

NOUN NUMBER, GENDER, CASE (Daniela Hăisan)

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Deeply thankful to Professors

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FOREWORD

This book is a descriptively oriented study of the basic aspects related to noun number, gender, and case. Its contents blend the empirical, the literary, the theoretical, the anecdotal, but also the odd fact or the linguistic “curiosity”. Key insights are provided by means of a survey of the literature on the matter, as well as by occasionally delving into the history of the English Language (*The Case of Curiosities* column).

Noun number has traditionally been considered a fundamental grammatical category (along gender and case). The morphosemantic theory offered here does not claim to present any new theory on the subject; it aims, instead, at shedding new light on certain aspects. Our debt to major authorities like Quirk *et al.* (1985), Crystal (1995, 2008, 2017), Biber *et al.* (1999), Downing & Locke (2006), but also to Berk (1999), Chiriacescu (2003), Falinski (2011), Manoliu (2012), Ciobanu (2012) runs so deep that it may at times surface unacknowledged. For *The Case of Curiosities*, we heavily relied on Wickens (1992), Curzan (2003)’s and Palin (2017)’s extremely entertaining books.

The book is organised into three main chapters, each composed of a number of sub- and sub-sub-chapters, and also contains 4 appendices. Chapters open with a bulleted list that lays out the main aspects dealt with, and end with a retrospective look at the chapter concerned (*Noun Number / Gender / Case in a Nutshell*). While being essentially a synthesis of the three (lexico-)grammatical categories mentioned in the title, the study resorts to a scalar organisation of the material rather than attempt to oversimplify things by presenting them as clear-cut oppositions (see the scale of countability, the scale of animacy etc.). Examples of English nouns contrasted with Romanian and other languages are kept to a minimum.

Last but not least, we deliberately opted for a reader-friendly layout; this accounts for the numerous tables, diagrams, bullets, shading, bold emphasis, even upper-case letters.

Notational and Typographical Conventions:

References for the examples extracted from various literary sources (Agatha Christie, James Finn Garner, Kazuo Ishiguro, Jerome K. Jerome, John Le Carré, Edgar Allan Poe, William Wordsworth etc.) or from online versions of newspapers appear as footnotes, so as not to obstruct the flow of the text. However, the few examples taken from already quoted grammar books follow the in-text citation rule.

AmE = American English

BrE = British English

ME = Middle English

OE = Old English

OED = Old English Dictionary

NOUN NUMBER

- **Prolific Plurals**
- **Regular / Irregular**
- **Noun Number: Plurality & Countability Theories**
 - The Strictly Structuralist Viewpoint
 - The Structural Semantics Viewpoint
 - The Psychomechanics Viewpoint
 - The Empirical / Theoretical Viewpoint
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- **Variable Nouns**
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 - Group Partitives: Animals, Birds, Insects
 - Binominal Noun Phrases
- **Noun Number in a Nutshell**
 - Semantic Problems Related to Plurality. A Review

PROLIFIC PLURALS – The Recipe

“Place the adjective before the noun it modifies” and “**add an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural**” are probably among the very first things an EFL student learns about the English language. For elementary students, as well as for many beginners, these simple, straightforward grammar rules prove invaluable for a while, but then, little by little, they come to the realization that they are far from being infallible. Exceptions to these rules soon add up and possibly overwhelm learners (or even very young native speakers of English who find themselves stuck in a language-learning plateau). Making sense of plurality may take some time, as suggested by David Crystal’s account:

When Suzie [David Crystal’s daughter] realized she could talk about lots of things just by “adding an -s”, as in *cats, dogs, and horses*, I can imagine her feeling that this grammar business was easy. Certainly she lost no time in applying that -s to all kinds of nouns – *cars, buses, dollies, prams, flowers* – and then, one day, *mouses*. *Me not like them mouses*, she said, when she was about two and a half.

Like everyone who learns a new language, she was working on the assumption that the rules work all the time. The grim reality is that no inflectional language works like that. There are always exceptions – irregular forms. They are the bane of every language learner’s existence. (Crystal, 2017: 41)

The fact of the matter is that both Suzie and whoever uses the “add an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural” rule are not (entirely) wrong. What they resort to is a recipe that happens to work for a majority rather than a minority of nouns. What’s more, this recipe has been and will (in)definitely be put into practice, as predicted by Otto Jespersen as far back as 1933:

To form the plural—that is, the **expression of more than one**—we have **old formulas** in the case of *men, feet, oxen* and a few other words, which are used so often in the plural that they are committed to memory at a very early age by each English-speaking child. But they are so irregular that they could not serve as patterns for new words.

On the other hand, we have an **s-ending** in innumerable old words (*kings, princes, bishops, days, hours* etc.), and this type is now **so universal** that it **can be freely applied to all words** except the few old irregular words. As soon as a new word comes into existence, no one hesitates about forming a plural in this way: *automobiles, kodaks, aeroplanes, hooligans, ions, stunts* etc. (Jespersen, 2006 [1933]: 3, bold emphasis mine)

REGULAR / IRREGULAR

When learning / teaching EFL, the “add an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural” rule is soon rephrased so as to accommodate a first adversative “but”, a first exception: the “old formulas” Jespersen talks about. A general distinction needs to be made between the so-called “regular” plural (*i.e.* the –S plural), and the so-called “irregular” plural (commonly cited examples, but by no means unique, are the ones above, listed by Jespersen: *men, feet, oxen*, along others like *women, teeth* or *children* – nouns too essential to be bypassed, even at the initial stage of language-learning). Our rule becomes then: “**add**

an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural, but never to nouns of Anglo-Saxon origin like *man, woman, child, goose, mouse etc.*”

Various (to all appearances anonymous) online texts, posted by English teachers or students, turn into account this “thorny” issue of grammar in a creative – while prescriptive – manner:

<i>The English Lesson¹</i>	
We'll begin with box, and the plural is boxes, But the plural of ox should be oxen, not oxes. Then one fowl is goose, but two are called geese, Yet the plural of moose should never be meese. You may find a lone mouse or a whole lot of mice, But the plural of house is houses, not hice. If the plural of man is always called men, Why shouldn't the plural of pan be pen?	The cow in the plural may be cows or kine, But the plural of vow is vows, not vine. And I speak of a foot, and you show me your feet, But I give a boot... would a pair be beet? If one is a tooth, and a whole set is teeth, Why shouldn't the plural of booth be beeth? If the singular is this, and the plural is these, Why shouldn't the plural of kiss be kese?
Then one may be that, and three be those, Yet the plural of hat would never be hose. We speak of a brother, and also of brethren, But though we say mother, we never say methren.	

13

Beware of similarities of singular forms, do not fall into the trap of hasty generalization, treat analogy with caution – seems to be the message of this otherwise entertaining poem.

Historically and philologically speaking, linguistic phenomena such as the *i*-mutation or the First / Great Vowel Shift deeply affected (Old, respectively Middle) English, which indirectly led to changes in plurals, too. The research behind *i*-**mutation** (*i.e.* the change of quality of Old English vowels between the time the Anglo-Saxons left the continent and the time Old English was first written down) actually leads to the conclusion, based on hundreds of examples, that this change was by no means random and that it is very possible to establish a pattern in the way it took place. In other words, what we term today (plural) *irregularity* used to be a matter of utter regularity:

In Germanic there were many words where a vowel in a stressed syllable was immediately followed by a high front vowel ([i]) or vowel-like sound ([j]) in the next syllable. The plural of **fōt* is thought to have been **fōtiz*, with the stress on *fō*. For some reason [...], the quality of this high front sound caused the preceding vowel to change (mutate). In the case of **fōt*, the *ō* became *ē*, which ultimately came to be pronounced [i:], as in modern *feet*. The *-iz* ending dropped away, for once the plural was being shown by the *e* vowel, it was unnecessary to have an ending as well. *Fēt* therefore emerged as **an irregular noun in English** – though **the process which gave rise to it was perfectly regular**, affecting hundreds of cases. (Crystal, 1995: 19, bold emphasis mine)

¹ <https://www.ling.upenn.edu/~beatrice/humor/english-lesson.html>, fragmentarily reproduced.

NOUN NUMBER: PLURALITY & COUNTABILITY THEORIES

THE STRICTLY STRUCTURALIST VIEWPOINT

As stated by Huddleston & Pullum (2002: 334), number is “the name of the system contrasting singular and plural.” From a strictly structuralist point of view, noun number supposes indeed an opposition, a minimal contrast. The minimal number contrast is between:

- the uninflected, **non-nmarked singular form** of nouns, usually identical with the lexical base (e.g. *cat*, *class*), which denotes “one”, and
- the inflected, morphologically **marked plural form** of nouns, usually an -(E)S ending (e.g. *cats*, *classes*), which denotes “more than one”.

However, “while the ability to pluralize is one of the distinguishing characteristics of nouns as a class, not all nouns have contrasting singular and plural forms.” (Berk, 1999: 78) Furthermore, as added by Huddleston & Pullum, before even considering this relative contrast between singular and plural, we need to carefully examine “the distinction between **count** and **non-count nouns**, since it interacts in important ways with the number system.” (*idem*, emphasis mine) But this count / non-count distinction does not end the story of noun number, since the language sometimes makes it possible to look at things from both standpoints simultaneously (*i.e.* count(able) and non-count(able)).

Plurality is not, as a result, a mere morphological notion, based on clear-cut divisions. A singular form does not necessarily have a singular meaning, and *plural* might not always mean “more than one”.

A noun, for example, may “look” singular, but refer to a multiplicity of entities (e.g. *the committee are agreed*), and nouns which “look” plural may refer to a single entity (e.g. *billiards*). (Crystal, 2008: 335)

The semantics of plurality is far from being straightforward and we need to draw on logic, philosophy, history, even (psycho)mechanics, in order to figure it out. Here are some other views on plurality and countability, from different angles (structural semantics, psychomechanics, empiricism, functionalism, descriptivism), which go beyond the strictly structuralist perspective.

THE STRUCTURAL SEMANTICS VIEWPOINT

In Structural Semantics, a typical method, which analyzes the components of a word meaning, is commonly called Componential Analysis. This kind of analysis implies examining words through structured sets of semantic features, which are usually given as present: [+ feature], absent: [– feature], or indifferent: [± feature]. When it comes to noun morphology, an important disjunctive marking is [+ **count(able)**] / [– **count(able)**]. Nouns like *cat*, *dog*, *tree*, *book* will then be marked as [+ countable], since they can be literally counted (*one cat*, *two cats* a.s.o.), while others, like *gold*, *flour* or *happiness*, will be marked as [– countable], since their occurrence in the plural is highly improbable. Many English nouns, however, can be used both countably and uncountably in different contexts and

different Noun Phrase environments², which means they should be marked as [**± countable**].

If “some animals are more equal than others”, then “some nouns are more countable than others”, too. Nouns have **countability preferences**: “some enter countable environments more readily than others. And not all nouns occur in just any kind of countability environments. A noun’s countability preference can be computed by checking its potential for occurrence in a definitive set of countability environments.” (Allan, 1980: 541) Keith Allan proposes the following test for countability: **if the head constituent of a noun phrase falls within the scope of a denominator** (i.e. determiners used to show either number or distribution), **it is countable**. See, for instance, *car* and *lightning* put to the test:

(1) one / a / each / every / either / three / many / several / both / a few / one / no / two / some / all *car(s)*

(2) *one / a / each / every / other / three / many / several / both / a few / one / no / two / some / all *lightning(s)* (*ibidem*, 542)

Car can be used with all the denominators in the series, therefore it is countable, whereas *lightning* does not, which makes it uncountable. On the other hand, a noun like *cake*³ scores for both teams:

a) *Hetty likes to gorge herself on cake*. [**– countable**]

b) *Whenever Hetty gobbles down a cake, her diet “starts tomorrow”*. [**+ countable**]

Our nouns can thus be considered as follows: *car* – mainly countable (although uncountable uses are possible: *The scrapyard is full of smashed car awaiting recycling*.), *lightning* – mainly uncountable, and *cake*, the most versatile of the three, can frequently be seen in both capacities in everyday language:

<i>car</i>	[+ countable]
<i>lightning</i>	[– countable]
<i>cake</i>	[± countable]

Allan (*op. cit.*) also distinguishes between the types of denominators found acceptable by certain nouns (another useful parameter for their countability). If *car* is found to be countable with all denominators, others (like *admiration*) are only compatible with *a(n)* and *one*, while a third category (including collective nouns like *cattle* or **pluralia tantum** – always in the plural – nouns like *electronics*), will only collocate with **fuzzy denominators** (i.e. denominators which do not state a precise, but rather a vague number, such as *(a) few*, *several*, *many*, *a dozen or so*, *about fifty* etc.).

² This is what makes Keith Allan consider that the count / non-count binary opposition is characteristic not of the nouns *per se*, but of the noun phrases which they head (Allan, 1980: 541).

³ In order to illustrate (un)countable *cake* and uncountable *car*, we are again dwelling on Allan’s examples (pp. 546-547).

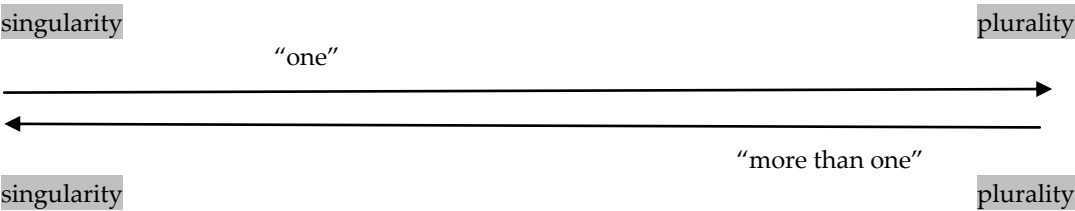
TYPE OF DENUMERATOR	HEAD NOUN IN THE DOMAIN OF THE DENUMERATOR		
	car	admiration	cattle
A. unit, <i>a(n), one</i>	+	+	-
F. fuzzy (plural) <i>e.g. several, about fifty</i>	+	-	+
O. all others	+	-	-

(Allan, 1980: 549)

THE PSYCHOMECHANICS VIEWPOINT

Founded by the French linguist Gustave Guillaume (1883-1960), Psychomechanics is a theory of language seen as a cognitive phenomenon. With its roots in comparative grammar, Guillaume’s basic psychomechanism is based on contrast, on the idea that everything in language is a matter of movement, on a dual movement of the mind towards the singular but also towards the universal. In other words, the mind is able to intercept its own processes at a given moment in order to obtain the particular sense needed as a sentence is being constructed.

Borrowing Guillaume’s terminology, Walter H. Hirtle offers, in his book *Number and Inner Space. A Study of Grammatical Number in English* (1982), a new theory of noun number which goes far beyond the “add an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural, but never to nouns of Anglo-Saxon origin like *man, woman, child, goose, mouse* etc.” rule. First of all, unlike other grammarians, he regards this issue as being entirely systematic and coherent. Then, where other linguists see **singular nouns** (unmarked, or bearing a zero morpheme) as statistically meaning “one”, what he actually sees (following Guillaume) is a **movement going from the notion of plurality to that of singularity**. By the same token, the classic plural morpheme (*i.e.* the –S ending), statistically meaning “more than one”, is seen by Hirtle as a **movement going from the notion of singularity to that of plurality**, more or less the way we tried to represent it graphically below:



THE EMPIRICAL / THEORETICAL VIEWPOINT

Inspired by Hirtle's theory of number in English nouns, Mark A. Wickens does his best in *Grammatical Number in English Nouns. An Empirical and Theoretical Account* (1992) to validate it by providing substantiating evidence for its principles. Wickens starts from the same premise as Hirtle, namely that the –S morpheme is not something arbitrary, but rather something semantically justified. He is only interested in nouns bearing the –S inflection and proceeds systematically, from ailment names to liquid names to names in –ing, then to names of binary objects and abstract nouns ending in –S, and puts order into numerical irregularities, exceptions or apparent anomalies.

Thus, Chapter 1 studies the –S nouns which designate **ailments** (i.e. illnesses, diseases, maladies, disorders, syndromes, physical complaints, moods, psychological states etc.) and is divided into two sections entitled *A Pluralism of Entities in Space* and *A Pluralism of Entities in Time* respectively. Pluralism in space is illustrated, among others, by means of *measles*, which “evokes **the impression of the numerous maculae or inclusions that characterize the disease.**” (Wickens, 1992: 38) and by *glands* (a diseased or inflamed condition of the glands, either the lymph or the salivary glands of the neck), which, according to Wickens, “takes the -s **because a multiplicity of glands are affected** and probably swollen.” (*ibidem*, 42). Pluralism in time is illustrated, among others, by *hiccups* (making much more sense in the plural than in the singular, since dictionaries define hiccups as a series of spasms, taking place one after another) and by *runs* (etymologically, “the frequent and hasty visits to the water-closet” (*ibidem*, 33-34)).

Chapter 2, *Liquid Names*, begins with a question:

At first sight, it is curious that the names of certain liquids bear the s-ending, because the usual impression arising from **a substance like a liquid** is one of **an unbroken, continuous stretch of something**. Consequently, most liquid names, that is, those ending in zero, are recognized as “mass” or “continue” nouns, e.g. *coffee, cream, ink, milk, oil, water, wine* and *whiskey*. How, then, is one to explain the s-inflection of *bitters* and *spirits*, of *faints* and *heads*, each of which designates a fluid derived in the manufacture of whiskey, of *jibbings*, which is applied to a certain kind of milk, and of almost seventy other substantives referring to a variety of liquids? (Wickens, 1992: 69, bold emphasis added)

Drippings vs. *dripping* makes a good starting point: both forms designate **the fat and juices from a roast or fowl**. However, says Wickens, the s-form is associated with **the hot liquid accumulating under dripping meat**, whereas **the zero noun with the accumulated liquid once it has cooled and solidified**. (Wickens, 1992: 70) *Drops*, on the other hand (as in *eyedrops* or *eardrops*), is indeed a liquid solution, an undivided mass, but one which needs to be divided up into smaller portions in order to be correctly used.

Findings, *sweepings* and *writings* are studied in Chapter 3, *Nouns in –ings*. Largely speaking, the –S words **suggest a result** of, or something **more concrete** than the meaning of the zero nouns (i.e. *findings* are the result of finding, *sweepings* the result of sweeping, and *writings* the result of writing.)

Binary objects like *pliers*, *trousers* or *goggles* are analysed in Chapter 4. First, Wickens divides these objects into three categories: **bifurcate garment names**, **binary tool names** and **binary optical devices**. The discussion of bifurcate garment names focuses on *briefs*, *panties*, *pants*, *shorts* and *trunks*, as garments with two sheaths or legs. While dealing with handactuated tool names (like *clippers*, *forceps*, *nutcrackers*, *pincers*, *pliers*, *scissors*, *shears*, *tongs*, *tweezers* etc.), Wickens also challenges the traditional two-equal-parts explanation behind this group of nouns, based on the fact that not all of them are made of two equal or parallel components, and some of them (e.g. *sugar* or *spaghetti tongs*) are actually only “one continuous stretch of malleable material fashioned into the shape of a V or U”. (*ibidem*, 101) The author convincingly manages to demonstrate that these binary tools are not constructionally, but functionally binary, which is what accounts for the –S ending. (see the subchapter on *Summation Plurals*).

The *Abstract* –S terms in Chapter 5 are organised into:

- compensation terms (e.g. *damages*, *wages*, *amends*, *thanks* etc.)
- terms of mutual relation (e.g. *friends*, as in *I am friends with him.*)
- terms of comparison (e.g. *the likes of*, *bettors*, *elders*, *odds*)
- terms of engagement (as in: *for funs*, *for keeps*).

The labels given to these categories function themselves as explanations for the plural form of the terms they include. An interesting point is made for *amends*:

Amends is a particularly enlightening case because it groups together ideas which may seem quite dissimilar at first glance (**compensation**, **improvement**, **revenge** and **debt**) but which, upon closer examination, are found to have a **common denominator: the achieving of a balance**, as it were, between two entities, the second of which necessarily presupposes the existence of the first. (Wickens, 1992: 153, bold emphasis added)

In the case of *thanks*, where other authors interpret plurality as a means of suggesting **intensity** (Erades, 1975: 13), Wickens sees a **duality** (“Whether it is a prayer, statement or gesture, *thanks* implies the favor or compliment in recognition of which it is rendered.”, *op. cit.*, 154) *Afters* (defined as the course which follows the main course of a meal) also involves a **binarity**, shows Wickens, in that *afters* clearly presupposes a course before.

This empirical and theoretical account of grammatical number provides enlightening observations on thorny plurality issues that we too often take for granted.

THE FUNCTIONALIST VIEWPOINT

For M. A. K. Halliday (*An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 2004), things are represented in English as **either**

- (a) **discrete**, and therefore **countable**, or
- (b) **continuous**, and therefore **uncountable**.

Halliday very soon admits, however, that the distinction is not quite as clear-cut as the a) vs. b) dichotomy suggests: **mass nouns** are often **itemized**, and hence also **pluralized**; the meaning is either “a kind of”, as in *I’ve found a new polish*, or “an amount of”, as in *three*

coffees please. (Halliday, 2004: 326) He further proposes a cline of **a cline of countability** rather than a mere opposition. This cline of countability will have at one end those nouns which construe things as **fully itemized**, and at the other end those which treat them as **totally unbounded**. Based on Halliday's examples, his cline of countability could be represented as follows:

fully itemized things	in-between	totally unbounded things
living beings	institutions	abstract entities
concrete objects	collectives	nominalized processes
		qualities

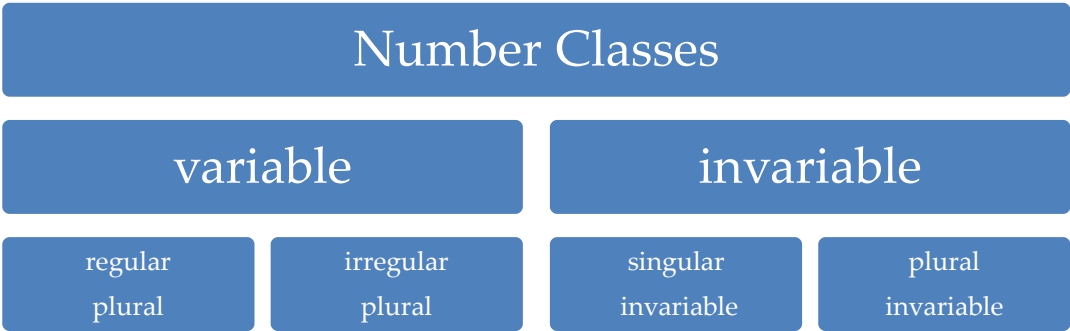
Angela Downing & Philip Locke's 2006 book (*English Grammar: A University Course*) being clearly indebted to Halliday's functionalism, we chose to label their viewpoint *functionalist*, too, while being aware of the various other sources they draw on. Downing & Locke focus on technical aspects of plurality, like the grammatical features of countability. We reproduce in the following table some of these features which can help us distinguish between count and non-count (mass) nouns:

GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF COUNT NOUNS	GRAMMATICAL FEATURES OF NON-COUNT (MASS) NOUNS
❑ the cardinal numerals <i>one, two, three</i> etc.: <i>four miles</i> ❑ other quantifiers which imply numerals (<i>both, a dozen</i> etc.): <i>both hands; a dozen eggs</i> ❑ the article <i>a(n)</i> taking a singular form: <i>I'm looking for a new job.</i> ❑ the determiners <i>each, every, either, neither</i>, which precede singular heads: <i>Each day is different.</i> <i>We go there every year.</i> ❑ the plural (including "zero") form of the noun preceded by a plural determiner (<i>many, several, few, these, those</i>): <i>many choices; few opportunities</i> <i>these aircraft; those sheep; several series</i> ❑ the plural with number contrast marked on the noun: <i>lion / lions; child / children;</i> <i>mouse / mice; stimulus / stimuli</i> ❑ plural number concord with verb or pronoun: <i>People want to be happy, don't they?</i>	❑ the singular form of the noun with zero determiner: <i>Water is necessary for animal and plant life.</i> ❑ the singular form of the noun preceded by <i>all</i>: <i>I say this in all sincerity.</i> <i>All equipment must be regularly inspected.</i> ❑ the singular form of the noun, quantified by <i>much, little, a little</i>: <i>There isn't much room in our apartment so we have little furniture.</i>
	NOMINAL GROUPS THAT ARE NOT MARKED FOR COUNTABILITY
	❑ The determiners <i>the, this, that, my, your, his, her, its, our, their</i> are neutral to the mass-count distinction and can be used with both types of reference: <i>this house, this bread;</i> <i>our friend, our friendship.</i>

(Downing & Locke, 2006: 406-407)

THE DESCRIPTIVE VIEWPOINT

After going through various theories regarding noun number, Quirk *et al.*'s well-established and widely used *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985) will constitute the actual starting point in and the basis of our approach. Quirk *et al.* regard this issue of plurality in terms of **variability**: according to them, nouns are either **invariable** or **variable**. Invariable nouns may be, in their turn, either **singular invariable** or **plural invariable**. As for the variable nouns, here, too, we can distinguish between **regular** and **irregular** plurals. A first, vertical, bird's-eye view of the number classes in point of form might look like this:



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Another, horizontal, more detailed view of things can be found in the following table which adapts one of Quirk *et al.*'s:

VARIABLE	regular plurals				boy	boys
	irregular plurals	VOICING + -s			leaf	leaves
		MUTATION			foot	feet
		-EN PLURAL			child	children
		ZERO			sheep	sheep
	foreign plurals		-us	→ -i	stimulus	stimuli
			-a	→ -ae	larva	larvae
			-um	→ -a	stratum	strata
			-ex, -ix	→ -ices	matrix	matrices
			-is	→ -es	thesis	theses
			-on	→ -a	criterion	criteria
			-eau	→ -eaux	tableau	tableaux
			-o	→ -i	tempo	tempi
			base	+ -im	cherub	cherubim

INVARIABLE	singular invariable	non-count nouns:	<i>gold, furniture</i>
		concrete	
		non-count nouns:	<i>music, homework</i>
		abstract	
		singular proper nouns	<i>Henry, the Thames</i>
	plural invariable	some nouns ending in –s	<i>news, linguistics</i>
		abstract adjective heads	<i>the beautiful, the supernatural</i>
		summation plurals	<i>scissors, jeans</i>
		other pluralia tantum in –s	<i>thanks, clothes</i>
		some plural proper nouns	<i>the Netherlands, the Alps</i>
		unmarked plural nouns	<i>cattle, people</i>
		personal adjective heads	<i>the rich, the poor</i>

(adapted from Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 298)

VARIABLE NOUNS

English **common nouns** are, in their vast majority, **countable**, and therefore **variable**. It is the form of their plural morpheme which divides them into **regular plurals** and **irregular plurals**, to be further differentiated in terms of morphographemic, morphophonemic and semantic aspects, as detailed in the following table:

REGULAR / IRREGULAR PLURAL OF NOUNS		
In English, the plural is more often than not realized by adding –S to the singular form of the noun (regular plural):	MAP – MAP <u>S</u> CAT – CAT <u>S</u> BOOK – BOOK <u>S</u> ⁴	CRAB – CRAB <u>S</u> PAD – PAD <u>S</u> LEG – LEG <u>S</u> PEN – PEN <u>S</u> BELL – BELL <u>S</u> CAR – CAR <u>S</u> TREE – TREE <u>S</u> ⁵

⁴ The {-s} plural morpheme is to be pronounced [S] after **voiceless consonants** (like P, T, K etc.), as in MAPS [mæps], CATS [kæts] or BOOKS [buks]. By the same token, **nouns ending in –TH** will end in –S (pronounced [S]) when in the plural, as the sound [θ] is also voiceless (e.g. BATH – BATHS; MOUTH – MOUTHS; PATH – PATHS).

