

REGULAR AND IRREGULAR PLURAL NOUNS



Linguistics

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Vlora Haxhiu

State University of Tetova. English Department. North Macedonia.

Abstract

This paper deals with regular and irregular plurals in English. The paper focuses on nouns which constitute an open class of words. It concentrates on important spelling and pronunciation grammar rules in order to avoid mistakes in turning singular nouns to their plural form. In the first part, it describes the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns as an important part that is closely related to the number of English nouns. The theoretical part focuses mainly on elaborating in more details the pronunciation, spelling, types of regular and irregular nouns. Furthermore, the paper includes different samples of nouns in regard to their number classification and the usage of nouns in the English grammar. So, the main aim of this paper is to show the important function that the number of nouns has in grammar.

Introduction

The aim of this paper was to examine the number of nouns in English by describing in more detail the importance of the number in the structure of grammar, taking into account the fact that the number of nouns as a category is really important in everyday conversations. It is generally said that in order to change a singular noun to its plural form in English, you usually add “s”. But there are many cases where this is not the case. In order to elaborate deeply the category of number, it is important to know the definition of the noun in English. NOUN: a grammatically distinct category of words which includes those denoting all kinds of physical objects, such as persons, animals and inanimate objects. (Pullum, 2005: 83)

Regarding this topic, an effort has been made to discuss the plural of English nouns and review some important grammar rules that English students and other learners of English should know in order to improve to also avoid mistakes in turning singular nouns to their plural form. Therefore, the theoretical part is based on describing the different categories of the number in English nouns, mainly the regular and irregular. Ever since primary school all English learners become familiar with the plural of nouns whereas they learn such rules as how only count-nouns actually have plural forms. Count-nouns represent items that exist in separated units you can count, such as *apples*, *songs* or *children*. Non-count nouns represent items existing as a mass, such as powders and liquids (*sand*, *water*, *milk*, *juice*, *flour*) or concepts (*honesty*, *economies*). In addition, unlike a singular count-noun that must have at least a/an as a determiner (*This is an apple*); plural count nouns can appear without a determiner (*I like apples*)¹. For this reason, we consider it appropriate to examine the nature of *countable* and *uncountable* nouns.

¹ <https://sites.google.com/site/englishgrammarguide/Home/singular-and-plural-nouns>

Regular plurals of nouns

The usual way to form the plural of most nouns in English is by adding the inflectional suffix *-s* (or *-es*) to the end of the singular noun.

Although all regular English nouns take either *-s* or *-es* suffix in the plural, the suffix is pronounced differently depending on the last sound of the noun.

The rules for pronunciation are the same as those for the third person simple present of regular verbs: /s/, /z/ and /ɪz/.

- a) It is pronounced /ɪz/ after bases ending in voiced or voiceless sibilants: /s/, /z/; /ʃ/, /ʒ/; /tʃ/, /dʒ/ and spelled *-es* unless the base already ends in *-e*. Here are some examples:

| Singular | Plural |
|----------|---------|
| Kiss | Kisses |
| Phase | Phases |
| Dish | Dishes |
| Witch | Witches |
| Judge | Judges |
| Prize | Prizes |
| Garage | Garages |
| Brush | Brushes |

Irregular Plurals

The English language has not always used 's' to form plurals. There are still a few words surviving from old English which do not use 's' to form plural. About seven nouns form their plural by a vowel change. This is a survival from old English.

Some nouns are following:

| Singular | Plural |
|----------|--------|
| Man | Men |
| Woman | Women |
| Goose | Geese |
| Tooth | Teeth |
| Foot | Feet |
| Mouse | Mice |

Zero Plurals

Zero plural marking refers to the absence of the plural markers *s* or *es*². It refers to the nouns that have the same spoken and written form both in singular and plural. These nouns may be preceded by a determiner higher than one (two, four, many, several) but if used in a plural

² <https://www.thoughtco.com/english-grammar-4133049>

sense they would take a plural verb³. These are, most notable, nouns referring to animals, maybe because we often see animals in both number and mass. Examples: *deer, sheep, cod, moose, swine, trout, fish etc.* So, except for the fact that irregular nouns change in the plural form, in English exist some nouns that do not change at all. Example: *Species, aircraft, series, means etc.* Now it is understandable that nouns have zero plural, it refers to the absence of the plural markers -s and -es. In other words, they remain unchanged in the plural, especially the names of animals (listed above) and some nationalities (listed below)

Foreign Plurals

A number of loan words have preserved their original plural forms. Especially in scientific and technical language these words have not been thoroughly ‘naturalised’ and they have kept their original forms. The largest number by far of these foreign plurals is of Latin and Greek origin⁴.

Nouns of Latin origin

Singular -us

Bacillus
Stimulus
Radius
Genus

Plural – i

Bacilli
Stimuli
Radii
Genera

Plural of Compound Nouns

Compound nouns are nouns that are made up of two or more words. Sometimes, there is a space between the words in a compound noun. Sometimes there is a hyphen between the words join to form a single word. There are three ways that compound nouns form their plural:

- a) *Plural in the first element*
- b) *Plural in the last element and*
- c) *Plural in the both elements.*

Collective Nouns

Quirk defines the collective nouns as nouns that differ from other nouns in taking as pronoun co referents either singular it and relative which or plural they and relative who without change of number in the noun (the army: it/which-they/who; plural the armies: they-which). Consequently, the verb may be in the plural after a singular noun, though far less commonly in American English than in British English. (Quirk, 1985:317).

³ Jashar Kabashi (2000) *ibid.*

⁴ Jashar Kabashi (2000) *op. cit.*, pp.179-180

Conclusion

English nouns represent quite a problem, not only for us as EFL students, but also for English native speakers. Many careful writers insist that the words data and media are Latin plurals and must, therefore, be used as plural words. The singular Latin forms of these words, however, are seldom used: datum as a single piece of information or medium as a single means of communication. Many authorities nowadays approve sentences like “My data is lost”, and “The media is out to get the President”. Even textbooks in computer science are beginning to use “data” as a singular.

Another problem with English plurals is also the countable of English and Albanian nouns, because, as professor J. Kabashi has pointed out, “in many cases there is no obvious logical relationship between English and Albanian countable and non – countable class of nouns. In Albanian (and many other language) the class of the noun may be different.

Since there are generally accepted alternative spellings of count and un – count nouns, the only suitable advice one could give about the usage of this particular class of nouns, is: when in doubt, it is best to consult a dictionary. If a noun adds anything but a simple s to make the plural, then most dictionaries will show the special / alternative plural forms. For example, mango – mangos / mangoes, and a scarf – scarf’s scarves, etc. In closing, I can say that writing this paper has helped me greatly to become more conscious about the usage of nouns in general, and to understand in depth the plurality of English nouns.

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