ideas or concepts, such as "justice" or "hate". While this distinction is sometimes useful, the boundary between the two of them is not always clear. In English, many abstract nouns are formed by adding noun-forming suffixes ("-ness", "-ity", "-tion") to adjectives or verbs. Examples are "happiness", "circulation" and "serenity".

## Nouns and pronouns

Noun phrases can be replaced by pronouns, such as "he", "it", "which", and "those", in order to avoid repetition or explicit identification, or for other reasons. For example, in the sentence "Janet thought that he was weird", the word "he" is a pronoun standing in place of the name of the person in question. The English word one can replace parts of noun phrases, and it sometimes stands in for a noun. An example is given below:

John's car is newer than the one that Bill has.

But one can also stand in for bigger subparts of a noun phrase. For example, in the following example, one can stand in for new car.

This new car is cheaper than that one.

LIST

CHAIR PAPER BOOK CAKE DRINK CANDY CAKE FUDGE SISSORS KEY BOARD SPEAKERS CAR BIKE PENCIL PEN

In linguistics, grammatical number is a morphological category characterized by the expression of quantity through inflection or agreement. As an example, consider the English sentences below:

That apple on the table is fresh.

Those two apples on the table are fresh.

The number of apples is marked on the noun — "apple", singular number (one item) vs. "apples", plural number (more than one item) — , on the demonstrative, "that/those", and on the verb, "is/are". Note that, especially in the second sentence, this information can be considered redundant, since quantity is already indicated by the numeral "two".

A language has grammatical number when its nouns are subdivided into morphological classes according to the quantity they express, such that:

Every noun belongs to a single number class. (Number partitions nouns into disjoint classes.)

Noun modifiers (such as adjectives) and verbs have different forms for each number class, and must be inflected to match the number of the nouns they refer to. (Number is an agreement category.)

This is the case in English: every noun is either singular or plural (a few, such as "fish", can be either, according to context), and at least some modifiers of nouns — namely the demonstratives, the personal pronouns, the articles, and verbs — are inflected to agree with the number of the nouns they refer to: "this car" and "these cars" are correct, while "\*this cars" or "\*these car" are ungrammatical.

Not all languages have number as a grammatical category. In those that do not, quantity must be expressed either directly, with numerals, or indirectly, through optional quantifiers. However, many of these languages compensate for the lack of grammatical number with an extensive system of measure words.

The word "number" is also used in linguistics to describe the distinction between certain grammatical aspects that indicate the number of times an event occurs, such as the semelfactive aspect, the iterative aspect, etc. For that use of the term, see "Grammatical aspect".

## Semantic vs. grammatical number

All languages are able to specify the quantity of referents. They may do so by lexical means with words such as English *a few*, *some*, *one*, *two*, *five hundred*. However, not every language has a grammatical category of number. Grammatical number is expressed by morphological and/or syntactic means. That is, it is indicated by certain grammatical elements, such as through affixes or number words. Grammatical number may be thought of as the indication of semantic number through grammar.

Languages that express quantity only by lexical means lack a grammatical category of number. For instance, in Khmer, neither nouns nor verbs carry any grammatical information concerning number: such information can only be conveyed by lexical items such as *khlah* 'some', *pii-bey* 'a few', and so on.

Most languages of the world have formal means to express differences of number. The most widespread distinction, as found in English and many other languages, involves a simple two-way number contrast between singular and plural (*car* / *cars*; *child* / *children*, etc.). Other more elaborate systems of number are described below.

## Number in specific languages

### English

English is typical of most world languages, in distinguishing only between singular and plural number. The plural form of a word is usually created by adding the suffix *-(e)s*. Common exceptions include the pronouns, which have irregular plurals, as in *I* versus *we*, because they are ancient and frequently used words.

### French

In its written form, French declines nouns for number (singular or plural). In speech, however, the majority of nouns (and adjectives) are not actually declined for number. This is because the typical plural suffix *-s*, is silent, and thus does not really indicate a change in pronunciation; the plural article or determiner is the real indicator of plurality (but see *Liaison* (French) for a common exception). However, plural number still exists in spoken French because a significant percentage of irregular plurals differ from the singular in pronunciation; for example, *cheval* "horse" is pronounced [ʃəval], while *chevaux* "horses" is pronounced [ʃəvo].