However, many seemingly regular plural nouns display certain peculiarities, as in the following cases: 1. nouns ending in –F(E) (sometimes called <i>near-regular plurals</i>); in this case the plural inflection (usually but not always) turns into –VES (consonant shift; voicing):	CALF – CAL<u>VES</u> ELF – EL<u>VES</u> HALF – HAL<u>VES</u> KNIFE – KNIV<u>ES</u> LEAF – LEAV<u>ES</u> LIFE – LIV<u>ES</u>⁶ LOAF – LOAV<u>ES</u> SELF – SEL<u>VES</u> SHEAF – SHEAV<u>ES</u> SHELF – SHEL<u>VES</u> THIEF – THIEV<u>ES</u> WOLF – WOLV<u>ES</u> WIFE – WIV<u>ES</u>	DWARF – DWAR<u>VES</u> (also DWARF<u>S</u>) HOOF – HOOV<u>ES</u> (also HOOFS) SCARF – SCAR<u>VES</u> (also SCARF<u>S</u>) STAFF – STAV<u>ES</u> (also STAFF<u>S</u>) WHARF – WHAR<u>VES</u> (also WHARF<u>S</u>) BELIEF – BELIEF<u>S</u> CHIEF – CHIEF<u>S</u> CLIFF – CLIFF<u>S</u> CUFF – CUFF<u>S</u> FIFE – FIF<u>ES</u> GRIEF – GRIEF<u>S</u> GULF – GULF<u>S</u> PROOF – PROOF<u>S</u> REEF – REEF<u>S</u> ROOF – ROOF<u>S</u> SAFE – SAF<u>ES</u> SHERIFF – SHERIFF<u>S</u> STRIFE – STRIF<u>ES</u> TURF – TURF<u>S</u>
2. nouns ending in –O: a) when final –O is preceded by a consonant, the nouns will end in –ES when in the plural b) when –O is preceded by a vowel, the nouns will end in –S if used in the plural c) the same {-S} is applied to rare words or words imported (relatively) recently from other languages (mostly Italian; however, there are exceptions to this rule: TEMPO – TEMP<u>I</u>; LIBRETTO – LIBRETT<u>I</u> or LIBRETT<u>OS</u>; VIRTUOSO – VIRTUOS<u>I</u> or VIRTUOS<u>OS</u>; also, Italian plurals such as CONFETTI, GRAFFITI, MACARONI, RAVIOLI and SPAGHETTI are non-count in English and take singular verb concord)	a) ECHO – ECHO<u>ES</u> HERO – HERO<u>ES</u> NEGRO – NEGRO<u>ES</u> POTATO – POTATO<u>ES</u> TOMATO – TOMATO<u>ES</u> c) CANTO – CANTO<u>S</u> CASINO – CASINO<u>S</u> GHETTO – GHETTO<u>S</u> PIANO – PIANO<u>S</u> SOPRANO – SOPRANO<u>S</u> STUDIO – STUDIO<u>S</u>	b) EMBRYO – EMBRYO<u>S</u> KANGAROO – KANGAROO<u>S</u> RADIO – RADIO<u>S</u> TATTOO – TATTOO<u>S</u> d) AUTO – AUTO<u>S</u> HETERO – HETERO<u>S</u> KILO – KILO<u>S</u> MEMO – MEMO<u>S</u> PHOTO – PHOTO<u>S</u> PRO – PRO<u>S</u> SOLO – SOLO<u>S</u>

⁵ The {-s} plural morpheme is to be pronounced [Z] after **voiced consonants** (like B, D, G etc.), as in CRABS [kræbz], PADS [pædz], LEGS [legz], after **nasals**, as in PENS [penz], after **liquids**, as in BELLS [belz], after **consonant [R]**, as in CARS [ka:z], as well as after **vowels**, as in TREES [tri:z].

⁶ But: STILL-LIFE – STILL-LIFES.

d) the same {-S} is applied to abbreviated words: they get an -S for plural even if they end in <i>consonant</i> + -O e) the same {-S} is applied to ethnic nouns (e.g. ESKIMO – ESKIMOS) f) with some nouns, there are two alternate plural forms (either -S or -ES), both of which are commonly accepted as correct		VIDEO – VIDEO<u>S</u> ZOO – ZOO<u>S</u>
3. nouns ending in voiced or voiceless sibilants like /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/ or /dʒ/, which means, graphically speaking, an ending in -S(S), -X, -TS / -TZ, -Z(Z), -SH, -(T)CH, or -(D)GE: a) usually add linking -E before -S b) sometimes, the noun already contains a final -E (but it is a silent /e/, the final sound remaining /s/, /z/ or /dʒ/), in which case we only add a -S, as in: HORSE – HORSE<u>S</u>, SIZE – SIZE<u>S</u>, BRIDGE – BRIDGE<u>S</u>, or LANGUAGE – LANGUAGE<u>S</u> c) sometimes, the final sound in a noun changes when turned into the plural (e.g. HOUSE – HOUSE<u>S</u>, where final /s/, a voiceless fricative, becomes a voiced /z/: /haus/ vs. /hauziz/) d) in some cases, the final consonant needs to be doubled, as in: QUIZ – QUIZZ<u>ES</u>, or FEZ – FEZZ<u>ES</u>	f) ARCHIPELAGO – ARCHIPELAGO<u>ES</u> (also ARCHIPELAGO<u>S</u>) BRAVO – BRAVO<u>ES</u> (also BRAVO<u>S</u>) BUFFALO – BUFFALO<u>ES</u> (also BUFFALO<u>S</u>) CARGO – CARGO<u>ES</u> (also CARGO<u>S</u>) DOMINO – DOMINO<u>ES</u> (also DOMINO<u>S</u>) FRESCO – FRESCO<u>ES</u> (also FRESCO<u>S</u>) GROTTO – GROTTO<u>ES</u> (also GROTTO<u>S</u>) HALO – HALO<u>ES</u> (also HALO<u>S</u>) INNUENDO – INNUENDO<u>ES</u> (also INNUENDO<u>S</u>) MANIFESTO – MANIFESTO<u>ES</u> (also MANIFESTO<u>S</u>) MEMENTO – MEMENTO<u>ES</u> (also MEMENTO<u>S</u>) MOSQUITO – MOSQUITO<u>ES</u> (also MOSQUITO<u>S</u>) MOTTO – MOTTO<u>ES</u> (also MOTTO<u>S</u>) TORNADO – TORNADO<u>ES</u> (also TORNADO<u>S</u>) VOLCANO – VOLCANO<u>ES</u> (also VOLCANO<u>S</u>) ZERO – ZERO<u>ES</u> (also ZERO<u>S</u>) a) BOX – BOX<u>ES</u> BRUSH – BRUSH<u>ES</u> BUS – BUS<u>ES</u> BUZZ – BUZZ<u>ES</u> CLASS – CLASS<u>ES</u> WALTZ – WALTZ<u>ES</u> WATCH – WATCH<u>ES</u>	
4. nouns ending in Y: a) if preceded by a consonant, Y turns into I	a) BABY – BABI<u>ES</u>	b) BOY – BOY<u>S</u>

and –ES is added for plural b) if preceded by a vowel, Y gets a simple –S for plural EXCEPTIONS: a) proper nouns ending in –Y b) words of Latin origin like COLLOQUY or SOLILOQUY	CANDY – CAND <u>IES</u> COUNTRY – COUNTR <u>IES</u> FACTORY – FACTOR <u>IES</u> PASTRY – PASTR <u>IES</u>	DAY – DAY <u>S</u> KEY – KEY <u>S</u> PLAY – PLAY <u>S</u> WAY – WAY <u>S</u>
	a) THE KENNED <u>YS</u>	b) COLLOQUY – COLLOQU <u>IES</u> SOLILOQUY – SOLILOQU <u>IES</u>
5. nouns ending in –I make the plural in –S (with some notable exceptions: see ALKALI, CHILLI); TAXI, too, short for TAXIMETER, will only get an –S, just like the abbreviations ending in –O, see no. 2 above, p. 22)	ALIBI – ALIB <u>S</u> KHAKI – KHAK <u>IS</u> RABBI – RABB <u>IS</u> SKI – SK <u>IS</u>	ALKALI – ALKAL <u>IS</u> (also ALKAL <u>IES</u>) CHILLI – CHILL <u>IS</u> (also CHILL <u>IES</u>)
6. irregular (Anglo-Saxon) / apophonic plurals⁷:	BROTHER – BRETHR <u>EN</u> CHILD – CHILDREN OX – OX <u>EN</u> (-EN plurals)	FOOT – FEET GOOSE – GEESE ⁸ TOOTH – TEETH (mutation ⁹ or deflexion)
	MAN – M <u>EN</u> WOMAN – WOM <u>EN</u> ¹⁰	MOUSE – M <u>ICE</u> LOUSE – L <u>ICE</u>
7. foreign (Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Slavic) plurals: a) us > a ¹¹ ; a > ae ¹² ; um > a ¹³ ; also en > a (as in: STAMEN – STAMINA) b) us > ora (GENUS – GENERA; CORPUS –	ALUMN <u>US</u> – ALUMN <u>I</u> CACT <u>US</u> – CACT <u>I</u> (also CACTU <u>SES</u>) FOC <u>US</u> – FOC <u>I</u> (also FOCU <u>SES</u>)	masculine Latin nouns (us > a) ←

⁷ See also archaic / dialectal COW – KINE.

⁸ But: *Mother Gooses*; *You, silly geeses / louses*! Also, *gooses* is “fier de călcat pentru croitorie”.

⁹ Cf. “Compound nouns whose final element is a **mutational noun** usually pluralize accordingly. Compare: *gooseberry*, *-ies*, *footman-footmen*, *footmark(s)*, *footnote(s)*, *footpath(s)*, *footprint(s)*, *footstool(s)*, *footstep(s)*, *goose-step(s)* and *goosefoot(s)*⁹ vs *dormouse* – *dormice*, *forefoot* – *forefeet*.” (Manoliu, 2012: 175-176)

¹⁰ According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 306), these, too, along *lice* and *mice*, are illustrative of **mutation**.

¹¹ The following nouns, however, take only the regular plural: *bonus*, *chorus*, *circus*, *status*, *virus* (e.g. *bonuses*, *choruses* etc.)

¹² Exceptions to the rule: *agenda*, *arena*, *dilemma*, *diploma*, *drama*, *era* take a regular plural inflection (i.e. *agendas*, *arenas*, *dilemmas* etc.)

¹³ But: CHRYSANTHEMUM – CHRYSANTHEMUMS, DECORUM – DECORUMS, FORUM – FORUMS, GYMNASIUM – GYMNASIUMS, MILLENIUM – MILLENIUMS, STADIUM – STADIUMS. *Aquarium*, *curriculum*, *medium*, *memorandum*, *millenium*, *referendum*, *spectrum*, *stratum*, *symposium*, *ultimatum* have both plurals.

CORPORA) c) is > es (AXIS – AXES)¹⁴ d) ix, ex > ixes, ices (APPENDIX – APPENDIXES / APPENDICES; CODEX – CODICES; INDEX – INDEXES / INDICES) e) eau, ieu > eaux / eaus, ieux / ieus, pronounced /əuz/: (ADIEU – ADIEUX / ADIEUS; BUREAU – BUREAUX / BUREAUS; TABLEAU – TABLEAUX / TABLEAUS)	FUNGUS – FUNGI GENIUS – GENII¹⁵ LOCUS – LOCI OCTOPUS – OCTOPI (also OCTOPUSES) STIMULUS – STIMULI THESAURUS – THESAURI (also THESAURUSES)	
	ALGA – ALGAE ALUMNA – ALUMNAE ANTENNA – ANTENNAE¹⁶ FORMULA – FORMULAE¹⁷ VERTEBRA – VERTEBRAE (also VEERTEBRAS)	feminine Latin nouns (a > ae) ←
	BACTERIUM – BACTERIA DATUM – DATA MEDIUM – MEDIA	neuter Latin nouns (um > a) ←
	ANALYSIS – ANALYSES BASIS – BASES CRISIS – CRISES DIAGNOSIS – DIAGNOSES ELLIPSIS – ELLIPSES GENESIS – GENESES EMPHASIS – EMPHASES NEMESIS – NEMESES OASIS – OASES SYNOPSIS – SYNOPSES	THESIS – THESES (also: SYNTHESIS, ANTITHESIS, PARENTHESIS, HYPOTHESIS)
	DOGMA – DOGMATA (also DOGMAS)	AUTOMATON / AUTOMATA

¹⁴ But: ACROPOLIS – ACROPOLEIS, and METROPOLIS – METROPOLISES.

¹⁵ GENIUSES is also possible: GENIUSES means “men of genius,” but GENII – “spirits.”

¹⁶ Antennas is a generally accepted term, too, especially when used in non-technical contexts or in electronics, whereas antennae is preferred in biology.

¹⁷ Formulas is a generally accepted term, too, especially when used in non-technical contexts, formulae being preferred in mathematics, linguistics etc.

	SCHEMA – SHEMATA STIGMA – STIGMATA	CRITERION – CRITERIA GANGLION – GANGLIA (also GANGLIONS in AmE) PHENOMENON – PHENOMENA TAXON – TAXA
	CHERUB – CHERUBIM SERAPH – SERAPHIM KIBBUTZ – KIBBUTZIM	KOBZAR – KOBZARI OBLAST – OBLASTI
7. <u>zero plural / zero inflection nouns keep the same form for both singular and plural:</u>	BASS – BASS BISON – BISON CARP – CARP COD – COD DEER – DEER MOOSE – MOOSE PIKE – PIKE PLAICE – PLAICE SALMON – SALMON SHEEP – SHEEP SHELLFISH – SHELLFISH SHRIMP – SHRIMP SQUID – SQUID SWINE – SWINE TROUT – TROUT	SERIES – SERIES SPECIES – SPECIES MEANS – MEANS
		AIRCRAFT – AIRCRAFT WATERCRAFT – WATERCRAFT
		CHEROKEE – CHEROKEE SIOUX – SIOUX

Our rule “add an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural” needs to be rephrased as “the **general rule for variable nouns** involves **adding an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural**, with **seven major exceptions**.”

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Pluralsy and Foreign Plurals
As a sort of interlude between plural forms of single nouns and plural forms of compound nouns, here’s a fragment of a poem satirizing foreign plurals published in the <i>Punch</i> magazine in its issue of 19 March 1924 and cited in by Crystal (2017: 172-173): “Though we do not recommend a Change of plural for ‘agenda’. And we always understand a Careful list of ‘memoranda’;

Though we can't eliminate a
Careless publisher's '*errata*',
May the man who says '*gymnasia*'
Be afflicted with aphasia!
If we do not check this mania
We shall cultivate '*gerania*',
For the gardener, though he delves,
Knows more Latin than ourselves.
We shall see him planting '*gea*'
In the gardens of '*musea*',
Also '*scillae*' in the '*loci*'
Of '*narcissi*' and of '*croci*'.
[...] Now, if this is not abated,
With the quite uneducated
Every '*us*' will turn to '*i*',
'*Omnibus*' to '*omnibi*'."

A few special cases need to be dealt with next: the plural of **compound nouns**, of **abbreviations**, of **numbers**, of **proper nouns** and of **forms of address**.

PLURAL OF COMPOUND NOUNS	
1. when both components of a compound are nouns , the plural suffix is added to the second term:	CLASSROOM – CLASSROOMS HORSE RACE – HORSE RACES FELLOW-TRAVELLER – FELLOW-TRAVELLERS
2. when only one of the components is a noun, or in compound nouns formed with verb + <i>er</i> and an adverb , the noun component takes the plural suffix:	LOOKER-ON – LOOKERS-ON PASSER-BY – PASSERS-BY
3. in words with a noun and a prepositional phrase , the headword is the one taking the plural suffix:	MOTHER-IN-LAW – MOTHERS-IN-LAW ATTORNEY-AT-LAW – ATTORNEYS-AT-LAW EDITOR-IN-CHIEF – EDITORS-IN-CHIEF MAN-OF-WAR – MEN-OF-WAR COAT-OF-ARMS – COATS-OF-ARMS
4. when the first component is either MAN- or WOMAN- , both are made plural ¹⁸ :	MAN SINGER – MEN SINGERS MAN-CHILD – MEN-CHILDREN WOMAN DOCTOR – WOMEN DOCTORS GENTLEMAN FARMER – GENTLEMEN FARMERS
5. in the Noun + Adjective subclass of compounds there is considerable fluctuation:	MOTHER SUPERIORS / MOTHERS SUPERIOR POET LAUREATES / POETS LAUREATE SERGEANT-MAJORS / SERGEANTS MAJOR

¹⁸ However, if the compound is not appositional, the plural is in the last element (see WOMAN-HATER – WOMAN-HATERS and MAN-EATER – MAN-EATERS, examples from Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 313). On the other hand, LORDS-JUSTICES as a plural of LORD-JUSTICE is an exceptional example of both nouns in a compound being made plural, even though neither of them is MAN or WOMAN.

6. when the compound does not contain any noun , the plural is formed by adding S- to the last word ¹⁹ :	FORGET-ME-NOT – FORGET-ME-NOTS GROWN-UP – GROWN-UPS MERRY-GO-ROUND – MERRY-GO-ROUNDS GOOD-FOR-NOTHING – GOOD-FOR-NOTHINGS THE 50-YEAR-OLD – THE 50-YEAR-OLDS
7. when the first element is a GENITIVE , some uncertainty prevails as to the plural of the genitive:	DEBTOR'S / DEBTORS' PRISON MAN'S / MEN'S CLUB but: BIRD'S EYE VIEW
8. nouns ending in –FUL usually make their plural in the ordinary way:	ARMFUL – ARMFULS HANDFUL – HANDFULS SPOONFUL – SPOONFULS

To sum it up, as far as pluralization is concerned, the behaviour of compounds “largely depends on the **degree of fusion** of the constituting elements” (Duțescu-Coliban, 1986: 184, bold emphasis added).

Four main categories should be taken into account:

1. the boyfriends / girlfriends type	the plural mark is added at the end of the compound
2. the commanders-in-chief / editor-in-chief type	the plural mark is added to the most significant (<i>i.e.</i> the most informative) word in the compound
3. the mother superiors / mothers superior OR poet laureates / poets laureate type	the plural mark is flexible
4. the men-servants / women-singers type	the plural mark is added to both words in the compound

Another situation which requires attention is that of peripheral word-classes, which are not nouns, but act like nouns (*e.g.* substantivized numerals and other parts of speech), and also that of abbreviations. The main pluralization rules applicable to these special cases are presented as follows:

PLURAL OF FIGURES, LETTERS, ABBREVIATIONS, TITLES, NUMBERS	
1. figures, letters, signs, substantivized numerals and words that are not normally pluralized may also assume the plural suffix, generally with an apostrophe:	in the 1970's / 1970s He founded the company in <i>the</i> 20's / 20s. dot your <i>i's</i> and cross your <i>t's</i> all these <i>if's</i> the three <i>X's</i> all your <i>but's</i> the <i>dos</i> and <i>don'ts</i> the <i>pros</i> and <i>cons</i>

¹⁹ As emphasized by Chiriacescu (2003: 46).

2. the plural of abbreviations is marked by: a) doubling the final letter b) adding an –S, sometimes after a full stop or an apostrophe	a) p. (page) – pp. (pages); MS. (manuscript) – MSS. (manuscripts)	b) M.P. (Member of Parliament) – M.P.s. / MP's (Members of Parliament) Co. (Company) – Co.s (Companies) PhDs / Ph.D.s / PhD's hr (hour) – hrs (hours)
3. the plural of titles and forms of address means adding an –(E)S:	Mr. (Mister / Monsieur) – Messrs. (Misters / Messieurs) Miss – Misses Madam – Mesdames	
4. numerical terms such as <i>dozen, score, hundred, thousand, million</i> go by the following rules: a) when modified by a number, the plural is not inflected b) when not modified by a number, the plural takes –S as usual, but the resulting expression is not a number, but rather a vague or hyperbolic expression c) when the modifier is a vaguer expression of number, either pattern may be followed d) when the word does not necessarily express quantity, it is pluralized as an ordinary noun	a) one <i>hundred</i> two <i>million</i> three <i>score</i> four <i>dozen</i> eggs five <i>billion</i> people	b) <i>hundreds</i> of complaints <i>thousands</i> and <i>thousands</i> of people
	c) several <i>hundred</i> (people) / several <i>hundreds</i> (of people)	d) My phone number contains three <i>sixes</i> and two <i>eights</i>. Work in <i>threes</i>.

Proper nouns are typically singular invariables. However, some of them are plural invariable (e.g. *The Alps*), and some others behave regularly with respect to the marking of plural: it is the case of some nationality nouns, individual proper nouns and names of cities and inhabitants, which may pattern with plural verbs under specific circumstances. That is why we choose to deal with them in greater detail at this point, with special emphasis on the exceptions, rather than under the *Zero Plural* or the *Invariable Nouns* heading.

PLURAL OF PROPER NOUNS		
1. nationality nouns fall into several categories: a) most of them have a regular singular-plural contrast b) nationality nouns ending in –ES or –ISS have zero plurals, no matter if they are used generically or as countables	a) AUSTRIAN(S) AUSTRALIAN(S) BELGIAN(S) DANE(S) FINN(S) GERMAN(S)	b) THE SWISS THE CHINESE ONE / TWO SWISS / CHINESE / JAPANESE / LEBANESE /

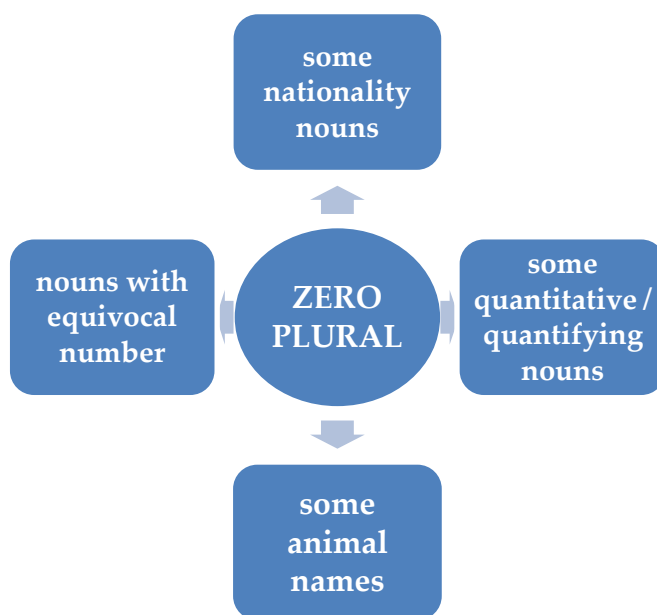
c) certain nationality and ethnic names are used with either a regular or a zero plural d) the singular and plural forms of the noun SIOUX differ only in pronunciation e) some nationality names are used interchangeably with the adjective denoting nationality f) some nationality names are compounds ending in –MAN or –WOMAN in the singular –MEN or –WOMEN in the plural	ISRAELI(S) PAKISTANI(S) POLE(S) ROMANIAN(S) INDIAN(S) SPANIARD(S) SWEDE(S) TURK(S)	MALTESE / PORTUGUESE / SUDANESE / VIETNAMESE
	c) APACHE(S) BEDOUIN(S) ESKIMO(S) NAVAHO(S)	d) THE SIOUX (sg.): /su:/ THE SIOUX (pl.): /su:z/
	e) THE DANES / THE DANISH THE POLES / THE POLISH THE SPANIARDS / THE SPANISH	f) A FRENCHMAN THE ENGLISHMEN vs. THE ENGLISH
<u>2. individual proper nouns denoting last names or dynasties</u> are regularly pluralized:	THE CLOONEYS THE FLINTSTONES THE KENNEDYS	THE TUDORS THE WINDSORS
<u>3. some foreign proper names, family names included</u> , end in the –S allomorph, whereas others have a zero plural:	THE BORGIAS	THE MEDICI THE GRACCHI
<u>4. abstract temporal proper names</u> can also get pluralized	<i>If each day is a gift, I'd like to know where to return Mondays.²⁰</i> <i>On special Sundays, when Mr. Kearney went with his family to the pro-cathedral, a little crowd of people would assemble after mass at the corner of Cathedral Street.</i> ²¹	
<u>5. names of city residents</u> observe two main patterns (as shown by Manoliu, 2012: 173-174): a) by derivation with suffix –ERS b) by derivation with suffix –IANS Note also: (THE) MUSCOVITS (people of Moscow)	a) (THE) BUCHARESTERS (THE) DUBLINERS (THE) LONDONERS (THE) NEW YORKERS	b) (THE) ATHENIANS (THE) BOSTONIANS (THE) PARISIANS (THE) EDINGBURGHIANS

²⁰ A quote by John Wagner.

²¹ James Joyce, *A Mother*, in *Dubliners*.

ZERO PLURALS

Nationality nouns make the transition towards zero plurals smoother, since, statistically, they are overwhelmingly zero plural nouns. Zero plural nouns are all characterized by **plural meaning and concord**, but **no overt plural ending**. In other words, we are talking about a **plural form of a count(able) noun** that is **identical to the singular form**. According to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 307), there are four main types of nouns with zero plural, as represented by our next diagram:



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As previously stated, the **nationality nouns** which have zero plurals are usually those ending in –ESE and –ISS, irrespective of their being used generically or as countables (e.g. *the Vietnamese* – “vietnamezii” / “vietnamezul” / “vietnameza”; *the Swiss* – “elvețienii” / “elvețianul” / “elvețian(c)a”).

Some **quantitative nouns** (like *dozen*, *hundred*, *thousand*, *million*, *billion*) have zero plural when premodified by another quantitative word (e.g. *three hundred*; *several million*). Regular plural is possible, however, when these quantitative nouns are followed by an *of*-phrase (e.g. *dozens of books*; (*many*) *thousands of people*; *thousands and thousands of people*; *hundreds of millions of stars*).