### Hebrew

In Hebrew, most nouns have only singular and plural forms, such as *sefer/sfarim* "book/books", but some have singular, plural, and dual forms, such as *yom/yomaim/yamim* "day/two days/[two or more] days". Some words occur so often in pairs that what used to be the dual form is now the general plural, such as *ayin/eynayim* "eye/eyes", used even in a sentence like, "The spider has eight eyes." Adjectives, verbs, and pronouns have only singular and plural, with the plural forms of these being used with dual nouns.

## Obligatoriness of number marking

In many languages, such as English, number is obligatorily expressed in every grammatical context; in other languages, however, number expression is limited to certain classes of nouns, such as animates or referentially prominent nouns (as with proximate forms in most Algonquian languages, opposed to referentially less prominent obviative forms).

A very common situation is for plural number to not be marked if there is any other overt indication of number, as for example in Hungarian: virág "flower"; virágok "flowers"; hat virág "six flowers".

## Number agreement

### Verb conjugation

In many languages, verbs are conjugated for number. Using French as an example, one says je vois (I see), but nous voyons (we see). The verb voir (to see) changes from vois in the first person singular to voyons in the plural. In everyday English, this often happens in the third person (she sees, they see), but not in other grammatical persons, except with the verb to be.

### Agreement in other lexical items

Adjectives often agree with the number of the noun they modify. For example, in French, one says un grand arbre [œ̃ gʀɑ̃t aʀbʀ] "a tall tree", but deux grands arbres [dø gʀɑ̃z aʀbʀ] "two tall trees". The singular adjective grand becomes grands in the plural, unlike English "tall", which remains unchanged.

Other determiners may agree with number. In English, the demonstratives "this", "that" change to "these", "those" in the plural, and the indefinite article "a", "an" is either omitted or changes to "some". In French and German, the definite articles have gender distinctions in the singular but not the plural. In Spanish and Portuguese, both definite and indefinite articles are inflected for gender and number, e.g. Portuguese o, a "the" (singular, masc./fem.), os, as "the" (plural, masc./fem.); um, uma "a(n)" (singular, masc./fem.), uns, umas "some" (plural, masc./fem.)

In the Finnish sentence Yöt ovat pimeitä "Nights are dark", each word referring to the plural noun yöt "nights" ("night" = yö) is pluralized (night-PL is-PL dark-PL-partitive).

### Exceptions

Sometimes, grammatical number will not represent the actual quantity. For example, in Ancient Greek neuter plurals took a singular verb. The plural form of a pronoun may also be applied to a single individual as a sign of importance, respect or generality, as in the *pluralis majestatis*, the T-V distinction, and the generic "you", found in many languages, or, in English, when using the singular "they" for gender-neutrality.

### Collective nouns

A collective noun is a word that designates a group of objects or beings regarded as a whole, such as "flock", "team", or "corporation". Although many languages treat collective nouns as singular, in others they may be interpreted as plural. In British English, phrases such as *the committee are meeting* are common (the so-called agreement *in sensu* "in meaning", that is, with the meaning of a noun, rather than with its form). The use of this type of construction varies with dialect and level of formality.

## Types of number

### Singular versus plural

In most languages with grammatical number, nouns, and sometimes other parts of speech, have two forms, the singular, for one instance of a concept, and the plural, for more than one instance. Usually, the singular is the unmarked form of a word, and the plural is obtained by inflecting the singular. This is the case in English: car/cars, box/boxes, man/men. There may be exceptional nouns whose plural is identical to the singular: one fish / two fish.

### Collective versus singulative

Some languages differentiate between a basic form, the collective, which is indifferent in respect to number, and a more complicated derived form for single entities, the singulative, for example Japanese and some Brythonic languages. A rough example in English is "snowflake", which may be considered a singulative form of "snow" (although English has no productive process of forming singulative nouns, and no singulative modifiers). In other languages, singulatives can be productively formed from collective nouns; e.g. Standard Arabic حجر ḥajar "stone" → حجرة ḥajarā "(individual) stone", بقر baqar "cattle" → بقرة baqarā "(single) cow"

### Dual number

The distinction between a "singular" number (one) and a "plural" number (more than one) found in English is not the only possible classification. Another one is "singular" (one), "dual" (two) and "plural" (more than two). Dual number existed in Proto-Indo-European, persisted in many of the now extinct ancient Indo-European languages that descended from it—Sanskrit, Ancient Greek and Gothic for example—and can still be found in a few modern Indo-European languages such as Icelandic and Slovene language. Many more modern Indo-European languages show residual traces of the dual, as in the English distinctions both versus all and better versus best.

Many Semitic languages also have dual number.

### Trial number

The trial number is a grammatical number referring to 'three items', in contrast to 'singular' (one item), 'dual' (two items), and 'plural' (four or more items). Tolomako, Lihir and Tok Pisin (though only in its pronouns) have trial number.

There is a hierarchy between number categories: No language distinguishes a trial unless having a dual, and no language has dual without a plural (Greenberg 1972).

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Some languages, such as Latvian, have a nullar form, used for nouns that refer to zero items. Other languages use either the singular or the plural form for zero. English, along with the other Germanic languages and most Romance languages, uses the plural. French normally uses the singular, instead.

### Distributive plural

Distributive plural number, for many instances viewed as independent individuals (e.g. in Navajo).

In most languages, the singular is formally unmarked, whereas the plural is marked in some way. Other languages, most notably the Bantu languages, mark both the singular and the plural, for instance Swahili (see example above). The third logical possibility, rarely found in languages, is unmarked plural contrasting with marked singular.

Elements marking number may appear on nouns and pronouns in dependent-marking languages or on verbs and adjectives in head-marking languages.

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| **English (dependent-marking)** | **Western Apache (head-marking)** |
| Paul is teaching the cowboy. | Paul idilohí yiłch’ígó’aah. |
| Paul is teaching the cowboy**s**. | Paul idilohí yiłch’í**da**gó’aah. |

In the English sentence above, the plural suffix *-s* is added to the noun *cowboy*. In the Western Apache, a head-marking language, equivalent, a plural prefix *da-* is added to the verb *yiłch’ígó’aah* "he is teaching him", resulting in *yiłch’ídagó’aah* "he is teaching them" while noun *idilohí* "cowboy" is unmarked for number.

### Number particles

Plurality is sometimes marked by a specialized number particle (or number word). This is frequent in Australian and Austronesian languages. An example from Tagalog is the word *mga*: compare *bahay* "house" with *mga bahay* "houses". In Kapampangan, certain nouns optionally denote plurality by secondary stress: *ing laláki* "man" and *ing babái* "woman" become *ding láláki* "men" and *ding bábái* "women".

## Conclusion

## We have investigated the noun, the main part of speech in English grammar. We chose the noun as the theme of our course work because we interested in it. We used different kind of references to investigate the noun. Nouns can be classified further as count nouns, which name anything that can be counted (four books, two continents, a few dishes, a dozen buildings); mass nouns (or non-count nouns), which name something that can't be counted (water, air, energy, blood); and collective nouns, which can take a singular form but are composed of more than one individual person or items (jury, team, class, committee, herd). We should note that some words can be either a count noun or a non-count noun depending on how they're being used in a sentence. Whether or not a noun is uncountable is determined by its meaning: an uncountable noun represents something which tends to be viewed as a whole or as a single entity, rather than as one of a number of items which can be counted as individual units. Singular verb forms are used with uncountable nouns. Uncountable nouns are substances, concepts etc that we cannot divide into separate elements. We cannot "count" them. For example, we cannot count "milk". We can count "bottles of milk" or "litres of milk", but we cannot count "milk" itself. We usually treat uncountable nouns as singular. We use a singular verb. Countable nouns are easy to recognize. They are things that we can count. For example: "pen". We can count pens. We can have one, two, three or more pens. We cannot say that it is finished investigation of this theme, because we are going to continue its investigation in our diploma work.

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