Other semantically specialized terms, measures, units of weight and currency units (examples from Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 309) generally used with zero plural are:

- ❑ *brace* (= 2): *five brace of pheasants*
- ❑ *gross* (= 12): *ten gross of nails*
- ❑ *head* (= 1): *400 head of cattle*
- ❑ *horsepower* / *HP*: *This engine has only fifty horsepower.*

- ❑ (kilo)hertz: Two **kilohertz** equals 2000 **hertz**.
- ❑ *quid* (pound, currency): You owe me five **quid**.
- ❑ *score* (=20): four **score** and ten years ago
- ❑ *stone* (= 20 pound, weight): He weighs 18 **stone**.
- ❑ *yen* (Japanese currency): one **yen**, 200 **yen**
- ❑ *yoke* (= 2): two **yoke** of oxen

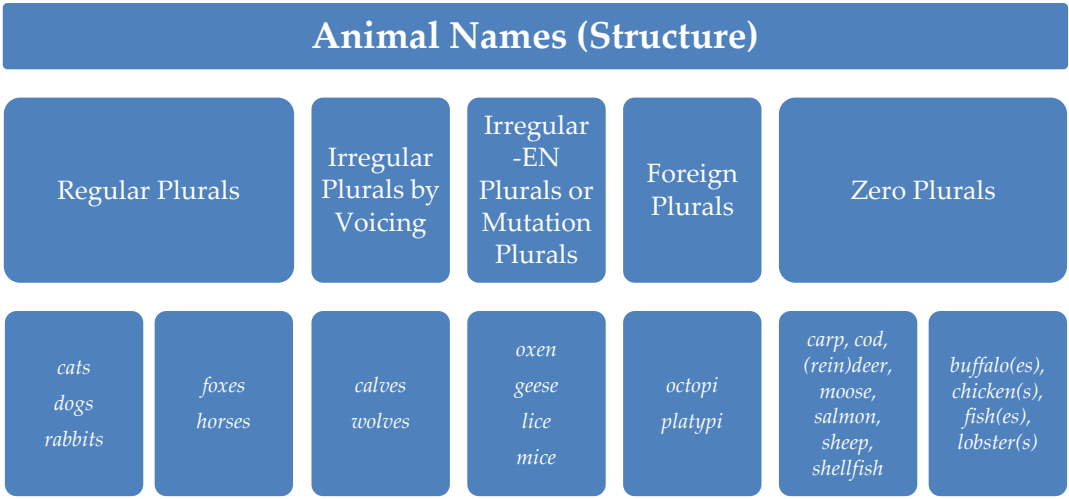
Since both animal names and nouns with equivocal number constitute each a broader topic, we will deal with them in separate sub-subchapters.

Zero Plurals: Animal Names

“How the animal world is conceptualized by speakers and represented by languages, and animal names in particular, is a fascinating field of research, but so far in the social sciences only etymologists and folkbiologists [...] have taken an interest in it.”
(Toupin, 2015: 97)

Plurality varies with animal names on a number of levels. By *animal names* we understand in this particular context a generic term incorporating any living organisms from mammals to birds, fish, reptiles etc.

Structurally speaking, many of them take the regular plural (e.g. *cats, dogs, eagles, foxes, hens, horses, pigs, rabbits* etc.). Some animal names take irregular plurals derived by voicing (*calf – calves; wolf – wolves*), while a handful of them have mutation or –EN plurals (*goose – geese; louse-lice; mouse – mice; ox – oxen*). Foreign plurals are also possible, in competition with regular plurals (e.g. *octopus – octopi* or *octopuses; platypus – platypi* or *platypuses*). Yet another important category is that of zero plurals, but in order to be able to discriminate between them, we need to have a bird’s-eye view of things.



Terminologically speaking, one and the same animal may be referred to by different names, depending on a number of factors, such as what aspect exactly we are focusing on when introducing them into the discourse: are we talking about the species, are we talking about a particular specimen of the species, are we talking about livestock or game animals, are we talking about the animal products in fact, and not so much about the animal *per se*? The following diagram summarizes the various terms we use depending on what we focus upon (a living animal, animal flesh seen as meat / food, or a game animal):

Animal Names (Semantics)		
living animal	flesh / food	game animal
cow ox / calf pig sheep deer hen	beef veal pork mutton venison chicken	game bison (wild) boar deer fowl
countable [-S plural / zero plural]	uncountable [invariable, mass nouns]	countable [zero plural / -S plural]

As Silvia Manoliu very eloquently puts it, “we shoot *deer* but eat *venison*, raise / keep *sheep* but eat *mutton* / *lamb*, raise / keep *cows* but eat *beef*, raise / keep *pigs* but eat *pork*”. (Manoliu, 2012: 179)

Semantically speaking, when animal names are used to refer to **material** (skin / leather / fur etc., as in a *fox* / *hare* / *rabbit* coat) or **food** (e.g. *We only eat duck, goose and lamb.*), they are treated as **uncounts**, but when they are regarded as **fellow creatures** (e.g. *Do you keep / raise ducks / geese / lambs?*) or as **game** (e.g. *They shot two bison / deer.*), they are typically **countable**. The –S inflection is more common when talking about living animals, with the exception of *sheep*, *deer*, *salmon*, *trout* etc., which are zero plural; viceversa, zero plural is more common, fishing and hunting jargon aside, when talking about game animals, although –S plural is also possible (e.g. *The game had been exceedingly abundant, and in great variety – elk, buffalo, big-horn, mule-deer, bears, foxes, beaver etc., etc., with wild fowl innumerable.*²²).

²² E. A. Poe, *The Journal of Julius Rodman*.

Animal names make up the most numerous (over 80) subcategory of zero plurals (as compared to much fewer quantifying nouns or nouns with equivocal number, for instance). However, many of them, as already seen, can take the regular –S plural inflection. In other words, “**zero plural in these nouns is an option** that speakers can go for, not a rule.” (Toupin, 2015: 102)

When it comes to **flexibility in the choice of plural** (usually between regular plural and zero plural), it is important to keep in mind that **regular plural** “typically draws attention to the **individual specimens**”, whereas the **zero plural** refers to “the **animals as a group**”(Biber *et al.*, 1999: 288).

If this flexibility were to be graphically represented as a **cline** with regular plural at one end and zero plural at the other, then it would like this:

always regular plural	both regular & zero plural	often zero plural	always zero plural
<i>cow, eagle, monkey etc.</i>	<i>antelope(s), buffalo(es), chicken(s), crab(s), duck(s), eel(s), elk(s), fish(es), flounder(s), giraffe(s), herring(s), lobster(s), sardine(s), squirrel(s), stag(s), turtle(s), woodcock(s)</i>	<i>bison, quail, pike</i>	<i>carp, cod, deer, grouse, moose, plaice, reindeer, salmon, sheep, shellfish, swine</i>

A minimal context is vital in disambiguating the [+ Count], [– Count] or [+/- Count] of nouns like *chicken*, for instance, which can refer to the species, to a specimen of the species, or to food (see below examples from Manoliu, 2012: 179):

- (a) There were *ten / some /no / lots of / a brood of chickens* in the backyard.
- (b) There was *no chicken* in the backyard.
- (c) We’ll have *chicken* for dinner.

Another animal name like *swine* is almost always a zero plural, whether it is used figuratively (as in the first example below) or simply as a synonym of *pig(s)* (as in the second and the third example):

- (1) *You swine!* (as a word of abuse)
- (2) *But what about species that rely on smell for identification, like swine?*²³
- (3) *It seems I’m casting pearls before swine.*

Species-wise²⁴, apart from *sheep* and *swine*, most zero pural animal names belong to specific categories such as birds, fish and (long)horns:

²³ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2019/09/animal-intelligence-is-hard-to-measure-photo-gallery/>.

²⁴ Cf. Toupin (2015: 103).

- ❑ fowl (*duck, grouse, quail, woodcock*)
- ❑ fish(es) (*carp, cod, flounder, herring, pike, plaice, salmon, trout*)
- ❑ shellfish (*crab, shrimp*)
- ❑ cervids (*deer, elk, reindeer*)
- ❑ other ruminant mammals of the ox family (*antelope, bison*)

Whether game (*antelope, deer, woodcock*) or domesticated (*sheep, swine*), what they have in common is their edible quality.

According to Fabienne Toupin, animal names resisted the powerful tide of plural regularisation in Middle English because

...the PDE [Present-Day English] category of ZP [zero plural] animal names is **a reflection of the psychological salience of game animals in Anglo-Saxon culture**, originating not only in their being considered **a source of food**, but also in their being **the focus of ritual attitudes** [...]. Put differently, the marking of plural in these nouns is a linguistic trace of the long-standing cultural status of their referents as **a taboo-loaded category of animals**. (Toupin, 2015: 109, emphasis added)

Another possible explanation for their endurance lies in their non-native (sometimes unknown) etymologies (e.g. *grouse* – of unknown origin; *lynx* – from late Latin; *moose* – from native American Narragansett; *plaice* – of French origin; *walrus* – a Dutch loanword etc. – a selection highlighted by Toupin, *op. cit.*, 100).

Walter H. Hirtle also deals with **zero / uninflected plurals** in his *Number and Inner Space. A Study of Grammatical Number in English* (1982). In a passage he famously quotes, **animals forming a herd** that is directed toward an enclosure are spoken of as *buffalo*, while *buffaloes* is used whenever **some of the animals are singled out**:

Young men are usually sent out to collect and bring in the **buffalo** – a tedious task which requires great patience, for the herd must be started by slow degrees. [...] When the wind is aft it is most favourable, as they can direct the **buffalo** with great ease. [...] When he sees **buffaloes** approaching, he [the horse] moves slowly toward the pound, until they appear to follow him. [...] Many **buffaloes** break their legs and some their necks, in jumping into the pound, as the descent is generally six or eight feet and stumps are left standing there. (Jennes, 57-58, q. in Hirtle, 1982: 22-23)

So, according to Hirtle, zero / uninflected plurals are employed whenever the individuals are perceived as members of a species / herd / group (*salmon, buffalo, staff*), plurality being seen against a backdrop of unity (compare: *these trout*, an instance of **internal plural**, or of plurality within unity, and *these books*, an instance of **external plural**).

Going back to Gustave Guillaume's motion metaphor, if perceiving singularity actually supposes a movement direction from plurality to singularity, then "zero plural is obtained by holding up a movement toward the singular" (Hirtle, 1982: 20).

Zero Plurals: Nouns with Equivocal Number

Nouns with equivocal number are zero-plural nouns with invariable bases ending in –S (e.g. *means*, *series*, *species*)²⁵, which are treated as either singular or plural in meaning and pattern with both singular and plural determiners / verbs (e.g. *a means of transport* / *by all means*; *a series of unfortunate events* / *two series of real numbers*; *this species is endangered* / *these species are endangered*). Besides *means*, *series* and *species*, other common nouns with equivocal number can be seen in the following diagram:



- ❑ *barracks* ("baracă / barăci"; "cazarmă / cazărmi"): This is the (new) **barracks** / these are the (new) **barracks**.
- ❑ *crossroads* ("intersecție / intersecții"): This is a busy **crossroads**. These **croosroads** are busy.
- ❑ *gallows* ("spânzurătoare / spânzurători"): The chief of police ordered a **gallows** to be erected. **Gallows** humour is another term for dark humour. "To cheat the **gallows**" is to escape hanging though deserving it.
- ❑ (head)quarters ("sediu / sedii"): army **headquarters**; servants' **quarters**; sleeping **quarters**

²⁵ Cf. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 310), for whom *data*, *offspring* and *oats* also belong to the category of nouns with equivocal number. Biber *et al.* (1999: 299) include (air)cra^{ft} and dice among zero plurals, along *series* and *species*.

- ❑ *mews* (“grajd / grajduri / grajduri transformate în locuințe”): *Mews are nothing but a row of stables with living quarters above them. This mews is very fashionable.*
- ❑ *works* (“fabrică / fabrici”, old-fashioned; “lucrări”): *one / two large works; road works; civil engineering works.*

SINGULAR INVARIABLE NOUNS

We adopted Quirk *et al.* 1985’s take on number classes (variable / invariable) in full awareness that this can never be a clear-cut division. Given the many exceptions (*i.e.* the numerous nouns which may be shifted from one category to another), this distinction may look arbitrary; it proves, however, useful when it comes to getting a grasp on the way English conceptualizes noun number.

Singular invariable nouns, commonly referred to as *singularia tantum* nouns in traditional grammars, cover the following categories:

- ❑ non-count concrete nouns (*e.g. food, wood*)
- ❑ non-count abstract nouns (*e.g. beauty, duty*)
- ❑ singular proper nouns (*e.g. Finnigan, Michigan*)
- ❑ some nouns ending in –S (*e.g. mathematics, ethics*)
- ❑ abstract adjective heads (*e.g. the beautiful, the sublime*)

Technically, or **morphosyntactically speaking**, these types of nouns usually **resist pluralization**, which means:

- ❑ they will not pattern with plural verbs
- ❑ they will not combine with quantifiers such as *many* and *few*
- ❑ they will not be used with determiners such as *a*, *every* or *each*, or any other determiners which “presuppose a notion of countability” (Biber *et al.*, 1999: 243).

Semantically speaking, however, countability is equally important in determining the meaning of a noun. Singular invariables are typically seen as non-count or mass nouns. Thus, **the count nouns vs. non-count (or mass) nouns distinction** can be seen in the following terms:

Count(able) Nouns	Non- / Un-count(able) (or Mass) Nouns
❑ are nouns that denote “ individual countable entities ”. (Quirk <i>et al.</i> , 1985: 246)	❑ denote “ an undifferentiated mass or continuum ” (Quirk <i>et al.</i> , 1985: 246)
❑ are discrete , and therefore countable . (Halliday, 2004)	❑ are continuous , and therefore uncountable . (Halliday, 2004)
❑ present something as being manifested in discrete, bounded units that in principle can be counted . (Cruse, 2011: 273)	❑ present their referent as an unbounded mass , an undifferentiated “stuff” . (Cruse, 2011: 273).
Keywords Describing Count Nouns	Keywords Describing Mass Nouns
countable discrete bounded	uncountable continuous unbounded / undifferentiated

The widely used **term mass noun**, used in parallel with *uncount(able)* or *non-count noun*, is, according to Payne, “**a bit of a misnomer** because only some noncountable nouns refer to ‘masses,’ like *water, sand, air, wood*. However, there are several other semantic categories of nouns that also fall into the non-countable subclass (see the table below)”. (Payne, 2011: 115)

Some Groups of Nouns Normally Used in a Non-Countable Sense			
Concrete “Masses”	Concrete “Collections”	Abstract Nouns	Action Nominalizations
sand water air DNA compost cheese beer grass chocolate	jewelry furniture food lingerie architecture ²⁶ baggage lumber footware hardware	music sincerity love volleyball (game) architecture ²⁷ linguistics chess silence happiness	dancing running playing destruction robbery revival imitation laughter evacuation
Concrete		Abstract	

38 Payne’s classification is based on the concept behind mass nouns, and the last row we added to his table points to the implicit **concrete / abstract** distinction. Depending on the actual referent they point to, **concrete mass nouns** can be further subdivided into **liquids**, **food** and **natural elements**:

CONCRETE MASS NOUNS ²⁸		
CATEGORY	NOUNS	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1. Liquids	<i>beer, coffee, juice, milk, tea, water, wine</i> etc.	<i>I bought some milk for breakfast.</i>
2. Food (These can be solid, semifluid or granular.)	<i>beef, bread, butter, cheese, chocolate, food, honey, jam, meat, pasta, yogurt</i> etc. <i>flour, pepper, rice, salt, sugar</i> etc.	<i>Sea salt is a natural alternative to table salt. She advises me to reconsider bread as a staple food.</i>
3. Natural Elements (These include some terms relating to the weather – but not <i>weather</i> itself – and also to natural resources.)	<i>hail, ice, rain, snow</i> etc. <i>clay, coal, copper, gold, granite, iron, lead, oil, rubber, sand, silver, steel, tin, wood</i> etc.	<i>We didn’t have much snow or rain this year. The second little pig builds his house out of wood.</i>

²⁶ The product.
²⁷ The discipline.
²⁸ Loosely based on Steer & Carlisi (1998: 6).

Gill *et al.* (1998) go even further, and subclassify mass nouns into:

- ❑ the “Cheese” group (food and ingredients: *e.g. bread, butter, cheese, rice*)
- ❑ the “Beer” group (alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks: *e.g. beer, coffee, juice*)
- ❑ the “Silk” group (different sorts of fabric: *e.g. cotton, fur, leather, silk, wool*)
- ❑ the “Plastic” group (solid substances: *e.g. clay, plastic, metal, wood*)
- ❑ the “Lipstick” group (personal care products: *e.g. lipstick, scent, soap, toothpaste*)
- ❑ the “Cough Mixture” group (medications: *e.g. antiseptic, cough mixture, ointment*)
- ❑ the “Bleach” group (chemical substances: *e.g. bleach, detergent, repellent*)
- ❑ the “Acid” group (technical names for chemical substances: *e.g. acid, sulphate*)
- ❑ the “Fossil Fuel” group (kinds of fuel: *e.g. diesel, (fossil) fuel, oil*)
- ❑ the “Moss” group (simple forms of plant and fungus: *e.g. grass, moss, lichen*)
- ❑ the “Compost” group (substances added to the soil: *e.g. compost, manure*)
- ❑ the “Fluid” group (general terms for given substances: *e.g. concentrate, fluid, liquid*)
- ❑ the Nouns with Other Meanings group (a miscellaneous category, comprising nouns like: *poison, pollen, tobacco, wallpaper, wax*).

For further details and examples, see **Appendix # 1**.

From Anna Wierzbicka (1988)’s point of view, concrete mass nouns can be divided into certain fairly **coherent semantic categories**; at the same time, they are “**arbitrarily divisible**”. Take *water* and *chair*, for instance: water can be physically divided into any number of parts, and each of these parts will continue to be water, whereas a chair is no longer a chair if divided into parts. According to Wierzbicka (1988) and Berk (1999), non-count nouns that might be reasonably called *mass nouns* are only the ones that are arbitrarily divisible (*i.e. liquids, gases, substances composed of very small particles*, like salt and sand, but also **food**). As a matter of fact,

[f]oodstuffs represent an interesting subset of the “arbitrarily divisible” category. There are many cases in which **food on the hoof** or **on the vine** is a **count noun** while the same **food on the plate** is expressed by an **identical non-count noun**. I have *five pumpkins* and *two watermelons* in my garden but I am eating *some pumpkin* and *some watermelon*. Mary owns *three lambs* but she **had lamb** for dinner. Pumpkins, watermelons, and lambs are **discreet identifiable entities in nature**. However, **when they are cooked, they lose their discrete boundaries**. Furthermore, most of would never eat a whole pumpkin or a whole watermelon at one sitting, but we regularly consume entire peas, olives, and strawberries, all of which are count nouns, even when they appear on a plate. You may eat *four radishes* which are small and discrete, but you consume *some horse-radish*, because **the root from which it is made loses its boundaries when it is grown up**. (Berk, 1999: 79-80, bold emphasis added)

Besides foodstuffs, Wierzbicka also noted a second major non-count category that includes words like *furniture, crockery, linens, silverware, jewelry*. What is interesting here is that, except for *linens*, the **inclusive category is non-count**, but the **subcategories are count** nouns:

- **jewelry** – one ring, six bracelets, two necklaces
- **silverware**²⁹ – one fork, two spoons, six knives
- **linens** – two sheets, one table cloth, four towels
- **crockery** – twelve bowls, three plates, five cups

Lynn Berk (*op. cit.*) also points out that non-count nouns (the concrete ones, at least) are not exclusively singular invariables; on the contrary, a number of uncountables appear to be invariably plural (in that they always end in –S) – see **Appendix # 2**.

Abstract mass nouns, on the other hand, can be subdivided into three categories:

ABSTRACT NOUNS ³⁰		
CATEGORY	NOUNS	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
1. Concepts and ideas	<i>belief, chaos, charity, childhood, freedom, friendship, death, fun, growth, health, hope, life, loss, luck, luxury, music, progress, sleep</i>	<i>Some people take freedom for granted. ...to save the world from utter loss...</i> ³¹
2. Emotions	<i>anger, fear, joy, happiness, hate, love, sadness, sorrow</i>	<i>Both sadness and joy can cause a person to cry.</i>
3. Qualities and Traits	<i>arrogance, beauty, honesty, intelligence, maturity, poverty, patience, wealth</i>	<i>La familie, it is a strong tie, is it not? Sentiment, it takes the place of beauty.³² ...a liberal agenda addressing issues of race, wealth and opportunity.³³</i>

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It is easy for Romanian speakers learning English to understand **mass nouns** if they concentrate on the idea of **substance**, of **material** or **matter**, of **stuff things are made of**. After all, when we say:

- ❑ *Nu mai beau **cafea** de mult.* [I gave up coffee long ago.]
- ❑ *Se pare că **laptele** nu e chiar așa de bun pentru adulți.* [Milk is apparently not that good for adults.]
- ❑ *Ce alternative sunt la glazurarea cu **ou**?* [What alternatives are there to egg wash?]

we think of coffee, milk and egg as indivisible substances, too, as mass nouns.

²⁹ Not only *silverware*, but generally compounds with –ware (e.g. *chinaware, glassware, hardware, software*) and –wear (e.g. *footwear, headwear, nightwear, underwear*) are considered non-count.

³⁰ Loosely based on Steer & Carlisi (1998: 8).

³¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*.

³² Agatha Christie, *The King of Clubs*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

³³ "News Analysis: California's Legislature tackled big issues in 2019. Bigger fights might be coming," in *Los Angeles Times*, 16 Sep. 2019.

Statistically, mass nouns which are marked as plural and trigger plural agreement are extremely rare in Romanian (e.g. *câlți* [tow]; *cuișoare* [cloves]; *tărâțe* [bran]), but plenty of singular invariable nouns referring to various “substances”. However, when it comes to certain “**problem mass nouns**”, mistakes are lurking around the corner, because even when speaking English, we may still think of *money* or *advice* or *information* or *news* in Romanian terms, as being countable, and thus commit a concord or agreement error with the verb or a faulty pronoun reference.



All these nouns will pattern with a singular verb, and with *much* rather than *many*. And if all of them have an intrinsically plural meaning (either by convention or owing to historical accidents), then we need to use partitive phrases in order to point out that we are in fact talking about the singular (e.g. *a piece / word of advice*; *a round of applause*; *an article / item of furniture*; *a piece of news* etc.). Sometimes, phrases which indicate multitude or quality rather than partition may be used (as in *a mine of information*, in the example below):

- ❑ *Ah, by the way, **one word of advice**. Always sweep in the corners!*³⁴
- ❑ *Medical **equipment needs** to be sterilized before use.*
- ❑ *In short, the cost of **an article of furniture** has, at length, come to be, with us, nearly the sole test of its merit in a decorative point of view.*³⁵
- ❑ ***Jewelry** is like the perfect spice: **it** always complements what's already there.*³⁶

³⁴ Agatha Christie, *The Adventure of Johnnie Waverly*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

³⁵ E. A. Poe, *The Philosophy of Furniture*.

³⁶ Diane von Furstenberg.

- ❑ Too **much homework** is said to be counter-productive to learning; too **little** can lead to not enough practice.
- ❑ For some poeple, **housework includes** childcare, too.
- ❑ You are **a mine of information**, Hastings.³⁷
- ❑ His **knowledge** of Physics **is** much above that of his peers.
- ❑ She directed Mason to get out the **luggage** and put **it** in the cloakroom.³⁸
- ❑ Unless the **money is** paid by Tuesday evening, the letter goes to the Duke.³⁹
- ❑ The **news** went like wildfire round the ship.⁴⁰

Mind the differences between **English (mass)** and **Romanian (count)**:

English (mass)	Romanian (count)
advice	sfaturi
homework	teme acasă
housework	treburi casnice
information	informații
jewelry	bijuterii
knowledge	cunoștințe ⁴¹
luggage	bagaje
money	bani
news	știri

NOUNS WITH DUAL CLASS MEMBERSHIP

Many concrete or abstract mass nouns can be used with a countable meaning. “The language makes it possible to look upon some objects from the point of view of both count and noncount.” (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 247) These nouns make up a special category Quirk *et al.* like to call **nouns with dual class membership**. Halliday (2004: 326), too, talks about **mass nouns** being often **itemized**, and hence also **pluralized**. According to Falinski, “given the right context, **most nouns** will allow grammatical **reclassification**, especially in the direction **from count to mass**.” (2011: 33, bold emphasis added). This shift from one class to another (uasually from mass to count) is indeed possible in two basic ways (although sometimes there is no mark at all):

³⁷ Agatha Christie, *The Double Clue*, in *Poirot’s Early Cases*.
³⁸ Agatha Christie, *The Plymouth Express*, in *Poirot’s Early Cases*.
³⁹ Agatha Christie, *The Veiled Lady*, in *Poirot’s Early Cases*.
⁴⁰ Agatha Christie, *Problem at Sea*, in *Poirot’s Early Cases*.
⁴¹ As in “pricepere” or “competență”, not the counterpart of *acquaintances*.

- ❑ by **reclassification**:
 - a) pluralization (e.g. *I'd like two **coffees** / **beer** / **teas**.*)
 - b) use of determiners (e.g. *experience vs. **an** experience*)
- ❑ by **partition** / using partitive phrases:
 - a) quality partition (e.g. *a kind / sort / type of wine*)
 - b) quantity partition (e.g. *a drop / bottle / glass of wine*)
 - measure partition (e.g. *a litre (BrE) / a liter (AmE) of wine; a mile of cable; a foot of wire; an ounce of butter; a ton of coal*)

Nouns like *language* or *religion* may be considered both mass and count.

- ❑ *Rude **language** is absolutely forbidden in this class.* [mass]
- ❑ *He teaches English **Language** at this college.* [mass]
- ❑ *German is one of the most difficult **languages**.* [count]
- ❑ ***Religion** is a set of beliefs, dogmas and practices.* [mass]
- ❑ *Football is **a religion** for him.* [count]

As intimated by Quirk *et al.* (*ibidem*), more often than not, the meaning of the noun does not change dramatically when it changes the class, as in:

A: *Would you like **a cake**?* [count]

B: *No, I don't like **cake**.* [mass]

Sometimes there may be a notable difference in meaning between the two uses of the noun, as in:

*I want an evening **paper**.* ["newspaper": count]

*Wrap the parcel up in **brown paper**.* ["wrapping paper": mass]

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From Mass to Count / Countable Uncountables

Grammatical reclassification takes places, as already emphasized, especially from mass to count. Largely speaking, nouns are **uncountable** when they refer to **substance / matter / idea / flesh**, but they are **converted to countability** whenever they are used to refer to:

- ❑ **objects, containers** – or, in Downing & Locke's terms, "instances of the mass referent, conceptualised as conventional quantities of food or drink" and "eatable entities visualised as having a definite shape (e.g. *a cheese, a ham, a cake, a chicken, a fish*)" (2006: 409)
- ❑ **types / brands** or
- ❑ **concrete examples / things**.

UNCOUNTABLE / MASS	substance / matter / flesh	<i>I prefer tea to coffee.</i> <i>I hate cheese.</i> <i>In ancient times, they made their homes out of stone.</i> <i>She has red hair.</i> <i>She only eats beef and chicken.</i>
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Fish and *fruit*, normally mass nouns, can sometimes be used in the plural, as in the following contexts:

COUNTABLE	containers / conventional quantities of food or drink / eatable entities visualised as having a definite shape	No, I'd like two coffees , not two teas . A baked ham can make an elegant hot dinner, or be served cold for sandwiches. ⁴²
	kinds / types / brands	Brazilian coffees have a highly distinctive flavour. French cheeses are very popular. What cheeses do you serve?
	concrete examples / things	"To kill to birds with one stone " means to achieve two things in a single action. Customer: Waiter! There's a hair in my turtle-soup! Waiter: How about that! The turtle and the hare finally got together! One beef and two chickens ⁴³ , please.

Noun	Number Class	Meaning	Examples
<i>fish</i>	mass	flesh / species	I('d) like (some) fish . Fish is good for the brain. Fish are gill-bearing aquatic creatures. He is neither fish nor fowl.
	count	individuals / concrete examples	He owns a big collection of insects, fishes and birds. They made a huge effort to save the Danube fishes from extinction. Everybody knows he drinks like a fish . I felt like a fish out of water.
<i>fruit</i>	mass	food	Would you like some fruit for dessert?
	count	varieties of fruit / metaphorical meaning	He only likes citrus fruits and dried fruits . He unfortunately never got to reap the fruits of his labour. BUT: Their measure will soon start to bear fruit .

⁴² Carrie Coker Marrs, *Just Get a Ham*.

⁴³ According to Downing & Locke (2006: 409), in the context of restaurants or in-flight meals, even nouns such as *beef* and *chicken* may be interpreted as portions or choices, and countabilised.

When certain mass nouns are used with a countable meaning, they undergo a slight change of meaning, but they remain uncountable, even when used in the plural:

- ❑ *Pass me the **salt**, please.* [mass]
- ❑ *She sells Epsom **salts**, liver **salts**, bath **salts**, smelling **salts** etc.* [count]

With a noun like *salt*, “the meaning of the singular mass nouns includes the plural mass noun, but not vice versa”; the newly formed plural mass nouns are “semantically singular, but grammatically plural” (Ștefănescu, 1978: 87), in both form and concord.

Notable differences in meaning, however, can be seen in the count uses of nouns like *sand* or *wood*:

Noun	Number Class	Meaning	Examples
<i>sand</i>	mass	substance made of very small grains of rock	<i>I shook the sand out of my towel. He's tracing patterns in the sand with a stick.</i>
	count	an extensive area of sand (e.g. dunes or beach); sand in an hourglass; shifting sands	<i>Miles of golden sands lay before our eyes. The sands are running out. Like sands through the hourglass, so are the days of our lives.</i> ⁴⁴
<i>wood</i>	mass	the main substance of the trunk and branches of a tree / shrub	<i>I then saw that on a shelf behind the coal-bunker some logs of wood were piled; Poirot was dexterously taking them down one by one.</i> ⁴⁵
	count	forest	<i>Later that day, the Seven Towering Giants returned from a retreat in the woods, elaborately decked out in animal skins, feathers, and mud.</i> ⁴⁶ However, the singular is also possible: <i>There was once a young person named Red Riding Hood who lived with her mother on the edge of a large wood.</i> ⁴⁷

Types of material or fabric like *cotton*, *flannel* and *tweed* can be pluralized in order to denote types of clothes (e.g. *cottons* are clothes made of cotton; *flannels* are man's trousers made of flannel; *tweeds* designate a jacket and matching trousers or skirt made of tweed).

⁴⁴ Opening words of *Days of Our Lives*, an American NBC soap opera.

⁴⁵ Agatha Christie, *The Veiled Lady*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁴⁶ James Finn Garner, *Snow White*, in *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*.

⁴⁷ James Finn Garner, *Little Red Riding Hood*, in *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*.

Mass nouns like *snow* or *water* express a great quantity or intensity when reclassified (e.g. *the waters* of the earth; beware of fishing in muddy *waters*⁴⁸; Oh where are gone *the snows* of yore?⁴⁹).

Some **abstract nouns**, too, can be reclassified or **re-conceptualised** as **concrete instances of the mass meaning**:

ABSTRACT NOUNS: FROM MASS TO COUNT	
Mass	Count
Verbal abuse is punishable in accordance with the law.	This book is about the uses and abuses of power.
Business is business .	Theirs is a family business .
There is a group of six or seven people gathered just a little way behind me who have aroused my curiosity a little. ⁵⁰	The mantelpieces and windowsills are adorned with curiosities . A car like this is a curiosity nowadays .
They found their way across the kitchen without much difficulty and once more switched on the sitting-room light. ⁵¹	At the close of dinner, which from a professional viewpoint had been executed without any significant difficulties , his lordship rose to address his guests. ⁵²
Well, time passed, and the lady's innocence was established beyond doubt . ⁵³	I'm having doubts about his ability to carry out this project of that kind.
...one gravely risks uttering all manner of unsuitable things if one has not first acquired the necessary skill and experience . ⁵⁴	For it was then that I felt the first healthy flush of anticipation for the many interesting experiences I know these days ahead hold in store for me. ⁵⁵
Speak without fear , madame. Think what joy will be yours if we are able to prove your suspicions unfounded. ⁵⁶	I feel almost sure that your fears are unfounded, but we will see. ⁵⁷
Lots of people have complained about the noise .	Sudden noises are likely to scare her.
Silence in court!	After a long silence , he began to speak with some difficulty.
Quality sleep is extremely important.	She fell into a deep sleep .

⁴⁸ Notice, too, the use of the plural counterpart in Romanian: Nu mă simt deloc / tocmai în **apele mele**. OR Minte de îngheață **apele**.

⁴⁹ François Villon, *Ballade des dames du temps jadis* (translated by Florence Dujarric, retrieved from <http://www.projetbrassens.eclipse.co.uk/pages/transballade.html>).

⁵⁰ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

⁵¹ Agatha Christie, *The Third-Door Flat*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁵² Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

⁵³ Agatha Christie, *The Lost Mine*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁵⁴ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

⁵⁵ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

⁵⁶ Agatha Christie, *The Cornish Mystery*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁵⁷ Agatha Christie, *The Chocolate Box*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

<i>I'm running out of time.</i>	<i>How many times have you seen that film?</i> <i>It is just like old times.</i>
<i>Admitting you've made a mistake is a sign of strength, not weakness.</i>	<i>She admitted to a weakness for desserts.</i>

From Count to Mass / Uncountable Countables

Mass uses of inherently countable nouns are much less common than countable uses of mass nouns and mainly occur with reference to **food** (e.g. *cake, egg, lamb, pie, turkey*), **humans** (e.g. *man, woman, boy, girl*) and **human artefacts or institutions** (e.g. *car, house, school*), as well as some nouns denoting **building materials** (e.g. *rock, stone*).

Entities normally perceived as objects and grammatically coded as countable nouns can sometimes be **metonymically reconceptualised as substances** (e.g. meat connected to the animal – *chicken* used in order to point to the meat of a chicken – or abstract features connected with a particular object – *car* used in order to express the comfort or performance a car can offer).

Here are some situations which favour a non-count interpretation of inherently countable nouns:

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Noun	Number Class	Examples
<i>egg</i>	count	<i>I completely forgot to buy eggs.</i>
	mass	<i>You've got egg on your face / shirt.</i>
<i>school</i>	count	<i>There are three schools in my neighbourhood.</i>
	count	<i>My great-grandmother never went to school, but taught herself how to read and write.</i>

Jozef Falinski (2011: 87) provides a number of contexts in which *man* and *woman* may be interpreted as mass, not only as count. His interpretation of *mass* obviously has something related to collective, to generic *man / woman*:

Man is the descendant of the apes. [man as humanity]

Technological **man** is destroying his world. [humanity in the technological era]

The **man** normally does the gardening. [not the woman]

The modern **man** uses Calvin Klein. [obviously not all humanity]

Woman is the source of all evil, preachers used to say. [woman, as opposed to man]

It is (the) **woman's** lot to bear children. [woman, as opposed to man]

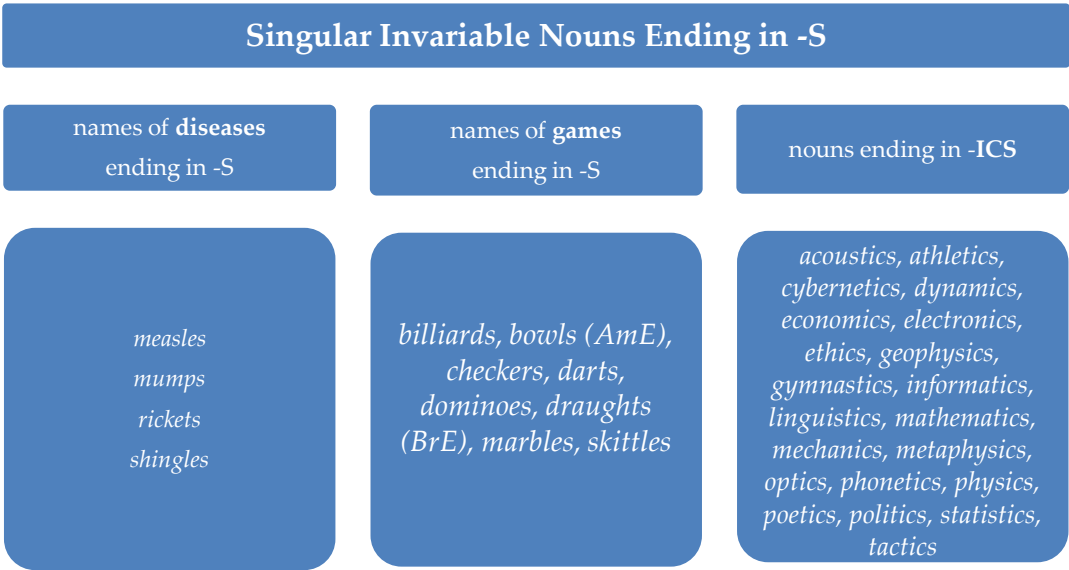
Countables like *boy* or *girl* are reclassified as mass in Jonathan Swift's satirical essay *A Modest Proposal*: "What would you like, sir? Boy or girl?" "I'd like *some boy*, please."

Other examples:

It's a lot of *car* for a very good price.
I'll see you in *class* on Monday.
His words are carved in *stone*.
You don't think there's too much *house*, do you?
Even proper nouns can be used with a "mass" meaning:
Hearing Shakespeare in his native tongue is a privilege.
You've been obviously watching too much James Bond.

SINGULAR INVARIABLE NOUNS ENDING IN -S

Singular invariable nouns ending in -S are plural form nouns which "actually behave like uncountable singular nouns" (Biber *et al.*, 1999: 290). Since they are looked upon as singular entities, they usually agree with singular verbs, irrespective of the -S inflection. There are three major categories of singular invariable nouns ending in -S:



THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Singular Invariables ending in -S. <i>Measles</i>
There is no consensus among linguists regarding <i>measles</i> . For instance, Jespersen (1965: 124) considers it a plural immaterial mass word. Christophersen & Sandved (1969: 107) classify <i>measles</i> and <i>mumps</i> as summation plurals. Keith Allan (1978: 167) counts <i>measles</i> , <i>shingles</i> and <i>mumps</i> , along <i>rabies</i> , among nouns

“which look plural, but aren’t”.

Quirk *et al.* (1985) regard *measles* as a **singular invariable noun**.

For Mark A. Wickens (1992: 38), “the -s of *measles* (disease) evokes **the impression of the numerous maculae or inclusions** that characterize the disease.”

In AmE, *measles* agrees with a plural verb also.

Nouns ending in -ICS and concord:	
singular concord	plural concord
when they denote sciences, subjects, academic disciplines, branches of knowledge, fields of study	when they denote the science / discipline put into practice, its application, or one’s knowledge of the subject
▪ <i>Acoustics is a branch of physics which deals with sounds and sound waves.</i>	▪ <i>The acoustics in this hall are not very good.</i>
▪ <i>Gymnastics is one of the few fields in which the Romanians outshine many others.</i>	▪ <i>The gymnastics are being held in the open.</i>
▪ <i>Politics is talk.</i>	▪ <i>Their politics have never been clear to us.</i>

ABSTRACT ADJECTIVE HEADS

The English country gentleman in pursuit of a fox:
the unspeakable in full pursuit of **the uneatable**.
 (Oscar Wilde)

Substantivised adjectives like *the beautiful*, *the best*, *the grotesque*, *the sublime*, *the supernatural*, *the unspeakable*, *the worst*, are usually called **abstract adjective heads**. They denote, as their name implies, **abstract**, therefore **singular** entities (unlike the very similar **personal adjective heads**, which relies on the same structure: DET. (THE) + ADJECTIVE, but which, denoting groups of people, imply **concrete**, **plural** entities – e.g. *the rich*, *the poor*, *the youth* etc.). Abstract adjective heads will naturally always pattern with singular verbs:

The best is yet to come.

*I did not as yet see that this little incident was of any use to me, yet I determined to investigate it as being out of **the ordinary**.*⁵⁸

*What did it really matter if a silly woman had committed adultery and why should her husband, face to face with **the sublime**, give it a thought?*⁵⁹

*The Duke is a rather peculiar character, jealous and suspicious and prone to believe **the worst**.*⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Agatha Christie, *The Chocolate Box*, in *Poirot’s Early Cases*.

⁵⁹ William Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil*.

PLURAL INVARIABLE NOUNS

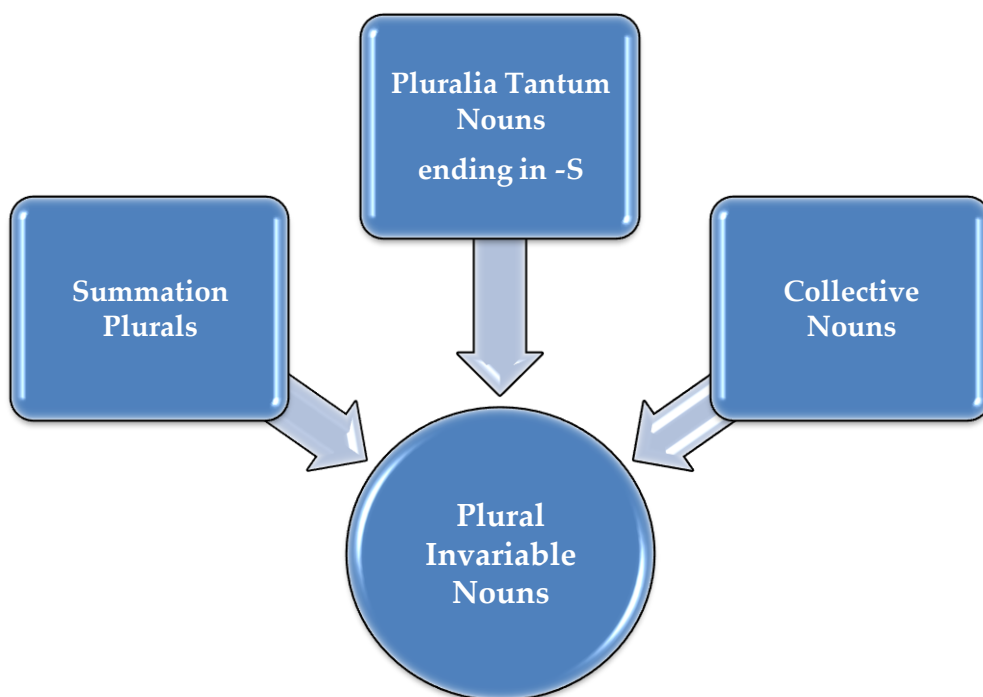
Plural invariable nouns, plural-only nouns (Biber *et al.*, 1999: 289) or **unmarked plural nouns** (Quirk *et al.*, 1985: 303), are mainly **plural uncountable nouns ending in -S** which typically pattern with a plural verb but which generally will not combine with numerals.

Gill *et al.* (1998: 14-21) subclassify plural invariables from a strictly semantic point of view into:

- ❑ the “Binoculars” group (tools and instruments: *e.g. binoculars, compasses, scissors*)
- ❑ the “Trousers” group (items of clothing: *e.g. pyjamas, shorts, suspenders, trousers*)
- ❑ the “High Heels” group (footwear: *e.g. flip-flops, galoshes, heels*)
- ❑ the “Clothes” group (clothing: *e.g. clothes, leathers, rags, whites*)
- ❑ the “People” group (groups of people: *e.g. ancients, clergy, people, personnel, youth*)
- ❑ the “Cattle” group (groups of animals: *e.g. cattle, fowl, poultry, stock, vermin*)
- ❑ the “Tonsils” group (parts of human / animal body: *e.g. bowels, guts, loins, tonsils*)
- ❑ the “Dreadlocks” group (hair: *e.g. (dread)locks, sideburns, whiskers*)
- ❑ the “Shakes” group (states / symptoms: *e.g. blues, cramps, hiccups, hysterics, nerves*)
- ❑ the “Troubles” group (misfortunes: *e.g. sufferings, troubles, woes*)
- ❑ the “Fries” group (food: *e.g. beans, chives, cold cuts, fries, greens, oats, pickles*)
- ❑ the “Foothills” group ((parts of) places: *e.g. quicksands, foothills, outskirts, tropics*)
- ❑ the “Business Hours” group (periods of time: *e.g. business / opening hours, holidays*)
- ❑ the “Riches” group (money / possessions: *e.g. alms, belongings, earnings, riches, royalties*)
- ❑ the “Costs” group (payments: *e.g. borrowings, costs, duties, expenses*)
- ❑ the “Congratulations” group (said / written things: *e.g. congratulations, thanks*)
- ❑ the “Thoughts” group (beliefs: *e.g. ethics, reflections, (second) thoughts, values*)
- ❑ the “Breakables” group (things of a given type: *e.g. breakables, electronics, valuables*)
- ❑ the “Basics” group (basic / detailed parts of sth.: *e.g. basics, essentials, rudiments*)
- ❑ the “Arts” group (fields of study: *e.g. arts, humanities, (literary / media) studies*)
- ❑ the “Block Capitals” group (forms of writing: *e.g. (block) capitals, italics*)
- ❑ the Nouns with Other Meanings group (a miscellaneous category, comprising nouns like: *acrobatics, arms, contents, feelings, manners, prospects, splendours, travels, wits*).

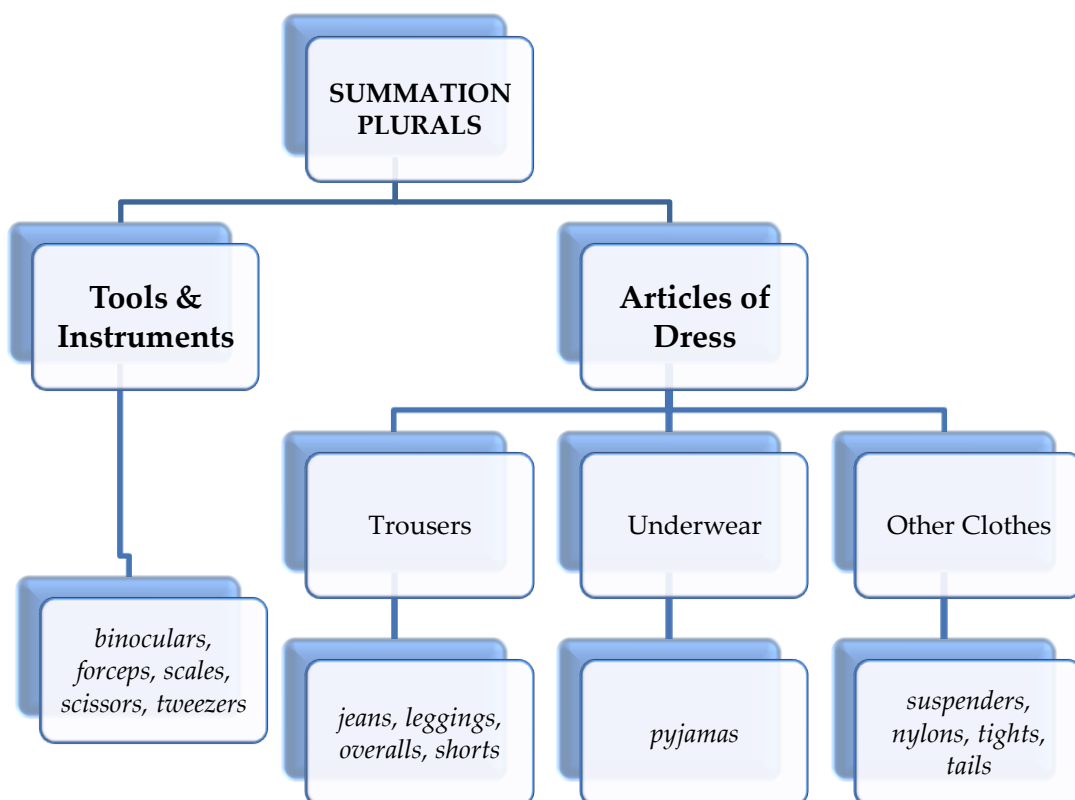
⁶⁰ Agatha Christie, *The Veiled Lady*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

Conceptually, one may distinguish several categories here, if these groups were “grouped” into larger categories (e.g. the “People” group and the “Cattle” group, because both of them share the idea of “collectivity”; the “Binoculars” group and the “Trousers” group, because the nouns in both categories can be used with “pair”, and so on). In doing so, we little by little end up obtaining three main subclasses of plural invariable nouns: **Collective Nouns** (i.e. the “People” / “Cattle” groups), **Summation Plural Nouns** (i.e. the “Binoculars” / “Trousers” groups), and **Pluralia Tantum Nouns ending in -S** (basically all the other groups presented above).



SUMMATION PLURALS

The common explanation for the category of **Summation Plurals** is that it is made up of nouns denoting **tools, instruments** and **articles of dress** consisting of **two identical parts joined together**. For Jespersen (1965 [1948]: 90-91), they are **composite objects**; Lynn Berk’s calls them **dual object plurals** (1999: 80), but, for the sake of terminological coherence, we adopt the terminology (i.e. *Summation Plurals*) preferred by Quirk *et al.* (1972, 1985).



Although there seems to be a consensus among grammarians as to the criterion behind this category (*i.e.* these nouns take the –S because their respective referents consist of **two equal or similar parts or halves that are joined**), Mark A. Wickens challenges this **the two-equal-parts explanation** by bringing two serious and perfectly commonsensical objections:

- ❑ first, numerous tongs, forceps, shears and pliers possess **more than two** obvious and often equal or parallel components (*e.g.* **lazy tongs** has a series of three pairs of equal parts; other tongs used in logging operations have four obvious components, others five or eight)
- ❑ second, not all tongs, tweezers, shears and scissors consist of two parallel or equal parts that are joined; on the contrary, various ice cube / salad / sugar / spaghetti tongs, are actually made up of only “ONE continuous stretch of malleable material fashioned into the shape of a V or U” (Wickens, 1992: 100).

Wickens also invokes Hirtle’s explanation (1982: 100), that the –S is due to an “**impression of space broken into separate stretches**”, only to dispel it as not always fitting the facts.

The impression of *two* that is uppermost in the minds of speakers and the fact the singulative phrase *a pair of* can be applied to absolutely any type of tool (whether made up of two, three, four or even five similar parts) are then put into contrast by Wickens. He thus reaches the conclusion that

...the essence of all these tools is a functional opposition which is made possible through movement and which permits seizing, holding, cutting or the like. **To have an opposition, there must be two parts functionally, even if the two parts are, existentially, the ends of the same piece of metal.** In these various devices, the two terms – the two more or less identical and complementary legs, limbs, branches or blades moving toward each other in opposite directions – cannot be perceived as occupying the same space; they must be perceived as occupying separate parcels of space. Hence, **the –S is due to a fact of function – an opposition –, not to a fact of construction,** although the latter is usually relevant. These tools are **functionally binary**; constructionally, they may be otherwise. (Wickens, 1992: 102, bold emphasis added)

The category of **tools and instruments** contains, besides *binoculars, forceps, scales, scissors, tweezers* (presented in the table above), nouns like *bellows* (“foale”), *callipers* (“şubler”), *clippers* (“forfecuță de unghii”), *pincers* (“pensetă”), *pliers* (“patent”), *shears* (“foarfecă / foarfere mare, de grădină”), *tongs* (“clește / clești”). All these nouns can be used with **a pair of** (e.g. *a pair of scissors*; *a pair of tweezers*) or **some** (e.g. *some scissors*; *some tweezers*); otherwise, they will agree with a **verb in the plural** (e.g. *How much are the scissors?*), with a notable exception, mentioned by Manoliu (2012: 199) – namely the tendency, especially with AmE speakers, to use **a singular verb** with **premodified nouns** (e.g. *How much are the scissors?* vs. *How much is / are the new scissors?*).

Articles of dress can be, as seen in the table above, subclassified into:

1. **trousers** (e.g. *breeches* (BrE) / *britches* (AmE), *chinos*, *corduroys*, *culottes*, *denims*, *dungarees*, *flannels*, *flares*, *jeans*, *knickers*, *leggings*, *overalls*, *pantaloon*s, *shorts*, *trousers* (BrE) / *pants* (AmE) etc.)
2. **underwear** (e.g. *bloomers*, *long johns*, *panties*, *pyjamas* (BrE) / *pajamas* (AmE), (*swimming*) *trunks*, *underpants*, *Y-fronts* etc.)
3. **other clothes** (e.g. *braces* (BrE) / *suspenders* (AmE), *nylons* / *stockings* / *tights*, *tails* etc.)

These, too, when premodified or when occur in premodification, may be used in the singular or as count nouns (e.g. *a garden shears*; *a new clippers*; *a suspender belt*; *a pyjama top*).

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Summation Plurals (I). <i>Pajamas</i>
“The common <i>pajamas</i> constitutes a problem case. When this word refers to a pair of loose, lightweight trousers of the type worn in the Near East, its -s can be seen to mark the same impression as in <i>trousers</i> . In later use, <i>pajamas</i> , along with several variations and abbreviated forms, such as <i>pj's</i> , came to designate a two-piece (jacket and loose trousers) or, more recently, it seems, a one-piece (combined top

and bottoms) form of nightdress.” (Wickens, 1992: 134)

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES:

Summation Plurals (II).

Panties

The word *panties* is somewhat curious. In addition to men’s trousers and shorts, it is a name for a woman’s undergarment covering the lower trunk and having either no legs at all or legs extending in some instances to just above the knee. What is not immediately explainable with any degree of certainty is the retention of the *s*-ending in the case of the individual legless garment. The presence of the *s*-ending cannot be explained from an ontological perspective. From an experiential standpoint, however, since there are two openings for inserting one’s legs, it would seem that the garment offers after all the possibility of opposing movement. (adapted from Wickens, 1992: 136)

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PLURALIA TANTUM

Pluralia tantum nouns ending in –S are invariable plural-form items. Many of them are used in set phrases; some of them can have **corresponding singular forms with a different meaning**. Pluralia tantum nouns are highlighted in bold as follows:

- ❑ *I began to take an interest in current / foreign **affairs**.*
- ❑ *She had liked Charles Townsend very much. [...] He played tennis and polo and golf. He kept racing ponies. He was always ready to do any one a good turn. He never let red tape interfere with him. He put on no **airs**.*⁶¹
- ❑ *Would you say that the currency problem in Europe would be made better or worse if there were to be an **arms** agreement between the French and the Bolsheviks?*⁶²
- ❑ *The room had evidently not been touched since the night before. The **ashes** were still in the grate, and the bridge-table was still in the centre of the room, with a dummy exposed, and the hands thrown down.*⁶³

⁶¹ William Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil*.

⁶² Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

⁶³ Agatha Christie, *The King of Clubs*, in *Poirot’s Early Cases*.

- ❑ *My grandmother's **ashes** were scattered all over this lake.*
- ❑ *The period was one of the darkest in the **annals** of European history.*
- ❑ *The Japanese American evacuees would be allowed to leave the camps with their personal **belongings**, twenty-five dollars, and train fare.⁶⁴*
- ❑ *He has **brains**, resource, power. He is the strong man that England needs to guide her through these difficult days of reconstruction.⁶⁵*
- ❑ ***Brains** are at a discount in the married state.⁶⁶*
- ❑ *He came in this morning in his usual style, which he appears to have founded on that of an American cyclone, and the first thing he did was to sweep my coffee-cup off the table with his tail, sending the **contents** full into the middle of my waistcoat.⁶⁷*
- ❑ *A table of **contents** is a list, usually found on a page before the start of a written work, of its chapter or section titles.*
- ❑ *His **credentials** as an archaeologist were beyond dispute.*
- ❑ *The policeman asked to see the driver's **credentials**.*
- ❑ *When you go through **customs**, they will probably inspect your luggage.*
- ❑ *The defendant shall pay **damages** for both loss or injury.*

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Pluralia Tantum. <i>Damages</i>
"<i>Damages</i> [...] poses a problem in that it does not mean 'a damage + a damage +...' One legal dictionary explains that 'damages are based on the idea of a loss to be compensated, a damage to be made good'. Briefly, <i>damage</i> is some kind of loss, <i>damages</i> compensation for loss, so it seems that the -S is linked to the idea of compensation. (Wickens, 1992: 149) The preexisting damage sustained (-) is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for subsequent compensation (+). Stated differently, such damage does not imply its ensuing compensation, while the converse is unavoidably true. This explains the distinction in semiology: <i>damages</i> calls into question both entities, between which there is a logically inevitable link, while <i>damage</i> involves the first one only." (Wickens, 1992: 151)

⁶⁴ Ann Howard Creel, *The Magic of Ordinary Days*.

⁶⁵ Agatha Christie, *The Submarine Plans*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁶⁶ Jerome K. Jerome, *On Dress and Deportment*, in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*.

⁶⁷ Jerome K. Jerome, *On Cats and Dogs*, in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*.

Briefly put, use the plural (*i.e. damages*) when you refer to a reciprocal relationship, going both ways, and the singular (*i.e. damage: What's the damage?*) for one way only.

- ❑ *It is a Middle Eastern custom to read your future in your coffee **dregs** / grounds.*
- ❑ *But if you desire to drain to the **dregs** the fullest cup of scorn and hatred that a fellow human creature can pour out for you, let a young mother hear you call dear baby "it."*
- ❑ *"Dexter" is the story of a serial killer who eliminates only the **dregs** of society.*
- ❑ *"Paid My **Dues**" is a song by American recording artist Anastacia.*
- ❑ *The company's previously fabulous **earnings** have suddenly dropped by 15 % in the first quarter.*
- ❑ *He was arrested for the murder of Wu Ling. A search of his **effects** was made, but no papers relating to the mine were discovered.⁶⁸*
- ❑ *My travelling **expenses** have not been reimbursed yet.*
- ❑ *Mr Baker Wood has paid over good money for stolen **goods**.⁶⁹*
- ❑ *The stars – as we term the myriad other worlds that are rushing down beside us through the eternal silence – were put into the **heavens** to make the sky look interesting for us at night; and the moon with its dark mysteries and ever-hidden face is an arrangement for us to flirt under.⁷⁰*
- ❑ *Good **heavens**! You startled me!*
- ❑ *Shall I do the **honours**?*
- ❑ *He received military **honours** for his service.*
- ❑ *He left Oxford with a first class **honours** degree.*
- ❑ *With such a background in **humanities**, it is no wonder she got the scholarship.*
- ❑ *I love making a meal from **leftovers**.*
- ❑ *As a man of **letters**, he could speak for hours on Shakespeare's tragedies.*
- ❑ *Curious, that in **lodgings** the rule of life is reversed. The higher you get up in the world the lower you come down in your **lodgings**.⁷¹*
- ❑ *In spite of his good **looks**, there was something repellent about the man.⁷²*
- ❑ *New **lyrics** have been written for his song.*
- ❑ *The General was a portly, ugly man, his **manners** were not refined, and his talk was conspicuous for an eagerness to apply military similes to a very wide variety of matters.⁷³*

⁶⁸ Agatha Christie, *The Lost Mine*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁶⁹ Agatha Christie, *Double Sin*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁷⁰ Jerome K. Jerome, *On Vanity and Vanities*, in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*.

⁷¹ Jerome K. Jerome, *On Furnished Apartments*, in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*.

⁷² Agatha Christie, *The Lemesurier Inheritance*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁷³ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

- ❑ *Minutes* are simply notes taken during a meeting, to remind you of what was discussed and agreed.
- ❑ We have noticed a serious decline in the public *morals*.
- ❑ *Obsequies* are funeral rites.
- ❑ During Bea's wedding reception, my aunts pointed out to me that now, more than ever, single girls had good *odds* of husband catching.⁷⁴

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Pluralia Tantum. <i>Odds</i>
"<i>Odds</i> [...] denotes 'Chances or balance of probability in favour of something happening or being the case' or [...] 'the probability that one thing is so rather than another or that one thing will happen rather than another'. Therefore, in the sentence <i>The odds are that it will rain today.</i>, it is a question of a pair of eventualities compared in the scales of probability: it may rain (+), or it may not rain (-). The likelihood of one eventuality may be greater than that of the other, or it may be the same on both sides of the scales, in which case the odds are even." (Wickens, 1992: 164)

- ❑ My grandmother's house was on the *outskirts* of the town.
- ❑ They were taking turns brushing each other off, taking great *pains* to remove every fleck of grass and dirt that had landed on their clothes.⁷⁵
- ❑ When I arrived, potato and apple *peelings* were scattered all over the kitchen.
- ❑ He then led me on an unnecessarily extensive tour of the *premises*.
- ❑ Please give her my *regards*, should you see her before Christmas.
- ❑ Have you read or watched "*The Remains of the Day*"?
- ❑ I calculated finally that my *savings* would be able to meet all the costs I might incur, and in addition, might stretch to the purchase of a new costume.⁷⁶
- ❑ She began to regain her *spirits*; she felt better and stronger.⁷⁷
- ❑ *Spirits* are not allowed to the under age.
- ❑ There was no ground-floor – its ground-floor belonged to a house in the next court, and the front door opened direct upon a flight of *stairs* leading down to the cellar.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Ann Howard Creel, *The Magic of Ordinary Days*.

⁷⁵ Ann Howard Creel, *The Magic of Ordinary Days*.

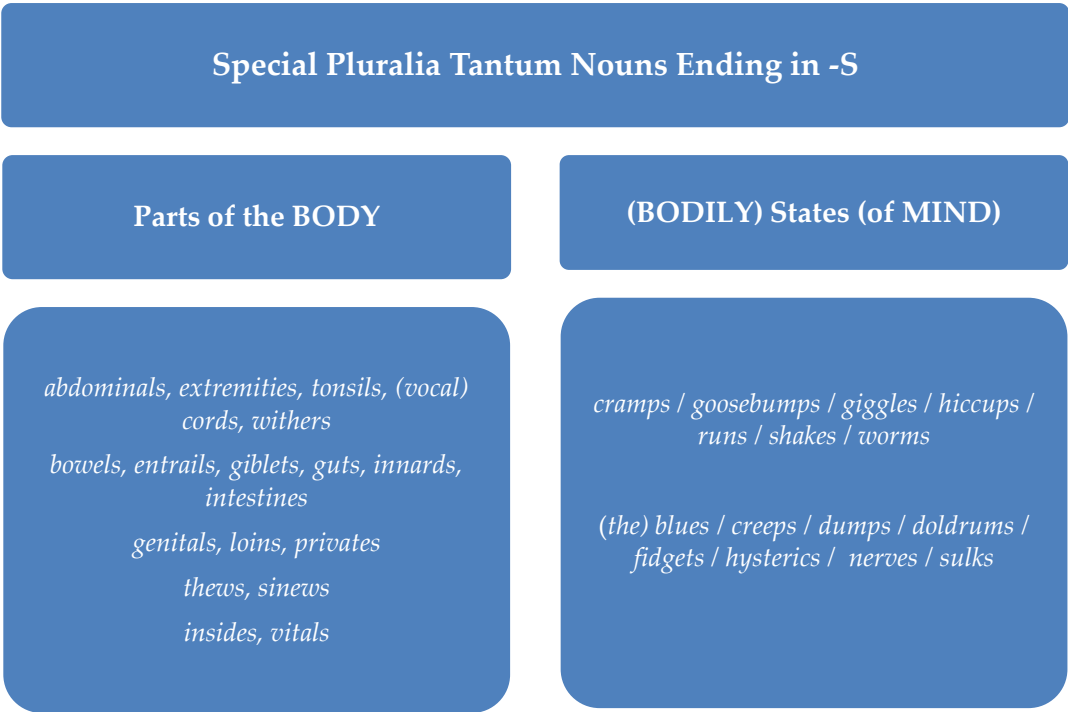
⁷⁶ Kazuo Ishiguro, *The Remains of the Day*.

⁷⁷ William Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil*.

⁷⁸ Jerome K. Jerome, *On Furnished Apartments*, in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*.

- ❑ *I stumbled down the porch **steps** and ran out into the storm as fast as my burdened legs could carry me.*⁷⁹
- ❑ *The town is taking **steps** to provide better street lights.*
- ❑ *She first went to **the Tropics** when she was five.*
- ❑ *The idea of leaving five hundred pounds' worth of **valuables** in a suitcase and going to lunch!*⁸⁰
- ❑ *The workers' **wages** have not increased yet.*
- ❑ *Of the passers-by, the younger ones wore jeans and sneakers, but their elders were still huddled in their **warms**.*⁸¹
- ❑ *They are subject to the **whims** and moods of their parents-in-law.*
- ❑ *Terror can deprive us of our **wits**.*

Two special subcategories of pluralia tantum nouns ending in -S are nouns denoting **parts of the body** and **states of mind** or **physical symptoms**, to which we might add a third seantically coherent group, that of **food**:



⁷⁹ Ann Howard Creel, *The Magic of Ordinary Days*.
⁸⁰ Agatha Christie, *Double Sin*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.
⁸¹ John Le Carré, *The Russia House*.

Special Pluralia Tantum Nouns
Ending in -S

Food Terms

*(baked) beans, chives, cold cuts,
(French) fries, (spring) greens, grits,
groceries, oats, pickles, provisions,
refreshments, seconds, wholegrains*

COLLECTIVE NOUNS

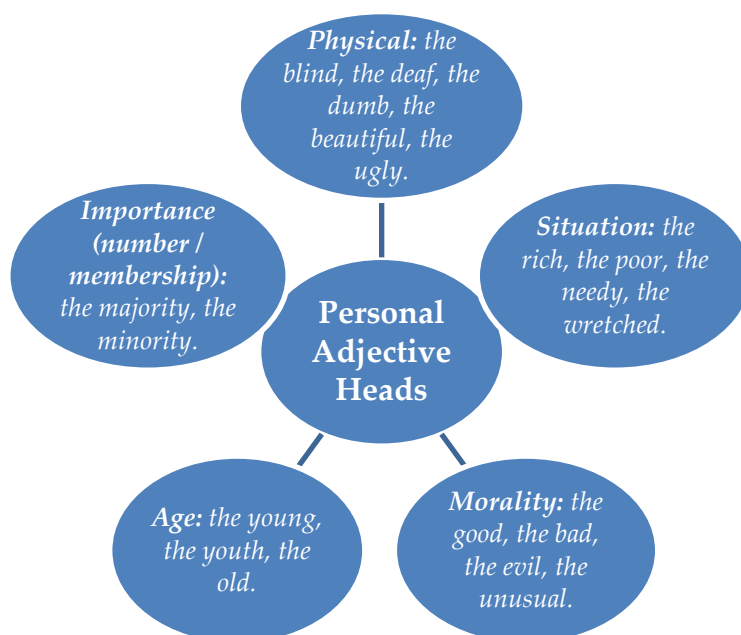
Collective nouns are so called because they refer to a collective entity with individual members (e.g. *army, band, class, clergy, faculty, gang, jury, team* etc.). **In terms of nominal types**, they can be classified into:

1. collective count nouns (e.g. *army, band, committee, couple, family, flock, group, party, team, troop* etc.)
2. collective uncount nouns or nouns mainly used in the singular (e.g. *array, artillery, bourgeoisie, cavalry, clergy, defence, infantry, livestock, majority, minority, nobility, opposition, personnel, police, press, public, staff* etc.)
3. collective proper nouns (e.g. *The Commons, the Olympic Games, the United States of America* etc.)
4. personal adjective heads (i.e. substantivised adjectives denoting groups of people: e.g. *the rich, the poor, the wounded, the youth*)

Personal adjective heads typically agree with a plural verb and do not usually vary for number.

Structurally, they can be **simple** (e.g. *the blind, the brave, the deaf, the dumb, the homeless, the undernourished*) or **complex** (e.g. *the ailing and the dying, the faint-hearted / the faint of heart, the stinking rich*).

Semantically, they can indicate physical, moral and other types of features the members of the denoted group happen to share:



60 In terms of criteria of reference, they can be divided into three large groups: **generic reference** collective nouns, **specific reference** collective nouns and **unique reference** collective nouns.

Collective Nouns		
Generic Reference	Specific Reference	Unique Reference
<i>the army, the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie, the clergy, the cavalry, the church, the faculty, the infantry, the laity, the marines, the media, the military, the nobility, the press, the public</i>	<i>assembly, audience, class, club, commission, committee, community, constabulary, council, crew, crowd, family, gang, group, government, jury, party, team</i>	<i>the BBC, the NATO, the Papacy, the UNO, the Vatican</i>

With the exception of unique reference collective nouns, which generally agree with a plural verb, collective nouns are marked by “special patterns with respect to subject-verb concord and co-referent pronouns.” (Biber *et al.*, 1999: 247), meaning that, because they refer to a collection of individual entities, they may be used with either a singular or a plural verb, depending on our perception of the collective noun or on our intentions as speakers. If the reference is to a **the group as a whole**, then a **singular verb** will be used; if, on the other hand, the speaker wishes to focus **the individual members of the group**, the verb will be in the **plural**. **Semantics outweighs syntax** in this particular case.

<i>A football team is made up of 11 players.</i>	[focus on the group as a set → singular verb]
<i>The team are angry about the result.</i>	[focus on the individual members → plural verb]

The following examples from Schwarzcild (1996: 172-173) illustrate the way the choice of a plural verb affects the grammar elsewhere in the sentence:

*The **choir** knelt and covered **their** faces.*

*The **committee** congratulated **themselves**.*

*Every debate **team**... gets disqualified because **they** attack each other instead of attacking **their** opponents.*

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Collective Nouns. <i>Family</i>
“Being a collective noun, <i>family</i> is different from the other people nouns (...). A collective noun refers to a group of people, and its uses can either focus on the group as a whole or stress the individuality of the members of the group. In British English, singular collective nouns can take either a singular or a plural verb. In the case of the plural verb the situation can be described as ‘notional’ concord instead of ‘grammatical’ concord (cf. Quirk <i>et al.</i>, 1985: 757f.).” (Mahlberg, 2005: 123)

The subclass of **unmarked plural nouns** (Quirk *et al.*, 1978: 166) / or **S-less plurals** (Biber *et al.*, 1999: 189, 289) includes collective nouns such as *cattle, people, police, poultry, staff, vermin*, which have a plural meaning, plural concord (all except *staff*) and can be used with plural reference quantifiers (e.g. *Cattle are the most common type of large domesticated ungulates. All the people have left before the end of the show. The police have finally caught the thief. The staff is / are disrupted by all these guests. Vermin are pests or nuisance animals that destroy crops.*).

(PSEUDO-)PARTITIVES

...a somewhat Coleridgey assertion,
with a **rivulet of deep meaning**
in a **meadow of words**.
(E. A. Poe, *The Philosophy of Furniture*)

Still I consoled myself with the reflection that
the tide of ill-luck would not run against me forever...
(E. A. Poe, *The Man That Was Used Up*)

Partitive constructions, as already emphasized in our discussion of mass nouns, can indicate partition, in respect of **quality** (e.g. *a kind of paper*) as well as in respect of **quantity** (e.g. *a piece of paper*). Emphasis must however be laid on the fact that, though undoubtedly very useful and very commonly used in **mass noun reclassification**, they are not necessarily restricted for this particular purpose; as a matter of fact, **both count and noncount nouns can enter partitive constructions** (i.e. constructions denoting a part of a whole). Partitives are usually count nouns (mostly in the singular, but plural is also possible) followed by an OF-phrase (e.g. *a heap of books*; *heaps of books*).

62 Mention must be made at this point that many linguists (e.g. Selkirk, 1977; Jackendoff, 1977; Koptjevskaya-Tamm, 2001 etc.) choose to differentiate between **proper partitives** (e.g. *a bottle of this wine*; *a glass of my favourite milk*; *a pile of Matthew's books*; *a kilogram of those apples*) and **pseudo-partitives** (e.g. *a bottle of wine*; *a glass of milk*; *a pile of books*; *a kilogram of apples*). Unlike proper partitives, which refer to a part or a subset of a definite superset, pseudo-partitives express an amount or quantity of some indefinite substance. This being said, we will be dealing in the next few pages with pseudo-partitives rather than partitives, but the two terms will be used interchangeably.

According to the type of the first noun, these constructions (quantity partitives especially) can be classified into several semantic categories⁸²:

- ❑ **measure-noun constructions** (e.g. *a litre of milk*; *a pint of beer*)
- ❑ **container-noun constructions** (e.g. *a cup of tea*; *a box of chocolates*)
- ❑ **part-noun constructions** (e.g. *a piece of cake*; *a slice of bread*)
- ❑ **collection-noun constructions** (for count nouns: e.g. *a group of boys*; *a herd of elephants*)
- ❑ **quantifier-noun constructions**
 - **abstract quantity** nouns (for count nouns: e.g. *a number of people*; *a large amount of apples*)
 - **quantums** (for mass nouns: e.g. *a lump of sugar*; *a drop of milk*)
 - **forms** (for mass and count nouns: e.g. *a pile of sand*; *a bouquet of roses*)

⁸² Cf. Keizer (2007: 109), for the last category.

If **quality partition** is usually expressed by *a kind / sort / type of*, **quantity partition**, on the other hand, can rely on a wide (though limited) variety of partitives. Some of them are very **general** (and can be used with many, if not most non-count nouns: *e.g. a piece of; an article of; an item of; a bit of*), others are more **specific** (and can be used with only a few nouns, sometimes one noun only: *e.g. a blade of grass; a speck of dust; a gaggle of geese*), and others yet make up a special category of **group / collective partitives**, which may be either more or less **general** or more or less **specific** (*e.g. a heap / heaps of books / money / snow; a flock / flocks of birds / sheep / tourists; a lot / lots of fun / money / people / space*).

The most widely used partitive expression is definitely *a piece of*, which works with both concrete and abstract nouns:

- ❑ *a piece of chalk / chocolate / coal / land / paper* [concrete]
- ❑ *a piece of advice / information / news / work* [abstract]

In terms of frequency, partitives of weight and measurement follow next, as they are quite flexible:

We can have *two pounds of anything that can be weighed* – salt, flour, oats, oregano, mercury etc. We can have *four gallons of anything that is liquid or suitably viscous* – water, ketchup, gas, oil, milk, molasses. (Berk, 1999: 78, bold emphasis mine)

On the other hand, some partitives are much more limited:

Only a few things are counted in *bars* (soap, gold, chocolate), *lumps* (sugar, coal), or *sticks* (gum, butter, dynamite). Only paper is counted in *reams* and only bread is counted in *loaves*. (*ibidem*, bold emphasis mine)

Among numerical quantifiers (typically *a hundred / thousand / million of* or *hundreds / thousands / millions of*), there are some border cases like *a dozen* (12), *a score* (20), *a pair / couple / brace* (2), *a gross* (144) etc. *Brace*, *span*, *yoke* and *gross* never take a plural morpheme (*e.g. five brace of pheasants; two span of horses; two yoke of oxen; two brace of partridges*).

PAUCAL VS. MULTAL PARTITIVES

Silvia Manoliu (2007, 2012) approaches partitives in terms of syntactic frames, meaning and collocates, as members of two notional paradigms: **the paucal partitive paradigm** and **the multal partitive paradigm**. Thus,

[w]hile the members of the paucal paradigm denote (very) low / little / infinitesimal values of the collocate (*a fleck / speck of [dust]*), the members of the multal paradigm denote values within a range from high to the highest of their collocate on the intensification cline. (Manoliu, 2012: 228-229)

The set of **paucal partitives** includes notably *a bit* and *a piece*, the most general in meaning and, consequently, the most prolific. Other, more specific paucal partitives are:

- ❑ *a ball of wool / thread / meat / snow*
- ❑ *a blade of grass*
- ❑ *a crumb of bread / cake / biscuits / comfort / hope / information / knowledge*

- ❑ a **dash** of cocoa / sauce / soda / wry humour
- ❑ a **dollop** of jam / mashed potatoes
- ❑ a **drop** of rain / sauce
- ❑ a **flake** of paint / snow
- ❑ a **flash** of light / hope / memory / wit / anger / inspiration
- ❑ a **fit** of anger
- ❑ a **fleck** of blood
- ❑ a **puff** of perfume
- ❑ a **scrap** of paper / work / evidence
- ❑ a **stick** of chalk / candy / celery

Some partitives in this set (**atom**, **iota**, **glimmer**, **scrap**, **shred**, **trace**) are frequently or exclusively used in negative contexts (e.g. *It won't make an **iota** of difference. There is not one **iota** of truth in what you're saying. There was not a **shred** of evidence available.*).

The members of the **multal paradigm** are based on nouns denoting multitude (e.g. **army**, **brood**, **bunch**, **bundle**, **cluster**, **collection**, **colony**, **constellation**, **crowd**, **crew**, **flock**, **gaggle**, **gang**, **heap**, **herd**, **hive**, **host**, **litter**, **nest**, **pack**, **pile**, **school**, **shoal**, **swarm** etc.).

Some partitives refer to **elements of nature** and **geographical features**, with an often **hyperbolic meaning**, as seen in the mottos above (*a rivulet of meaning; a meadow of words; a tide of ill-luck*) but also as in:

- ❑ a **flood** of news / people / refugees / tears
- ❑ an **ocean** of money / problems (e.g. *Lady Carrington had no sense and oceans of money.*⁸³)
- ❑ a **rain** of bullets
- ❑ a **sea** of words
- ❑ a **storm** of anger / applause / cheers / emotion / protest
- ❑ a **stream** / **torrent** of abuse / cars / insults / lies / losses / memories / people / questions / visitors / traffic

Plural partitives will always intensify the meaning of multitude (e.g. **heaps** of books / fun; **masses** of moss; **thousands** of ferns; **reams** of paper; **oodles**⁸⁴ of instructions; **slews** of legal issues). Some partitives may express too much of something, an excess (e.g. *a **surfeit***⁸⁵ *of gossip / sorrow / wine*).

These types of partitives, however, much like most intensifiers, can “connote divergent values of their collocates”, observes Manoliu (2012: 228). A diminisher like *a bit of* may sometimes be used to indicate a large quantity (e.g. *She's done a few bits of shopping.*), whereas a multal loads of may be used to indicate a very small amount of something (e.g. *He's done loads of work.*)

⁸³ Agatha Christie, *Problem at Sea*, in *Poirot's Early Cases*.

⁸⁴ Old-fashioned, informal term, usually plural only.

⁸⁵ Formal term.

CONTAINERS VS. SHAPE

Statistically, many partitive constructions denote **containers** (*bag, bottle, bag, barrel, jar, keg, packet, sack* etc.), but there are also some denoting **shape** (*column, curtain, wall*). As shown by the following table, containers may be used with both a concrete and a metaphorical meaning, whereas nouns denoting shape are more commonly used metaphorically:

CONTAINERS		SHAPE
Concrete Meaning	Metaphorical Meaning	Metaphorical Meaning
<i>a bag of popcorn</i>	<i>a bag of bones / time / tricks</i>	<i>a column of smoke</i>
<i>a jar of honey</i>	<i>a jar of knowledge</i>	<i>a curtain of mist</i>
<i>a barrel of beer</i>	<i>a barrel of fun / laughs</i>	<i>a wall of silence / secrecy</i>

CONTAINERS VS. AMOUNTS THEY CONTAIN

When nouns denoting containers (*e.g. basket, bucket, cup, plate*) and a few others which may act as receptacles (*e.g. arm, hand, hat, mouth, spoon*) undergo a subtle process of derivation by suffixation (namely, they are used with suffix *-ful*), they are closer to **measure-noun partitive constructions** (*e.g. an armful of flowers / books; a bucketful of milk / water; a handful of people / occasions; a mouthful of cheese / cream; a spoonful of medicine; Just a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down.*⁸⁶). In these particular instances, it is no longer the container that counts, but rather an estimate of the amount (of the substance or thing expressed by the noun following OF) the particular container can hold. Sometimes, such partitives will express a small, undefined number or quantity (*e.g. Only a handful of people attended the Saturday meeting.*). If premodified (as in *a good handful of fresh coriander* or *a couple of big handfuls of grated Cheddar*⁸⁷), the *-FUL* partitive will point to a great (still undefined) quantity. At other times, they may acquire a hyperbolic meaning (especially under pluralisation: *e.g. armfuls of books; basketfuls of cherries* etc.).

GROUP PARTITIVES: ANIMALS, BIRDS, INSECTS

A special category of group partitives may refer to **animals, birds or insects**, and sometimes to people, too (*e.g. a swarm of bees / protesters; an army of soldiers / ants / caterpillars / frogs*). Here, too, we have **general terms** (*e.g. bunch, flock or crowd*), and **specific terms**, denoting:

- ❑ the domicile of animals, birds or insects (*e.g. drift, drove, herd, rookery, rout*)
- ❑ birds on the ground or in flight (*e.g. bevy, covey, flight*)
- ❑ offspring of animals or birds (*e.g. brood of chickens; a litter of puppies; a nide of geese / pheasants*)

⁸⁶ A Mary Poppins song (1964).

⁸⁷ Jamie Oliver, *Jamie's Dinners* (2004: 101).

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Birds (I). A Dissimulation of Birds
"The verb <i>to dissimulate</i> means to pretend, or to conceal one's real feelings. The collective noun <i>dissimulation</i>, first referred to in the Egerton manuscript of about 1452, is applied particularly to flocks of small birds. It is said to derive from the habit many such birds have of distracting predators from the nest by their diverting behaviour or pretended injury." (Palin, 2017: ix, bold emphasis mine)

Here's a list of the most common group partitives for animals, birds and insects:

Group Partitives	
Animals	Birds
▪ <i>a caravan of antelopes</i> ▪ <i>a colony of bats / beavers / frogs / penguins</i> ▪ <i>a company of badgers / lions</i> ▪ <i>a congregation of crocodiles</i> ▪ <i>a drove of asses / cattle / oxen</i> ▪ <i>an earth of foxes</i> ▪ <i>a family of apes / beavers / gorillas</i> ▪ <i>a gam of whales</i> ▪ <i>a herd of bison / buffalo / cattle / deer / elephants / goats</i> ▪ <i>a labour of moles</i> ▪ <i>a nest of crocodiles / mice / rabbits</i> ▪ <i>a pack of coyotes / dogs / foxes / hounds / hyenas / wolves</i> ▪ <i>a parade of elephants</i> ▪ <i>a pod of whales</i> ▪ <i>a pride of lions</i> ▪ <i>a school / shoal of fish / whales</i> ▪ <i>a shrewdness of apes</i> ▪ <i>a sloth of bears</i> ▪ <i>a stable / stud of horses</i> ▪ <i>a tribe of zebras</i> ▪ <i>a trip of hares</i> ▪ <i>a troop of monkeys</i> ▪ <i>a warren of rabbits</i>	▪ <i>a bevy of larks / quails</i> ▪ <i>a congregation of eagles</i> ▪ <i>a covey of grouse / partridges</i> ▪ <i>a flight of birds</i> ▪ <i>a gaggle of geese</i> ▪ <i>a mob / murder of crows</i> ▪ <i>a murmuration of starlings</i> ▪ <i>a muster of peacocks</i> ▪ <i>a parliament of owls</i> ▪ <i>a party of jays</i> ▪ <i>a skein of (flying wild) geese</i>
	Insects
	▪ <i>a colony of ants</i> ▪ <i>a hive of bees</i> ▪ <i>a nest of hornets / wasps</i> ▪ <i>a plague of locusts</i> ▪ <i>a swarm of ants / bees / butterflies / flies / insects</i>

For a more detailed inventory of partitives, as well as more details on the origin of various group partitives (animals and birds), see **Appendix # 3** and **Appendix # 4**.

BINOMINAL NOUN PHRASES

According to Evelien Keizer (2007), **binominal NPs** are “anomalous” pre-article phrasal structures, of the type $N_1 - \text{of} - N_2$, in which the first term (*i.e.* N_1) is evaluative or emotive. In Frances O. Austin’s (1980) opinion, underlying these structures there is a simile or a metaphor. Their comparative or absolute superlative nature may have a laudatory or pejorative meaning, but it is often expressed in the form an emphatic partitive construction (sometimes intensified by particles such as *what*, *such*, *so* and *too*, or by a distal demonstrative like *that*):

- ❑ *What a fool of a man you are!*
- ❑ *He’s such a darling of a boy!*
- ❑ *She’s a peach of a girl.*
- ❑ *What an angel of a child!*
- ❑ *He’s a mountain of a man.*
- ❑ *It was such a hell of a time.*
- ❑ *He’s a hell of a player.*
- ❑ *I was merely a slip of a girl when I went to seaside for the first time.*
- ❑ *They went on living in their hovel of a cottage for the rest of their sabbatical.*
- ❑ *That monster of a dog bit me twice already.*
- ❑ *The merest dandy of a tourist may there visit every nook worth visiting without detriment to his silk stockings; so thoroughly known are all points of interest, and so well-arranged are the means of attaining them.⁸⁸*

NOUN NUMBER IN A NUTSHELL

- ❑ There are **two main number classes** in English: **variable** and **invariable**.
- ❑ The **general rule** for **variable nouns** is: **add an –S to singular nouns in order to make them plural**, with the following **exceptions**:
 1. some nouns ending in –F(E) (*e.g.* LEAF – LEAVES; WOLF – WOLVES)
 2. some nouns ending in –O (*e.g.* HERO – HEROES; POTATO – POTATOES)
 3. nouns ending in –S(S), –X, –TS / –TZ, –Z(Z), –SH, –(T)CH, or –(D)GE (*e.g.* BUS – BUSES; BOX – BOXES; BUZZ – BUZZES; BUSH – BUSHES; BRIDGE – BRIDGES)
 4. nouns ending in –Y preceded by a consonant (*e.g.* BABY – BABIES;

⁸⁸ E. A. Poe, *Morning on the Wissahiccon*.

COUNTRY – COUNTRIES)

5. nouns of Anglo-Saxon origin (*e.g.* CHILD – CHILDREN; MOUSE – MICE)
6. foreign (Latin, Greek etc.) plurals (*e.g.* FUNGUS – FUNGI; PHENOMENON – PHENOMENA)
7. zero plural nouns (*e.g.* SHEEP – SHEEP; SPECIES – SPECIES)

❑ The **general rule** for **compound nouns** is: **add the plural mark –S at the end of the compound**, with the following **exceptions**:

1. in words with a noun and a prepositional phrase, the headword is the one taking the plural suffix (*e.g.* MOTHER-IN-LAW – MOTHERS-IN-LAW; EDITOR-IN-CHIEF – EDITORS-IN-CHIEF)
2. in the Noun + Adjective subclass of compounds there is considerable fluctuation (*e.g.* MOTHER SUPERIORS / MOTHERS SUPERIOR; POET LAUREATES / POETS LAUREATE)
3. when the first component is either MAN- or WOMAN-, appositionally used, both are made plural (*e.g.* MAN-SERVANT – MEN-SERVANTS; WOMAN-SINGER – WOMEN-SINGERS)

❑ The **plural of abbreviations** is marked either by doubling the final letter (*e.g.* p. – pp.) or by adding an –S, sometimes after a full stop or an apostrophe (*e.g.* PhDs / Ph.D.s / PhD's).

❑ **Proper nouns** are typically singular invariables. However:

1. some nationality nouns follow the regular plural rule (*e.g.* BELGIAN – BELGIANS; GERMAN – GERMANS)
2. the singular and plural forms of a noun like SIOUX differ only in pronunciation (*i.e.* (sg.): /su:/; (pl.): /su:z/)
3. some nationality names are used interchangeably with the adjective denoting nationality (*e.g.* THE DANES / THE DANISH; THE POLES / THE POLISH)

❑ **Zero plurals** are characterized by one and the same form for both singular and plural. There are four main categories of zero plurals:

1. some nationality nouns (*e.g.* *that / those Japanese; a / the Swiss*)
2. some quantifying nouns (*e.g.* *two hundred; seven thousand*)
3. some animal names (*e.g.* *that / those sheep; this / these salmon*)
4. nouns with equivocal number (*e.g.* *that / those species; this / these series*)

❑ **Animal names** make up the most numerous (over 80) subcategory of **zero plurals**.

- When they are regarded as **food** or **material**, animal names are treated as **uncounts**, but when they are regarded as **fellow creatures**, and sometimes as **game**, they are typically **countable**.
- Some animal names (*e.g.* *carp, cod, deer, grouse, salmon, sheep, shellfish, swine*) are **always zero plural**.

- With others, there may be a choice between regular and zero plural: **regular plural** is generally used to draw attention to the **individual specimens**, whereas the **zero plural** refers to the **animals as a group**.
- ❑ **Nouns with equivocal number** are zero-plural nouns ending in –S (e.g. *means, series, species*)⁸⁹, which are treated as either singular or plural in meaning and pattern with both singular and plural determiners / verbs (e.g. *a means of transport / two means of transport; a series of events / two series of events; this species / these species*).
- ❑ **Singular invariable nouns** (*singularia tantum nouns*) cover the following categories:
 1. non-count concrete nouns (e.g. *food, wood*)
 2. non-count abstract nouns (e.g. *beauty, duty*)
 3. singular proper nouns (e.g. *Finnigan, Michigan*)
 4. some nouns ending in –S (e.g. *mathematics, ethics*)
 5. abstract adjective heads (e.g. *the beautiful, the sublime*)
- ❑ **Non-count nouns** denote unbounded / undifferentiated / continuous **mass** or stuff and can be **concrete** (e.g. *honey, milk, money, silk*) or **abstract** (e.g. *caprice, information, peace, reflection*).
- ❑ **Nouns with dual class membership** are **nouns** which can be used **both as counts and non-counts**. The shift from mass to count is possible by **reclassification / pluralization** (e.g. *I like coffee. → I'd like two coffees.*) or use of partitives (e.g. *a brand / cup of coffee*).
- ❑ **(Pseudo-)partitives** are usually count nouns followed by an OF-phrase, used to indicate partition, in respect of **quality** (e.g. *a kind of paper*) as well as in respect of **quantity** (e.g. *a piece of paper*).
 - Partitives can be **general** (e.g. *a piece of advice / cake / information / news / paper*) or **specific** (e.g. *a clump of trees / thistles; a skein of geese*). Semantically, they can be classified into **paucal** (e.g. *a bit of patience; a shred of paper*) or **multal** (e.g. *an army of reporters; an ocean of money*).
 - Partitives can involve **containers** (e.g. *a glass of milk*) or an estimate of **the amount a particular container can hold** (e.g. *a glassful of milk*).
- ❑ **Singular invariable nouns ending in –S** are **plural form nouns** which behave like uncountable singular nouns. They are:
 - names of diseases ending in –S (e.g. *measles, mumps*)
 - names of games ending in –S (e.g. *bowls, darts*)
 - nouns ending in –ICS (e.g. *linguistics, physics*)

⁸⁹ Cf. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 310), for whom *data, offspring* and *oats* also belong to the category of nouns with equivocal number. Biber *et al.* (1999: 299) include (*air*)*craft* and *dice* among zero plurals, along *series* and *species*.

- ❑ **Plural invariable nouns** are mainly **plural uncountable nouns ending in -S** which typically pattern with a plural verb but which generally will not combine with numerals. The three main categories of plural invariables are:
- **summation plurals** (e.g. *binoculars, scissors, suspenders, trousers*)
 - **pluralia tantum** (e.g. *ashes, damages, dregs, odds, outskirts, savings*)
 - **collective nouns** (e.g. *army, cattle, clergy, family, police, poultry, public, vermin*)

SEMANTIC PROBLEMS RELATED TO PLURALITY. A REVIEW

1. From Uncountable to Countable:

A. Some nouns are uncountable but can become countable under special circumstances (with slightly different meanings for the plural form, however). They are usually **a) mass nouns** or **b) abstract nouns**.

a) Mass nouns become countable whenever they are used with the meaning “kinds of...”, “varieties of...”, “brands of...” (e.g. *He likes French **wines**.*) or when the containers are also implied (e.g. *I’d like two **teas**, please.*)

b) Abstract nouns become countable whenever they are used to individualize or concretize, whenever they illustrate particular examples or a particular situation (e.g. *The **joys** of childhood.*)

Singularia tantum nouns which can be shifted from one class (noncount) to another (count) are called nouns with **dual class membership**.

B. With some uncountables, the plural is used in order to intensify the meaning expressed by the singular, to suggest great quantity or extent, and usually have a literary flavour (e.g. *Good **heavens**. The **sands** of the desert. The **snows** of Kilimanjaro.*)⁹⁰

❑ CHEESE → CHEESES

⇒ *Really now, you know I can’t stand **cheese**.*

⇒ *French **cheeses** are really appreciated around here.*

❑ COFFEE → COFFEES

⇒ *They consider **coffee** a drug.*

⇒ *Two **coffees** (cups of coffee), please!*

❑ BEAUTY → BEAUTIES

⇒ ***Beauty** lies in the eye of the beholder.*

⇒ *A thing of **beauty** is a joy for ever.*

⇒ *Your sister looks like she’ll grow up to be a **beauty**.*

⁹⁰ Cf. Quirk (1985: 299), cf. Budai (2002: 261).

□ CRUELTY → CRUELITIES ⇒ Mr. Rochester here is an animal cruelty investigator. ⇒ The cruelties practised during the Second World War are unspeakable.
□ PLEASURE → PLEASURES ⇒ The Pursuit of Pleasure is a book by Lionel Tiger. ⇒ The pleasures of winter sport are beyond compare.
□ SPLENDOR → SPLENDORS ⇒ What though the radiance which was once so bright Be now for ever taken from my sight, Though nothing can bring back the hour Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower.⁹¹ ⇒ The splendors of ancient Rome are hard to imagine.
□ WATER → WATERS ⇒ They prefer soda to mineral water. ⇒ Still waters run deep.
2. From Countable to Uncountable: There are situations which favour a non-count interpretation of inherently countable nouns (e.g. when animal names are used to denote food):
□ LAMB(S) → LAMB ⇒ There were lambs gamboling about all over the field. ⇒ They had lamb for supper.
3. Plural Meaning ≠ Singular Meaning: Nouns which have one meaning when used in the singular and another when used in the plural.
□ AIR → AIRS ⇒ His speech was really like a breath of fresh air. ⇒ Don't put on airs with me.
□ ASH → ASHES ⇒ Cigarette ash is the residue left after the burning of tobacco. ⇒ They scattered her ashes all over the meadow where she used to walk her dog. ⇒ Rise from the Ashes is the first single of the band Quietdrive.
□ DAMAGE → DAMAGES ⇒ The damage is done. There's nothing you can do about it.

⁹¹ William Wordsworth, Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.

⇒ <i>They got two million dollars in damages.</i>
□ EXPERIENCE → EXPERIENCES ⇒ <i>Applicants for the job should have experience of working with computers.</i> ⇒ <i>This is an experience I won't forget for as long as I live.</i>
□ FORCE → FORCES ⇒ <i>I didn't mean to hurt you, it was through force of habit.</i> ⇒ <i>the Forces = (BE) the army / navy / air forces of a country</i>
□ GOOD → GOODS ⇒ <i>Going to AA would be for your own good.</i> ⇒ <i>He's trying to get rid of those stolen goods.</i>
□ HAIR → HAIRS ⇒ <i>Most men's ideal of beauty is a woman with long, fair hair.</i> ⇒ <i>If I hate grandma's cat is because it leaves hairs all over the sofa.</i>
□ LACE → LACES ⇒ <i>Her magenta lace dress took everyone by surprise.</i> ⇒ <i>I taught my niece how to tie her shoe laces.</i>
□ PAIN → PAINS ⇒ <i>to be in pain; to relieve / ease the pain</i> ⇒ <i>He's such a pain in the neck.</i> ⇒ <i>No gains without pains.</i> ⇒ <i>I'm at pains to explain what really happened.</i>
□ WORK → WORKS ⇒ <i>If he's not at home, then he must be at work.</i> ⇒ <i>Looking after children can be hard work, you know.</i> ⇒ <i>the works = the factory</i>
4. Plurisemantic Singular Forms: Some nouns have an uncountable but also a countable meaning, when used in the singular, which allows for a plural form.
□ CHANGE → no plural / CHANGES ⇒ <i>Do you have change for a 20-dollar bill? [uncountable]</i> ⇒ <i>A change is as good as a rest. [countable, singular]</i> ⇒ <i>All changes are for the better. [countable, plural]</i>
□ COMPANY → no plural / COMPANIES ⇒ <i>I really enjoy her company. [uncountable]</i> ⇒ <i>We're having company for dinner. [uncountable]</i> ⇒ <i>Three employees of a big Chinese logistics company said their bosses fired them for no reason.</i>

[countable, singular] ⇒ <i>He's writing about the world's 20 most profitable companies.</i> [countable, plural]
□ GLASS → no plural / GLASSES ⇒ <i>People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.</i> [uncountable] ⇒ <i>Can I have another glass of water, please?</i> [countable, singular] ⇒ A: <i>My grandfather lived to be ninety and never used glasses</i>⁹². [countable, plural] B: <i>Well, lots of people prefer to drink from the bottle.</i>
□ PEPPER → no plural / PEPPERS ⇒ <i>Salt and pepper is the common name for edible salt and ground black pepper, traditionally paired on dining tables for additional seasoning.</i> [uncountable] ⇒ <i>The bell pepper is a cultivar group of the species Capsicum annuum.</i> [countable, singular] ⇒ <i>Green peppers are unripe versions of red, yellow, and orange peppers.</i> [countable, plural]
□ ROOM → no plural / ROOMS ⇒ <i>I wish I had more room for my countless books.</i> [uncountable] ⇒ <i>In My Room is a song written by Brian Wilson and Gary Usher for the American rock band The Beach Boys.</i> [countable, singular] ⇒ <i>How many rooms does Buckingham Palace have?</i> [countable, plural]
5. Plurisemantic Plural: Some nouns have a plural form which can be plurisemantic. Many of them are countable, but some of them can have a non-count singular form (see <i>effect</i> below).
□ COLOUR → COLOURS [plural meanings: "culori"; "drapel"] ⇒ <i>What kind of colour is crimson?</i> ⇒ <i>Purple and teal are my favourite colours.</i> ⇒ <i>Australia's national colours</i> ⇒ <i>to call to the colours</i> = a chema sub drapel
□ COMPASS → COMPASSES [plural meanings: "busole"; "compas"] ⇒ <i>A magnetic compass and a map are invaluable assets to a sailor.</i> ⇒ <i>Where are the compasses?</i>
□ CUSTOM → CUSTOMS [plural meanings: "tradiții"; "vamă"] ⇒ <i>He might be able to offer further information on local custom(s).</i> ⇒ <i>Immigrants are usually stopped at customs and questioned.</i>
□ LETTER⁹³ → LETTERS [plural meanings: "litere"; "scrisori"; "Litere"] ⇒ <i>How many letters does the alphabet have?</i>

⁹² Here, we not only have a plurisemantic singular form, but also a plurisemantic plural form, on which the pun is based: "pahare" vs. "ochelari".

⁹³ Here, we actually start from not only have a plurisemantic singular form: "literă" vs. "scrisoare".

⇒ How many letters have you written so far? ⇒ As a man of letters, he should be aware of the importance of etymology.
□ LOOK → LOOKS [plural meanings: “priviri”; “înfățișare”] ⇒ Why don't we have a look around the village after lunch? ⇒ She got her good looks from her mother.
□ MANNER → MANNERS [plural meanings: “moduri”; “maniere”] ⇒ By his manner of speaking, one could tell he was a Southerner. ⇒ It's about time one taught you the good manners.
□ QUARTER → QUARTERS [plural meanings: “sfert”; “sediu”] ⇒ It's a quarter past ten. He must be in front of the cathedral. ⇒ At half past seven I'll pass by the servants' quarters.
□ SPECTACLE → SPECTACLES [plural meanings: “spectacole”; “ochelari”] ⇒ You should wear your spectacles to enjoy better this exciting spectacle.
□ EFFECT → EFFECTS ⇒ If he wants to impress people at the party, I'm afraid his outfit will be of little or no effect. ⇒ His personal effects were taken by the widow. ⇒ The special effects used in his movie were absolutely fabulous.
6. Plurisemantic Plurals: Some nouns have two or more plural forms, each with a different meaning.
□ BROTHER → BROTHERS [“frați de sânge / biologici”] / BRETHREN [“frați de cruce / membri ai unei congregații religioase / membri ai unei frății”] ⇒ No Brother of Mine is a 2007 thriller. ⇒ She's got three siblings: two brothers and one half-sister. ⇒ Brethren is used chiefly in formal or solemn address or in referring to members of a profession, society or religion denomination.
□ INDEX → INDEXES [“indexuri, table de materii”] / INDICES [“semne algebrice, exponenți, indici”] ⇒ Clear cross references are supplemented by two thorough indexes at the end of the book. ⇒ Indices is a term generally preferred in mathematical, financial and technical contexts.
□ STAMEN → STAMENS [“stamine”] / STAMINA [“vigoare, rezistență”] ⇒ The stamens of a flower hold the pollen grains. ⇒ Stamina is your ability to sustain a physical or mental effort for a long period of time.

NOUN GENDER

Another consequence of social condition is that
two words are required for *host* and *hostess*,
but only one for *guest*.
(Jespersen, 2006: 149)

- ❑ The Category of Gender
- ❑ Nouns: Grammatical vs. Natural Gender
- ❑ Gender Classes
- ❑ Nouns Morphologically (Un)Marked for Gender
 - Nouns Morphologically Unmarked for Gender. Lexical Pairs
 - Common / Dual Gender
 - *Male vs. Female Default*
 - *Generic Reference*
 - Nouns Morphologically Marked for Gender
 - *Derivational Endings for the Feminine Gender*
 - *Higher and Lower Animals*
- ❑ Gender and Personification
- ❑ Noun Gender in a Nutshell

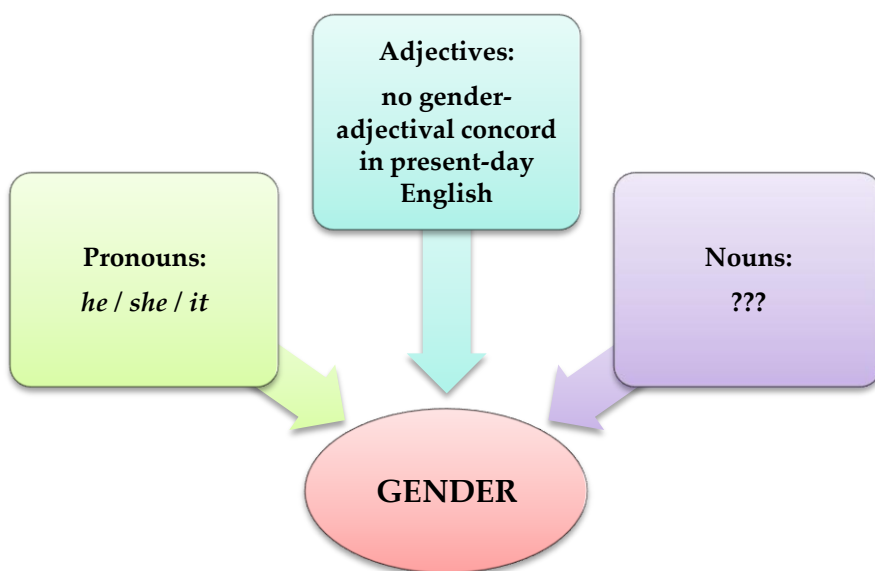
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THE CATEGORY OF GENDER

Gender is a basic grammatical category which “generally marks **nouns**, **adjectives** and **pronouns**, revealing mainly two types of contrasts: **masculine** / **feminine** / **neuter** and **animate** / **inanimate**.” (Ciobanu, 2012: 254)

If **pronouns** are generally accounted for, gender-wise, by the paradigm of the third-person singular pronoun (*he*, *she* and *it*)⁹⁴ – pointing to masculine or feminine [+ animate] (often also [+ human]) entities – with *it* also covering [– animate] [– human] entities –, in the case of **adjectives**, things are even less difficult, as we have no longer have gender-adjectival concord in English. When it comes to nouns, however, gender contrasts, much like number contrasts, do not lend themselves easily to a straightforward, one-to-one correlation.

⁹⁴ In the nominative, plus other slightly altered forms for the accusative and the possessive, pointing to masculine or feminine [+ animate] (often also [+ human]) entities – with *it* also covering [– animate] [– human] entities.



76 NOUNS: GRAMMATICAL vs. NATURAL GENDER

Approaches to noun gender have “generally focused on the need to distinguish **natural gender**, where items refer to the sex of real-world entities, and **grammatical gender**, which has nothing to do with sex, but which has an important role in signalling grammatical relationships between words in a sentence”. (Crystal, 2008: 206). Present-day English does not possess a systematic grammatical gender⁹⁵, therefore gender distinctions are more responsive to **natural / notional**⁹⁶ **gender** (*i.e.* a **semantic** classification: male / female, animate / inanimate) rather than a **grammatical, inflectional, or syntactic** one (*i.e.* masculine / feminine / neuter⁹⁷). Of course, things have not always been so. In Old English,

⁹⁵ Cf. Hockett and Fodor, quoted in Curzan (2003: 13): “Gender in language, which can be referred to by the general term *linguistic gender*, can be defined at the most basic level as a system of noun classification reflected in the behavior of associated words (Hockett, quoted in Corbett, 1991: 1). [...] Gender only exists if grammatical forms with variable gender (*e.g.* adjectives, pronouns, numerals) regularly adopt forms to agree with grammatical forms of invariable gender, usually nouns (Fodor, 1959: 2).”

⁹⁶ *Notional gender* has been proposed instead of *natural gender* by Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg (1994), in order to better capture the psychological and social aspects of gender assignment in the language.

⁹⁷ “In the fifth century BC, according to Aristotle’s account, Protagoras first created the labels *masculine*, *feminine*, and *neuter* for Greek nouns, and language scholars have been trying to explain the relationship of grammatical gender categories to the world around them ever since.” (Curzan, 2003: 11)

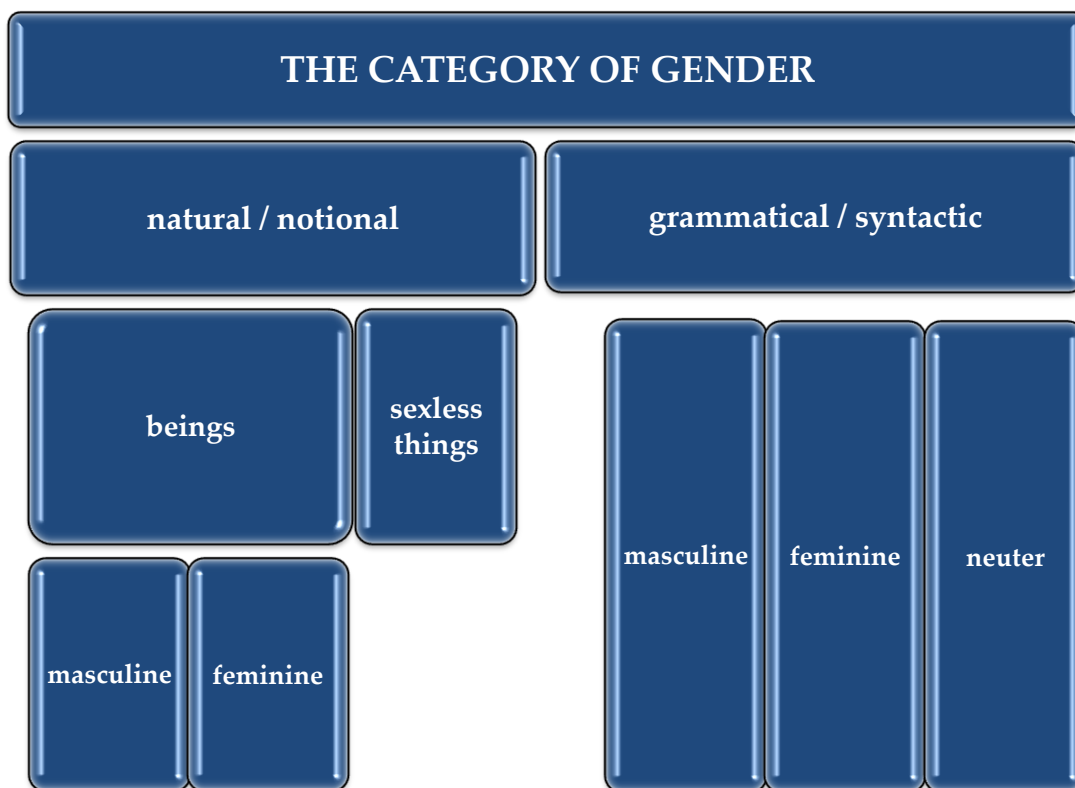
like in Modern German and other European languages (including Romanian), all nouns were placed, more or less erratically, into one of the three gender classes (masculine, feminine, neuter).

The mysteries of how European languages such as German, French, Spanish, or Italian categorize nouns as masculine, feminine, and neuter are at best a source of amusement and more often a source of bafflement and frustration for Modern English speakers, who are often unaware that their own language used to have these same kinds of noun categories. To English speakers, having been brought up in a linguistic universe where sexless objects are almost always *it*, it can seem arbitrary and absurd to talk about such objects with language normally reserved for male and female human beings and perhaps for animals. (Curzan, 2003: 12)

Three Old English nouns which all meant “woman”, belonged to different genders: *woman* (masculine), *quean* (feminine), and *wife* (neuter). (Ciobanu, 2012: 257) Many a linguist call these gender choices “unreasonable” or even “irrational”.

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Old English Gender
“In the older form of the language we cannot by any means conclude that males will be masculine, females feminine, and things without life neuter. There an ox was masculine, but a sheep neuter; one word for a woman, <i>wif</i>, was neuter; while other, <i>ides</i>, as well as <i>fæmne</i> (borrowed from Latin <i>femina</i>), are feminine. <i>Child</i> (<i>cild</i>), <i>maiden</i> (<i>mæden</i>), are neuter. Old age (<i>ildu</i> or <i>eldu</i>, Modern English <i>eld</i>) and a street are feminine, a brook masculine, though a burn is feminine. The genders seem as unreasonable as those in Latin, Greek, French, and German.” (Champneys 1893: 103, q. in Curzan, 2003: 36) “[Alfred’s English] had the same irrational system of genders: <i>hand</i> was feminine, <i>foet</i> (foot) was masculine, while <i>mægden</i> (maiden) and <i>wif</i> (wife, woman) were neuter.” (Bradley 1924 [1904]: 9, q. in Curzan, 2003: 36, bold emphasis mine)

In the early Middle English periods, however, a gradual decay of noun and modifier inflectional endings led to the simplification of the gender system. Shedding grammatical gender has often been cited as largely beneficial to the English language.

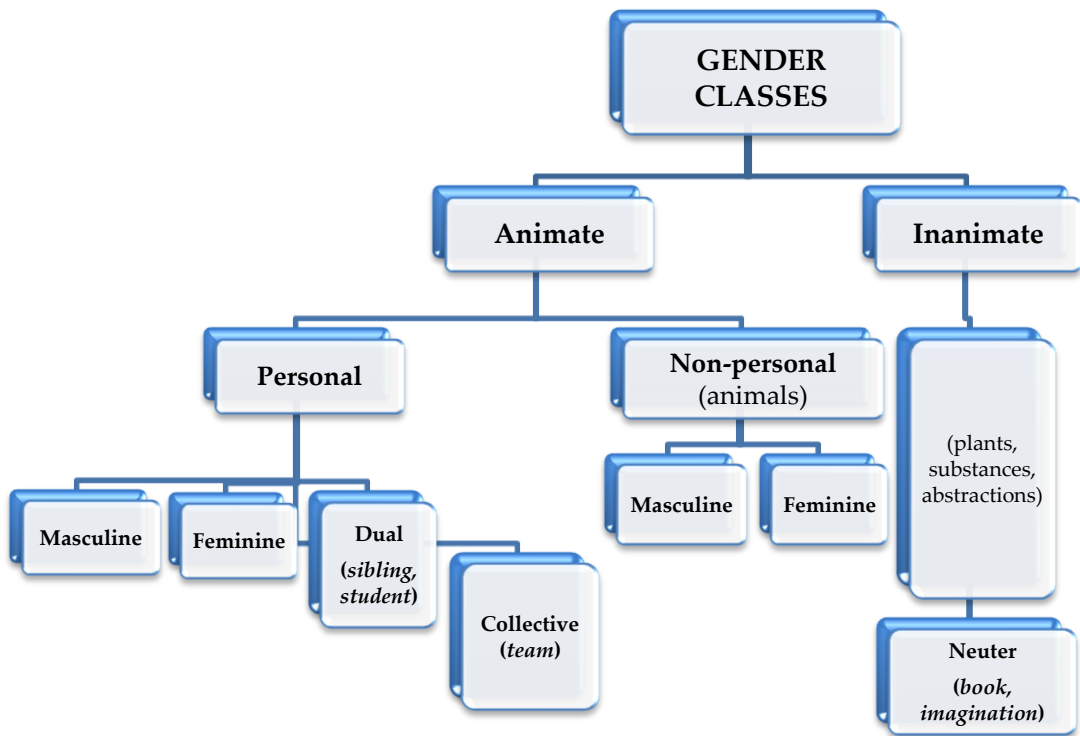


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GENDER CLASSES

According to Quirk *et al.* (1985), the main gender classes are **animate** and **inanimate**. The former are either **personal** or **non-personal**. The **personal** / [+ **person**] class includes **masculine**, **feminine** gender nouns, along with **dual gender** nouns (*e.g. sibling, student*) as well as **collective** nouns (*e.g. team*), which are considered to be also **neuter**. Collective nouns are intermediate between personal and non-personal nouns. **Non-personal** / [- **person**] nouns denote **masculine** and **feminine higher and lower animals** as well as **higher organisms**.

Quirk *et al.* (1985) also list **common gender** nouns (*e.g. baby*) as a separate category, along with **dual gender** nouns. We, however, will be using **dual** and **common gender** interchangeably for nouns like *sibling* as well as for nouns like *baby*, since the semantic difference between them is infinitesimal. The following diagram slightly departs, therefore, from Quirk *et al.*'s take on gender classes in English.



According to Biber *et. al.* (1999), classifications of English nouns into gender classes generally take into account **four semantic features**: [± animate], [± human], [± male] and [± countable], whose different combinations determine a preliminary classification into **Human / Personal** and **Neuter / Non-Personal** (we, unlike Biber, choose to distinguish, however, between **Dual Gender**, either **Personal** or **Non-Personal**, but **animate**, on the one hand, and **Inanimate**, on the other) nouns. We thus have the following:

- ❑ **Human / Personal nouns** are always [+ animate] and can be subclassified into three genders: the **masculine**, the **feminine** and the **common / dual gender**
- ❑ **Masculine gender** is represented by [+ human, + male] (*e.g. father*)
- ❑ **Feminine gender** is represented by [+ human, – male] (*e.g. mother*)
- ❑ **Common / Dual gender** is represented by [± human, ± male] (*e.g. cousin, raven*)
- ❑ **Inanimate gender** is represented by [– animate, + neuter] (*e.g. desk*)

NOUNS MORPHOLOGICALLY (UN)MARKED FOR GENDER

In Modern English, gender distinction is made either morphologically or lexically. Some nouns are **morphologically marked for gender**, while others are not. There are three basic types of morphological marks for gender:

1. derivational suffixes (*e.g. actor / actress*)
2. gender-specific premodifiers + dual gender nouns (*e.g. boyfriend / girlfriend*)
3. compounding elements (*e.g. policeman / policewoman*)

Nouns which are **morphologically unmarked** are, instead, **lexically marked** for gender (*i.e.* they come up in **lexical pairs**, as seen in the table below). Lexical pairs are distinctive terms, separate words, not derived from each other (sometimes they do not have absolutely any letter in common: *e.g.* *boy* and *girl*).

NOUNS	
Morphologically marked for gender	Morphologically unmarked / lexically marked for gender
Suffixes / Gender-specific prenoun modifiers / Gender-specific 2nd term in a compound	Lexical Pairs
<i>actor / actress, hero / heroine</i> <i>boyfriend / girlfriend, he-bear / she-bear</i> <i>policeman / policewoman</i>	<i>boy / girl, brother / sister, father / mother,</i> <i>man / woman, uncle / aunt</i> <i>bachelor / spinster, king / queen, monk /</i> <i>nun, Mr / Mrs , wizard / witch</i> <i>dog / bitch, fox / vixen, gander / goose</i>

NOUNS MORPHOLOGICALLY UNMARKED FOR GENDER. LEXICAL PAIRS

Lexical pairs usually belong to three main semantic fields:

- ❑ **kinship** (*e.g.* *boy / girl, father / mother* – also *daddy / mummy, papa / mamma* – *(half)brother / (half)sister, lad / lass, man – woman, son / daughter, uncle – aunt*)
- ❑ **social roles / trades** (*e.g.* *bachelor / spinster, friar or monk / nun, gaffer / gammer, gentleman or lord / lady, Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms⁹⁸, king / queen, Sir / Madam, tailor / seamstress, wizard – witch*)
- ❑ **animals** (*cock or rooster / hen, dog / bitch, drake / duck, fox / vixen, gander / goose, horse or stallion / mare*).

Some [– male] or **feminine gender nouns** convey “**sexual overtones, a negative or disphoric connotation**, especially as regards a young woman’s physical appearance or immoral behaviour, whereas others are insulting names for old(er) or wicked women” (Ciobanu, 2012: 261): *belle* (“the chief beauty of a place: a fair lady generally”), *blonde, brunette, chick, dish, doll, dowager* (among the few nouns which, besides the negative connotations, of a “sexually immoral woman”, also has positive connotations, when it

⁹⁸ *Ms*, considered by many a feminist or politically correct term, simply signals [+ female], regardless of marital status: [± married].

denotes either “a widow inheriting a property or title from her deceased husband”, or “an elderly woman of wealth and dignity”), *peach*, *bag* (“a prostitute”), *hag*, *harlot*, *minx* (an old fashioned word for a disrespectful, pert girl), *prude*, *shrew*, *tart*, *whore*. As noted by Anne Curzan,

[t]he semantic development of **words for women** began to receive serious attention with the establishment of **feminist linguistics** in the 1970s, but historical semantic work has consistently been overshadowed by examinations of current sexist vocabulary and usage. Robin Lakoff (1975) notes the asymmetrical development of words such as *master* / *mistress* and *bachelor* / *spinster* but does not pursue this point in detail... (Curzan, 2003: 139, bold emphasis added)

The asymmetrical development Lakoff will not enlarge upon actually has to do, on the one hand, with a polysemy in the [+ male] nouns, and, on the other, with an instance of semantic slippage in the case of the [– male] nouns.

[+ male] nouns		[– male] nouns	
divergent meanings, polysemy		semantic slippage [from neutral to negative connotations]	
<i>bachelor</i>	<i>master</i>	<i>spinster</i>	<i>mistress</i>
1. a young knight who follows the banner of another 2. an unmarried man 3. a person who has received a degree from a college / university etc.	1. a ruler / governor / conqueror / employer / owner (of slaves) 2. a male teacher 3. a person holding an academic degree higher than a bachelor's but lower than a doctor's 4. a revered religious leader (esp. if capitalized) 5. a consummate artist or performer (who may or may not teach apprentices)	a woman whose occupation is / was to spin ↓ an unmarried woman past the common age for marrying / a woman unlikely to ever marry [derogatory term]	an owner / employer / female head of a household or of a school ↓ concubine / adulteress [derogatory term]

It must be noted that due to common, shared stereotypes, negative connotations associated with initially neutral words may turn into denotation (e.g. calling someone who is not royalty *a princess* may be interpreted as pejorative, thus pointing to their spoilt, fussy, demanding, helpless nature).

Like *spinster*, other [– male] nouns ending in –STER, like *baxter* [bagster] or *webster*, have evolved from denoting a job to a mere proper name, but without the negative connotations *spinster* has acquired over time. Edward Sapir associates such phenomena with the unconscious patterning of the language:

In defining the type to which a language belongs one must be careful not to be misled by structural features which are mere survivals of an older stage, which have no productive life and do not enter into the unconscious patterning of the language. All languages are littered with such petrified bodies. The English—*ster* of *spinster* and *Webster* is an old agentive suffix, but, as far as the feeling of the present English-speaking generation is concerned, it cannot be said to really exist at all; *spinster* and *Webster* have been completely disconnected from the etymological group of *spin* and of *weave* [web]. (Sapir, 1921: 60, footnote 113)

Much fewer [+ male] than [– male] nouns refer to men and their sexuality (e.g. *beau*, *dandy*, *dude*, *ruffian*, *ladykiller*, *philander(er)*).

Sometimes, animal names are used informally and insultingly to refer to men or women. However, although the practice of using **animal metaphors as insults** for men is as old as that for women, the two practices tend to be derogatory in a different sense. For example,

the use of *fox* in reference to a cunning man predates its use for a sexy or attractive woman by many centuries (the reference to women is not cited until 1963 in the *OED*). Sexuality becomes salient in words referring to women in a way that it usually does not in words referring to men. Another example of an animal metaphor reflects the complicated relationship of words for women and children, discussed above: both *chick* and *chicken* are recorded in reference to young children as early as the fourteenth century; by the eighteenth century, both terms could be used for “a young inexperienced person” – hence the expression “no spring chicken.” [O]nly *chick*, the term for a baby chicken, came to refer “endearingly” to a girl or young woman, first recorded in the *OED* in 1927. (Curzan, 2003: 155)

At other times, males are named by feminine nouns and viceversa (e.g. *sissy*, a diminutive of *sister*, is used pejoratively to refer to an effeminate boy or man, whereas *tomboy* denotes the opposite – a girl behaving like a boy).

When it comes to lexical pairs as such, history shows pairing terms took a while. **Man and woman**, for example, only became a twosome towards the end of the English period, and even then they were often used interchangeably with “**man and wife**”, and “**husband and wife**” respectively. **Boy and girl**, too, have an interesting history (especially not being etymologically related), as shown in the Case of Curiosities below:

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Origins of <i>Girl</i>	THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Origins of <i>Boy</i>
The <i>OED</i> states that the word <i>girl</i> is of “obscure etymology” and Liberman (1998: 150) describes <i>girl</i> as “one of the most controversial words in English etymology.” When it first appeared (in 13 th -century Middle English texts), the word (spelled variously <i>girle</i> , <i>gerle</i> , <i>gyrle</i>) simply meant “young child.” The <i>OED</i> also suggests that <i>girl</i> may owe its origins to Old English	The etymological origins of <i>boy</i> are as difficult to trace as those of <i>girl</i> . According to the <i>OED</i> , <i>boy</i> has West Germanic origins (this hypothesis being supported by similar words (<i>boi</i> , <i>boy</i>) and Dutch (<i>boef</i>)). Liberman (2000) links the etymology of <i>boy</i> to the phrase <i>oh, boy</i> . His hypothesis is based on a prehistorical blend of two different roots: <i>boi(a)</i> (i.e. “younger

masculine <i>gyrela</i> , feminine <i>gyrele</i> (i.e. “garment”). The Romance borrowing <i>damsel</i> was first used with the meaning of “female servant” and only later was employed to mean “girl, young woman”. ⁹⁹	brother”) and <i>bo-</i> (i.e. “devil”). This etymology, he argues, helps to explain apparently contradictory meanings of <i>boy</i> in Middle English (i.e. “male servant”, “attendant” and “ruffian.”) ¹⁰⁰
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The evolution of *boy* and *girl* did not stop in the Middle Ages; the second World War endowed them with new meanings, which reflects the (sometimes biased) cultural values of the speakers.

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: <i>Boy and Girl in WWII</i>
“During World War II, the English words <i>boy</i> and <i>girl</i> acquired radical, even potentially deadly, new meanings: <i>boy</i> could refer to any nuclear device that exploded successfully, and <i>girl</i> to any that failed to explode. The bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, in other words, was a very healthy boy. The employment of this kind of gender terminology has clear implications for the study of how gender biases manifest themselves in language. According to Jane Mills (1989: 105), [...] the explosion of boy bombs – untouched, this innovation in bomb terminology is an example of a long-standing tradition in patriarchal societies: the higher value placed on a male child than on a female child. A boy is a success, a girl a failure; a boy bomb explodes, a girl bomb does not.” (Curzan, 2003: 141)

COMMON / DUAL GENDER

Personal common / dual gender nouns, which are generally marked [+ human, ± male], have only one form for both the masculine and the feminine, they do not encode any information about the sex of the person being referred to, and their gender is revealed in the context (by means of pronoun reference, for instance): *accountant, ace, actor, adult, artist, assistant, candidate, chair, champion, chef, coach, comrade, cook, cousin, criminal, cyclist, doctor, driver, enemy, engineer, expert, fool, foreigner, friend, guest, individual, inhabitant, journalist, lawyer, lecturer, librarian, linguist, major, musician, neighbour, novelist, orphan, owner, parent,*

⁹⁹ Cf. Curzan (2003: 141, *passim*).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Curzan (2003: 143, *passim*).

passenger, patient, person, professional, professor, pupil, relative, scientist, sergeant, servant, sibling, singer, speaker, spouse, stranger, student, teacher, tourist, traveller, trainer, visitor, writer etc. Compounds with *fellow* (either as a first compounding term or as the second) might be added to these: *fellow-linguist, fellow-sufferer, fellow-traveller, school-fellow*.

Semantically and notionally, personal dual gender nouns can be grouped into several categories¹⁰¹:

PERSONAL COMMON / DUAL GENDER [+ human], [± male]	
Kinship / Family / Social Relations	<i>comrade, enemy, foe, friend, guest, parent, partner, relative</i>
Inhabitants / Nationality / Race	<i>American, Canadian, European, Londoner</i>
Professions / Trades / Positions	<i>agent, artist, doctor, editor, engineer, pilot, sergeant, teacher, violinist</i>
Leaders	<i>captain, chair, chief, employer, Member of Parliament, official, President, principal, speaker, supervisor</i>
Followers & Supporters	<i>atheist, democrat, fan, heathen, Lutheran, Mahommedan, recruit, voter</i>
Collective Nouns	<i>audience, cabinet, crowd, family, government, jury, majority, mankind, minority, mob, nobility, party, team</i>

Male vs. Female Default

Personal dual gender nouns ending in –ER /–OR are basically perceived as masculine gender (as **male default**), but they all belong to the class of dual gender nouns. Not only *writer* (ending in –ER), but also *poet* or *novelist* are considered male default. Other, much fewer nouns, are regarded as **female default** (e.g. *nurse*). In such cases, the appropriate non-default sex is indicated by various prefixed elements such as *male, female* or *woman*: *woman poet, female novelist, woman writer*, and *male nurse* respectively. See, for instance, the way E. A. Poe emphasizes this gender distinction:

A male and a female *nurse* were in attendance.¹⁰²

The following riddle illustrates the sexism and the bias of male default, which sometimes dictates our expectations and thus influences our insight:

A man was taking a walk with his son one day and as they were crossing the road, a car came round a corner unexpectedly and hit the boy, injuring him badly. An ambulance was called for and the boy was taken to the nearest hospital and into the operating theatre. On seeing the boy, the surgeon suddenly let out a cry of horror: “My God, this is my son!” (Widdowson, 2007: 32)

¹⁰¹ Cf. also Hulban (2001: 59) and Ciobanu (2012: 264).

¹⁰² E. A. Poe, *The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*.

If at the end of the story we feel puzzled as to the identity of the surgeon, it means we have been relying on a taken-for-granted construct (*i.e.* that the surgeon must have been a man rather than a woman).

Generic Reference

Many a time dual gender nouns are deliberately used, in order to express genericity. Falinski (2011: 44) also poses the problem of subject-verb agreement or pronoun reference whenever explicit sex-reference is undesired. He inventories several solutions for this problem:

<i>The student must repeat the words he hears.</i>	[traditional, male sexist default]
<i>The student must repeat the words he or she hears.</i>	[academic; awkward]
<i>The student must repeat the words s/he hears.</i>	[academic; only written]
<i>The student must repeat the words they hear.</i>	[normal modern-day English; esp. BrE]
<i>Students must repeat the words they hear.</i>	[avoidance strategy]

Guy, typically pointing to a “man”, “fellow” or “individual” when used in the singular, can also be used generically (especially in the plural, but more and more so in the singular, too), to refer to the members of a group regardless of sex.

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Generic <i>Guy(s)</i> . The Lessons of History
“The semantic changes in progress with the word <i>guy</i> in Modern English raise the opposite question of that with generic <i>man</i>: to what extent can a gender-specific term generalize to become generic? [...] The use of the word <i>guy</i> has become more and more widespread and varied in past decades, particularly in American English. It can be used to refer to a male human being (covering a wide age range), as a plural inclusive in the vocative and second person (<i>e.g.</i> ‘hey guys’ and ‘you guys’), and as a quasi-pronoun (<i>e.g.</i> ‘this guy over here’ referring to, for example, a book).” (Curzan, 2003: 172)

NOUNS MORPHOLOGICALLY MARKED FOR GENDER

If genericity is not necessarily what we want to express when using dual gender nouns, then we need to use them together with some **gender-specific formal markers**, such as premodifiers (as **the first element of a compound**) or compounding elements (*i.e.* **the second element of a compound**). *Boy / girl* or *maid, male / female, man / woman* or *lady, he / she* are among the most common gender markers for **personal dual gender nouns**; to these, we might add *he / she* and other, more specific markers, for **dual gender animal names** (e.g. *boyfriend / girlfriend; milkboy / milkmaid; male / female friend; male / female reader; female officer; woman aviator; woman diplomat; lady friend; lady-doctor; he-doctor / she-doctor* etc.). All of these, with the exception of *boy* and *maid* (as in *milkboy / milkmaid*), are premodifiers¹⁰³.

As **most personal dual gender nouns** are **male default**, gender markers are usually added whenever the feminine needs to be emphasized. “Few masculine nouns, especially compounds, use a feminine stem to denote **a profession traditionally held by women**, such as *bride: bridegroom*¹⁰⁴; *model: male model*; *nanny: male nanny*; *nurse: male-nurse*; *secretary: male secretary*; *midwife: man-midwife*.” (Ciobanu, 2012: 265-266)

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: <i>Bridegroom</i>
<i>“Bridegroom</i> provides a good example [of folk or popular etymology]. What has a groom got to do with getting married? Is he going to ‘groom’ the bride, in some way? Or perhaps he is responsible for horses to carry him and his bride off into the sunset? The true explanation is more prosaic. The Middle English form was <i>bridgome</i>, which goes back to Old English <i>brydguma</i>, from <i>bride</i> + <i>guma</i> ‘man’. However, <i>gome</i> died out during the Middle English period. By the 16th century its meaning was no longer apparent, and it came to be popularly replaced by a similar-sounding word, <i>grome</i>, ‘serving lad’. This later developed the sense of ‘servant having the care of horses’, which is the dominant sense today. But <i>bridegroom</i> never meant anything more than ‘bride’s man’.” (Crystal, 1995: 139)

¹⁰³ In some compounds, the premodifier is not always inherently marked for gender (e.g. a *female impersonator* is a male who acts as a woman; *ladybirds* or *ladybugs* are beetles; a *lady-killer* is a man considered particularly seductive by women; *male chauvinism* is male prejudice against women etc.)

¹⁰⁴ Another (rare, even exceptional) example of [+ male] noun obtained by derivation from a [– male] noun is *widower* (> widow + ER).

Man, *woman*, and sometimes *girl*, may also be used as the second term in a compound, as “semi-suffixes”. They can indicate **occupation** (e.g. *businessman* / *businesswoman*; *chairman* / *chairwoman*; *policeman* / *policewoman*; *sportsman* / *sportswoman*; *statesman* / *stateswoman*) or **nationality** (e.g. *Englishman* / *Englishwoman*; *Scotsman* / *Scotswoman* or *Scotsgirl*).

There are several nouns ending in *-man* which have no counterpart ending in *-woman*, as well as some nouns ending in *-woman* which have no counterparts ending in *-man*¹⁰⁵.

Uniquely Masculine Terms [no feminine counterparts]	Uniquely Feminine Terms [no masculine counterparts]
<i>conman</i> <i>snowman</i>	<i>beggarwoman</i> <i>charlady</i> / <i>charwoman</i> <i>ghostwoman</i> <i>needlewoman</i> <i>slavewoman</i> <i>sweeperwoman</i>

In order to avoid **linguistic bias** (based on typical roles of men and women (still) attributed by society) as well as sexist extremists, some “**politically correct**” **dual gender nouns** have been coined (e.g. *person* replacing *man* / *woman*, as in: *chairperson*, *salesperson*, *spokesperson*; *business manager* / *executive* for *businessman* / *businesswoman*; *firefighter*, to avoid *fireman*; *fisher* instead of *fisherman*; *flight attendant* for *airline hostess* or *stewardess*; *homemamker* for *housewife*; *leader* for *statesman*; *mail carrier* for *mailman* / *postman*; *member of Congress* for *Congressman*; *supervisor* for *foreman* etc.). Here’s an example extracted from James Finn Garner’s *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*:

*Instead, the queen indulged in an adopted masculine power trip and ordered the royal woodsperson to take Snow White into the forest and kill her.*¹⁰⁶

Mate is often used informally, by men especially, in compounds or not, also as a form of address (e.g. *deskmate*, *roommate*, *schoolmate*; Ok, *mate!*).

Derivational Endings for the Feminine Gender

Most of the derivational endings / suffixes are anglicised forms of some foreign suffixes. The most common of which is *-ESS*, though mention must be made of the fact that it is slowly falling into disuse and often perceived as derogatory:

¹⁰⁵ Cf. fictional characters like *Batman* or *Catwoman*.

¹⁰⁶ James Finn Garner, *Snow White*, in *Politically Correct Bedtime Stories*.

DERIVATIONAL ENDINGS FOR THE FEMININE GENDER		
-ess	actor / actress adventurer / adventuress ambassador / ambadress author / authoress baron / baroness benefactor / benefactress conductor / conductress count / countess deacon / deaconess emperor / empress enchanter / enchantress giant / giantess god / goddess heir / heiress	host / hostess instructor / instructress lion / lioness mayor / mayoress ogre / ogress poet / poetess priest / priestess prince / princess prophet / prophetess protector / protectress shepherd / shepherdess sorcerer / sorceress steward / stewardess waiter / waitress
-ine	hero / heroine ¹⁰⁷	Joseph / Josephine Paul / Pauline
-ix	administrator / administratrix aviator / aviatrix or aviatress director / directrix or directress	executor / executrix or executress prosecutor / prosecutrix testator / testatrix
-a	don / donna signor / signora	czar / czarina sultan / sultana
-e(é) / -enne	fiancé / fiancée protégé / protégée	confidant / confidante comédien / comédienne
-ette / -use	bachelor / bachelorette usher / usherette	chauffeur / chauffeuse masseur / masseuse

Sometimes the stem is slightly altered (e.g. *abbot* / *abbess*; *duke* / *duchess*; *marquis* – *marquess* / *marchioness*; *master* / *mistress*; *headmaster* / *headmistress*, *negro* / *negrress*).

Other times, there is a semantic difference between the masculine and the feminine in a pair (e.g. *governor* / *governess*, where *governess* has to do with educating a children's family rather than ruling over a unit of some kind; *master* / *mistress*, where *mistress* also designates something other than "female master of a household").

Higher and Lower Animals

On a hypothetical **scale of animacy**, says Anne Curzan, "**nouns referring to animals** would seem to lie somewhere between nouns referring to human beings and those referring to inanimate objects. Unlike nouns for humans, for which natural gender and grammatical gender almost always correspond, **the grammatical gender of animals is**

¹⁰⁷ *Heroine* nowadays becomes for more and more people synonymous with a (Victorian fiction) character rather than a woman or a girl showing great courage. *She's the hero of the day* is thus more natural than *She's the heroine of the day*.

more arbitrary.” (Curzan, 2003: 91) The [$\pm$ male] opposition in animal nouns is revealed in a number of ways:

- ❑ by means of lexical pairs
- ❑ by gender-specific formal markers
 - derivational endings (*i.e.* suffixes)
 - compounding elements (the 2nd element in the compound)
 - premodifiers

GENDER OF ANIMAL NAMES [– human], [± male]				
Lexical Pairs	Gender-Specific Formal Markers			
<i>dog / bitch</i> <i>drake / duck</i> <i>fox / vixen</i> <i>horse / mare</i>	<i>Derivational Endings</i>	<i>Compounding</i>	<i>Premodifiers</i>	
	<i>lion / lioness</i> <i>tiger / tigress</i>	<i>peacock / peahen</i>	↓	
<i>Premodifiers</i>				
Large Mammals	Medium Size / Smaller Mammals	Carnivorous Mammals	Birds	Derived from Proper Names
<i>bull-elephant / cow-elephant male-camel / female-camel</i>	<i>buck-rabbit / doe- rabbit buck-rat / doe-rat</i>	<i>dog-otter / bitch- otter dog-wolf / bitch-wolf</i>	<i>he-bird / she-bird cock-pigeon / hen-pigeon</i>	<i>billy-goat / nanny-goat jack-ass / jenny-ass tom-cat / tabby-cat</i>

Beside the [$\pm$ male] opposition, animal names series may include an [$\pm$ adult] opposition, too (*e.g. horse / stallion / mare / colt; sheep / ram / ewe / lamb; pig / boar / sow / piglet* etc.). The first term in the series is typically used for the entire species, as a dual gender noun.

Pets are often referred to as *he / she*, especially when their owners are very fond of them and regard them as member of their family (*e.g. Where is Cody? He's busy chasing a mouse.*)

GENDER AND PERSONIFICATION

In fiction, but sometimes in everyday speech, too, **birds**, **animals** and **insects** are treated either as **feminine** or as **masculine**. **Personification**, whether stylistically or emotionally motivated, is never random: there are some noun categories generally perceived as masculine, and others as feminine, as shown in the following table¹⁰⁸:

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Paidos (1993: 20-21).

GENDER AND PERSONIFICATION			
Categories Perceived as Masculine:		Categories Perceived as Feminine:	
Nouns denoting force, passion, violence:	<i>anger, crime, danger, despair, discord, fear, fury, love, murder, terror, vice, war</i>	Nouns suggesting beauty / gentleness / harmony / virtues / positive feelings:	<i>affection, benevolence, charity, devotion, faith, hope, justice ¹⁰⁹, melancholy, mercy, patience, peace, pity, sympathy, virtue</i>
Nouns denoting (impressive) natural elements or phenomena:	<i>mountain, ocean ¹¹⁰, river, storm, stream, sun, thunder, wind</i>	Nouns denoting negative feelings / traits of character / sins:	<i>envy, jealousy, pride, revenge, stubbornness, vanity</i>
Nouns related to extinction and definitive things:	<i>death, grave</i>	Some nouns denoting natural elements:	<i>darkness, earth, nature, world</i>
Nouns denoting (periods of) time:	<i>autumn, day ¹¹¹, summer, time, winter¹¹²</i>	Names of arts and sciences:	<i>art, drama, painting, philosophy, poetry, science</i>
		Names of universities:	<i>Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard (University)</i>
		Names of countries ¹¹³ / localities:	<i>country, city, London, Romania</i>
		Names of vehicles:	<i>balloon, boat, bus, car, coach, motor, plane, schooner, ship, steamer, submarine</i>

Pets are also usually personalized as either *he* or *she*, as the case may be.

It is not uncommon for car owners to refer to their **cars** as *she*, generally by men, and only rarely by women.

Ships have also been made “female”, ever since Old English.

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: OE Gender. Personification
“The most cited gendered reference to an inanimate object today may be the use of <i>she</i> to refer to ships. This usage was first noted by Ben Jonson in his <i>English Grammar</i> of 1640; he names ships as an exception to the rule that <i>it</i>

¹⁰⁹ *Law*, however, is seen as masculine.

¹¹⁰ *Sea*, however, is seen as feminine.

¹¹¹ *Night, evening* and *morning*, on the other hand, are seen as feminine.

¹¹² *Spring*, on the other hand, is seen as feminine.

¹¹³ Only as political entities, not geographical.

refers to inanimate objects, for 'we say, *shee sayles well*, though the name be *Hercules*, or *Henry*, (or) the *Prince*' (1972 [1640]: 57). In 2002, it was announced that Lloyd's List, the world's best-known source of maritime business news and information, would stop using *she* in reference to ships, switching over instead to *it*. This announcement made headlines in both England and in the United States. [...] Alexander Bain (1879: 122) explains that the masculine is used for things 'remarkable for strength, superiority, majesty, sublimity.'" (Curzan, 2003: 83)

NOUN GENDER IN A NUTSHELL

- ❑ Nouns do not have a grammatical gender in English.
- ❑ The main **gender classes** are **animate** and **inanimate**. The former are either **personal** or **non-personal**, with the **personal** class includes **masculine**, **feminine** gender nouns, along with **dual / common gender** nouns (e.g. *friend*, *neighbour*, *sibling*, *student*) as well as **collective** nouns (e.g. *team*), which are considered to be also **neuter**.
- ❑ Nouns can be **morphologically marked or unmarked for gender**.
- ❑ There are **three basic types of morphological marks for gender**:
 1. derivational suffixes (e.g. *actor* / *actress*)
 2. gender-specific premodifiers + dual gender noun (e.g. *boyfriend* / *girlfriend*)
 3. compounding elements (e.g. *policeman* / *policewoman*)
- ❑ Nouns which are **morphologically unmarked** are, instead, **lexically marked** for gender (they come up in **lexical pairs**, i.e. distinctive terms, separate words, not derived from each other; e.g. *boy* and *girl*).
- ❑ **Personal dual gender nouns** have only one form for both the masculine and the feminine, their gender being revealed in the context (e.g. *adult*, *artist*, *cousin*, *friend*, *guest*, *neighbour*, *orphan*, *owner*, *parent*, *person*, *relative*, *servant*, *sibling* etc.)
- ❑ **Personal dual gender nouns ending in -ER /-OR** are basically perceived as masculine gender (as **male default**) (e.g. *conductor*, *driver*, *writer*). Other, much fewer nouns, are regarded as **female default** (e.g. *nurse*).
- ❑ The **grammatical gender of animals** is somehow arbitrary; the [± male] opposition in animal nouns is revealed in a number of ways:
 - by means of lexical pairs (e.g. *goose* / *gander*; *wolf* / *vixen*)
 - by gender-specific formal markers

- derivational endings (*i.e. lion / lioness; tiger / tigress*)
 - compounding elements (*i.e. peacock / peahen*)
 - premodifiers (depending largely on the size and / or species of the animals concerned: *i.e. bull-elephant / cow-elephant; male-camel / female-camel; buck-rabbit / doe-rabbit; he-bird / she-bird; billy-goat / nanny-goat*)
- ❑ Personification of **birds**, **animals** and **insects** (whether in fiction, or in everyday speech) is not uncommon. There are some noun categories generally perceived as **masculine** (*e.g. anger, crime, day, fear, fury, mountain, river, time, war*), while others are seen as **feminine** (*e.g. affection, art, car, envy, nature, night, science, ship*).

NOUN CASE (THE GENITIVE)

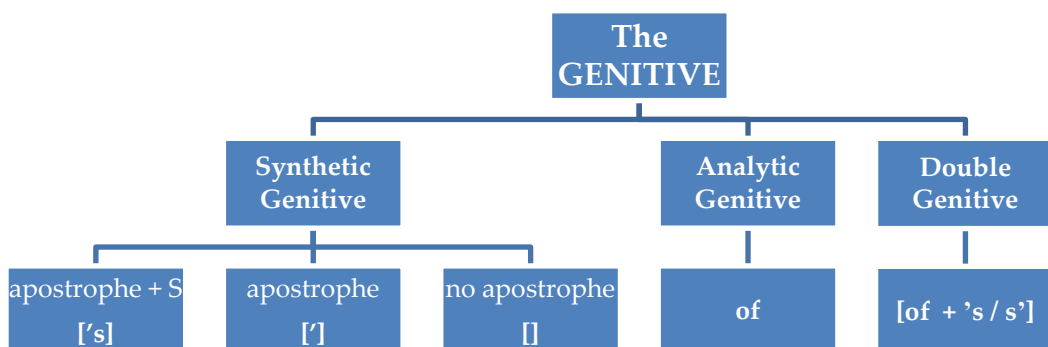
- ❑ **The Genitive**
- ❑ **The Synthetic / Inflectional / 'S / Saxon Genitive**
 - The Elliptic Synthetic Genitive
 - *The Local / Locative (Elliptic) Genitive*
 - The Group Genitive
 - The Classifying Genitive vs. The Specifying Genitive
- ❑ **The Analytic / Periphrastic / Of / Prepositional Genitive**
 - The Genitive of Gradation
- ❑ **The Double Genitive**
- ❑ **Genitive Semantic Types**
- ❑ **The Synthetic Genitive vs. The Analytic Genitive**
- ❑ **Noun Case in a Nutshell**

THE GENITIVE

English nouns have the following cases: Nominative, Genitive, Dative and Accusative. However, since there is no distinction in form between nouns except in the Genitive, **by Noun Case, we here mainly understand the Genitive.**

The Genitive case is sometimes called Possessive case, but as we shall see, possession is not the only thing it can express. Largely speaking though, the Genitive involves a relationship between a “possessor” and a “thing possessed / possessee” (e.g. *John's car; the worries of the poor*).

A first glance at the Genitive shows the following types and formal markers:



THE SYNTHETIC / INFLECTIONAL / 'S / SAXON GENITIVE

Formally, as shown in the diagram above, the Synthetic Genitive comes in one of three shapes: **apostrophe + S** ['s], **apostrophe** ['] ("zero" genitive) and **no apostrophe** [] (**implicit genitive**). The **word-order** imposed by the **Synthetic Genitive** is: **first the "possessor", and then the "thing possessed"**. In the economy of the noun phrase they make up, the **head** is the **"thing possessed"**.

apostrophe + S ['s]

singular common nouns designating **people or beings**

⇒ *my daughter's car*
 ⇒ *the student's book*
 ⇒ *the engineer's tools*

singular proper nouns

⇒ *John's car*
 ⇒ *Dr. Johnson's prescription*

irregular plural nouns

⇒ *the children's toys*
 ⇒ *the women's hats*

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apostrophe ['] / "zero" genitive

regular plural common nouns

⇒ *my daughters' car*

plural proper nouns

⇒ *the Johnsons' apartment*

proper nouns ending in -S, -X, -Z etc.

⇒ *Dickens'* (but also: Dickens's)
 ⇒ *Burns'* (but also: Burns's)
 ⇒ *Brutus', Moses' etc.*

common nouns ending in -S and followed by *sake*

⇒ *for goodness' sake* (but also: *for goodness sake*)
 BUT: *for Mary's sake; art for art's sake; for God's sake*

no apostrophe [] / implicit genitive

streets, restaurants, factories, publishing companies, firms etc.

⇒ *St. James Road*
 ⇒ *Longmans*

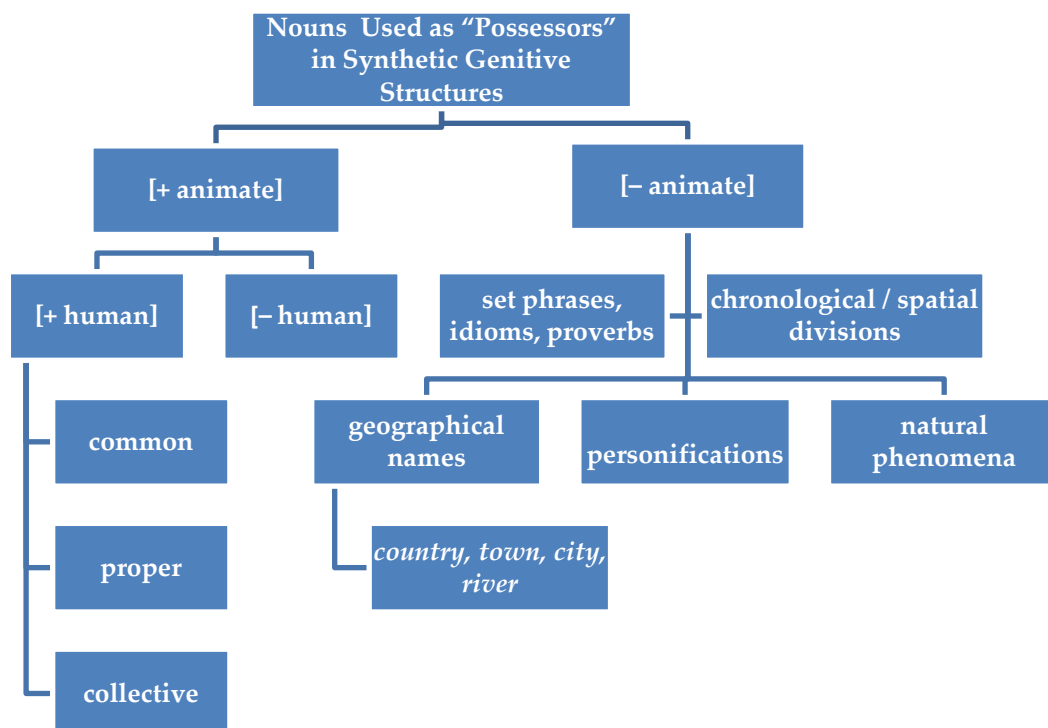
shops

⇒ *Marks and Spencers*
 ⇒ *Harrods*

associations, organisations etc.

⇒ *The Students Association*
 ⇒ *The United Nations Organisation*

Both [+ animate] and [– animate] nouns can be used as “possessors” in Synthetic Genitive structures, as shown in yet another diagram, as well as the immediately following table:



⇒ <i>the boy's car</i>	[+ animate], [+ human], common	[+ animate]	
⇒ <i>Shakespeare's plays</i>	[+ animate], [+ human], proper		
⇒ <i>the government's policy</i> ⇒ <i>the people's complaints</i>	[+ animate], [+ human], collective		
⇒ <i>a bird's egg</i> ⇒ <i>cow's milk</i> ⇒ <i>the cat's fur</i> ⇒ <i>the dog's food</i> ⇒ <i>the spider's web</i> ⇒ <i>the wolf's fangs</i>	[+ animate], [– human], common		
⇒ <i>a bird's eye view</i> ⇒ <i>a heart's desire</i> ⇒ <i>at arm's length</i> ⇒ <i>at death's door</i> ⇒ <i>by a hair's breadth</i> ⇒ <i>for God's / goodness' / Pete's / Christ's / heaven's sake</i> ⇒ <i>Hawks will not pick out</i>	[– animate], set phrases / idioms / proverbs, common / proper		

<i>hawks' eyes.</i>		
⇒ <i>a day's wait</i> ⇒ <i>a month's delay</i> ⇒ <i>a fortnight's vacation</i> ⇒ <i>a moment's thought</i> ⇒ <i>a year's leave</i> ⇒ <i>in a minute or so's time</i> ⇒ <i>in two years' time</i> ⇒ <i>last year's edition</i> ⇒ <i>the hundred years' war</i> ⇒ <i>today's / yesterday's newspaper</i>	[– animate], duration, distance, weight, value	[– animate]
⇒ <i>at a stone's throw</i> ⇒ <i>a 10 minutes' walk</i>		
⇒ <i>a 3 tons' lorry</i>		
⇒ <i>a 5 dollars' book</i> ⇒ <i>a pound's worth of candies</i>		
⇒ <i>Bucharest's streets</i> ⇒ <i>Europe's countries</i> ⇒ <i>Moldavia's monasteries</i> ⇒ <i>Romania's economy</i> ⇒ <i>the Danube's Delta</i> ⇒ <i>the river's banks</i> ⇒ <i>the town's inhabitants</i>	[– animate], geographical names, common / proper	
⇒ <i>liberty's voice</i> ⇒ <i>life's joys</i>	[– animate], personifications	
⇒ <i>the earth's water(s)</i> ⇒ <i>the ocean's roar</i> ⇒ <i>the Moon's surface</i> ⇒ <i>the Sun's rays / heat</i>	[– animate], natural phenomena	
⇒ <i>Mary's leaving</i> ⇒ <i>Byron's reading</i>	[– animate], when followed by a gerund ¹¹⁴	
⇒ <i>the brain's total weight</i> ⇒ <i>the duty's call</i> ⇒ <i>my life's aim</i> ⇒ <i>the novel's plot</i>	[– animate], common, nouns of special relevance to human activity	

THE ELLIPTIC SYNTHETIC GENITIVE

Sometimes, we get to use an incomplete form of the Synthetic Genitive (*i.e.* only the “possessor” is mentioned, the “possee” being usually inferred). There are two main reasons for this omission, or this ellipsis: “The **'s phrase stands alone** as an ellipited head of the NG [nominal group] when the noun head is recoverable, **either because it has already been mentioned, or by convention** (Downing & Locke, 2006: 426)

¹¹⁴ Cf. Chiriacescu (2003: 84).

The possessed object can be omitted in replies when it is clear from the context:

A: *Whose coat is this?*

B: *Susan's.*

The Elliptical Synthetic Genitive is commonly used to avoid redundancy:

Don't take my pen. Take Susan's / somebody else's.

His memory is like an elephant's.

*Tom's is the fastest car.*¹¹⁵

The Local / Locative (Elliptic) Genitive

The possessed object is omitted **by convention** whenever the 's element refers to **people's homes** or **establishments** such as **restaurants** and **shops, services, practitioners etc.**:

Let's have dinner at Archy's . They met at Uncle Tom's .	people's homes
"Breakfast at Tiffany's " is a 1961 film based on Truman Capote's 1958 novella of the same name. Have you been to St. Paul's ?	establishments / restaurants / shops
I have to go to the baker's / the butcher's / the chemist's / the (dry)cleaner's / the doctor's / the dressmaker's / the florist's / the (green)grocer's / the hairdresser's .	shops / services / practitioners

THE GROUP GENITIVE

It is also possible to add the 'S inflection of the Synthetic Genitive not to the head word, but to the last word in a complex construction (i.e. a group of words forming a sense unit).

All the other people's opinions.

Today is the heir-apparent's birthday.

The King of Denmark's court.

The man of the world's respectability.

At about a quarter of a mile's distance.

My daughter-in-law's jewels.

The commander-in-chief's office.

Credulity is belief in somebody else's nonsense.

At her lord and master's sudden return.

We had an hour and a half's talk.

In a year or two's time.

Mr What's-his-name's stupid remark. (Jespersen, 2006: 103)

¹¹⁵ Quirk et al. (1985: 329) call this type of structure "independent genitive":

A periphrastic paraphrase usually makes it clear exactly which part of the structure is receiving the genitive marker (e.g. *the King of Denmark court* is the King’s court, not Denmark’s). However, things used to be much more complicated in OE and ME.

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: The Group Genitive. OE & ME
“In Old and Middle English the genitive marker was always attached to the noun being made genitive. <i>The Queen of England’s robe</i> would have been <i>the Queen’s robe of England</i>. In the modern version <i>England</i> carries the genitive marker, even though it is not England’s robe. The Chaucer story which modern readers know as <i>The Wife of Bath’s Tale</i> was in Chaucer’s manuscript <i>The Wyfes Tale of Bath</i>. In the seventeenth century, a group genitive developed whereby the entire noun phrase receives the genitive marker – [<i>the Queen of England</i>]’s robe.” (Berk, 1999: 74-75)

Attention needs to be drawn to group genitives vs. compound genitives (coordinated proper nouns), as in:

<i>Jim and Sarah’s parents</i>	2 possessors 1 object [1 set of parents]	Jim and Sarah are siblings
<i>Jim’s and Sarah’s parents</i>	2 possessors 2 objects [2 sets of parents]	Jim and Sarah are not siblings

THE CLASSIFYING¹¹⁶ GENITIVE vs. THE SPECIFYING GENITIVE

Synthetic Genitive structures usually occur in a noun phrase with a specifying meaning, as determiners, indicating possession, appurtenance or other types of relationship between the “possessor” and the “thing possessed” (e.g. *Mary’s coat*; the *lion’s mane*; the *children’s books* etc.). Sometimes, however, the ‘S phrase may indicate **class** rather than possession (i.e. *a lady’s bag* may be a bag specially designed for women, and not necessarily a bag belonging to a lady), in which case the ‘S phrase acts as a modifier. Particularly when used with the article *a(n)* or when the possessor is a plural noun, genitives may cause confusion, leading to two possible interpretations.

¹¹⁶ Hortensia Pârlog, among others, calls this type of genitive *Descriptive Genitive* (1995: 31).

<i>a lion's mane</i>	specifying: the mane belonging to a lion	the 'S phrase: determiner
	classifying: a mane similar to that of a lion's	the 'S phrase: modifier
<i>children's books</i>	specifying: the books belonging to children	the 'S phrase: determiner
	classifying: the books specifically written for children (in general)	the 'S phrase: modifier

See also these two examples from one of E. A. Poe's short-stories:

*He was a sad dog, it is true, and a **dog's death** it was that he died.*¹¹⁷

*The scoundrels refused to pay it, so I had Mr. Dammit dug up at once, and sold him for **dog's meat**.*¹¹⁸

THE ANALYTIC / PERIPHRASTIC / OF / PREPOSITIONAL GENITIVE

The **word-order** imposed by the **Analytic Genitive** is: **first the "thing possessed"**, and **then the "possessor"** [the thing possessed + OF + the possessor]. The Analytic Genitive is used to indicate **possession** (e.g. *the picture of my mother*) or **appurtenance** (e.g. *the cover of the book; the lid of the pot; the trees of the forest*). The "possessor" is usually a common noun, but proper nouns in this position are not unheard of:

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⇒ <i>the leg of the table</i> ⇒ <i>the streets of the town</i>	[– animate], common	[– animate]
⇒ <i>the first of December</i> ⇒ <i>the month of February</i>	[– animate], proper (with months)	
⇒ <i>the dresses of the ladies</i> ⇒ <i>the eyes of the lion</i>	[+ animate], common	[+ animate]
⇒ <i>the fears of the poor</i> ⇒ <i>the teachings of the wise</i>	[+ animate], common (with personal adjective heads)	
⇒ <i>the coat of the old man in the doorway</i> ⇒ <i>the daughter of the man we talked about</i> ⇒ <i>the papers of the guests present</i>	[+ animate], common (when followed by prepositional phrases, attributive clauses or adjectives in postposition)	
⇒ <i>the murder of Caesar</i>	[+ animate],	

¹¹⁷ E. A. Poe, *Never Bet the Devil Your Head*.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

	proper (for emphasis)	
⇒ <i>the reign of Queen Elisabeth the First</i>	[+ animate], proper (when the possessor is a group of words)	
⇒ <i>the mother of Anne and Sarah</i>	[+ animate], proper (with coordinated proper nouns)	
⇒ <i>Historical Plays of William Shakespeare</i>	[+ animate], proper (in book titles)	

THE GENITIVE OF GRADATION

The so-called **Genitive of Gradation** (Pârlog, 1995: 32) actually expresses a **superlative**. It consists in the repetition of the noun head (i.e. the same noun is used as a “possee” and as a “possessor”, only that the noun used as “possessor” is in the plural.

- ❑ *the evil of evils*
- ❑ *a horror of horrors*
- ❑ *the king of kings*
- ❑ *the place of all places*
- ❑ *the song of songs*
- ❑ *And blood, too, that word of all words – so rife with mystery, and suffering, and terror...!*¹¹⁹

THE DOUBLE GENITIVE

English speakers sometimes use double genitive constructions (i.e. the genitive is marked both inflectionally and periphrastically). When we say *In I am reading a novel of Hemingway's*, Hemingway, the “possessor”, is marked by both the Synthetic Genitive 'S and by the Analytic Genitive OF.

a novel [of Hemingway('s)]

This is an example of **Double Genitive**¹²⁰. The “possessor” can be expressed by:

- ❑ a **common noun** (e.g. *a painting of (my) mother's*)
- ❑ a **proper noun** (e.g. *a painting of Picasso's*) or even
- ❑ a **pronoun** (e.g. *a painting of hers*).

¹¹⁹ E. A. Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

¹²⁰ Called *Post-Genitive* by Quirk et al. (1985: 330).

Double genitives are often used to refer to a **class of individuals** (e.g. *a friend of mine*, *a fan of Cher's*). Anna Wierzbicka argues that the double genitive “is particularly suited to collective categories, where all members can be viewed as equidistant with respect to the person who provides the point of reference” (Wierzbicka, 1997: 43). In other words, members of the category are undifferentiated.

Double genitives are also often used **emphatically**, even **pejoratively**, especially with demonstratives determining the “thing possessed” (e.g. *I can't stand those pets of Richard's*. *That husband of hers is up to no good.*).

As noticed by Jozef Falinski (2011: 132), the double genitive is the direct result of a particular restriction in the English determiner system (i.e. that two central determiners are mutually exclusive: a specifying 's genitive or a possessive can never be used in a syntagmatic relation, side by side).

Compare the following examples:

⇒ <i>a picture of my mother</i>	[simple genitive]	mother appears in the picture
⇒ <i>a picture of my mother's</i>	[double genitive]	the picture belongs to / was taken by mother
⇒ <i>a description of Sadoveanu</i>	[simple genitive]	Sadoveanu is the one described
⇒ <i>a description of Sadoveanu's</i>	[double genitive]	the description belongs to / was given by Sadoveanu

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There is always a possibility of extension of the double genitive, usually in appositive phrases of the “an angel of a girl” type. According to Keizer (2007: 87), constructions of this kind (she calls **binominals**, discussed here under the *(Pseudo-)Partitives* heading) are often **figurative** (based on a simile or metaphor (e.g. *an angel of a girl*), but may be **literal** (e.g. *that miser of a manager*). Whatever the case, they may be further extended. Thus, *an angel of a woman* may be turned into *that angel of a wife of his* (Falinski, 2011: 133). Here's an example of a **fourfold genitive**:

*Here, then, said Dupin to me, you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete – the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber.*¹²¹

GENITIVE SEMANTIC TYPES

The Genitive (mostly the Synthetic Genitive, but also the Analytic Genitive) can express a lot more than possession, as shown in the table below:

¹²¹ E. A. Poe, *The Purloined Letter*.

GENITIVE SEMANTIC TYPES ¹²²		
TYPE	EXAMPLE	MEANING
Possessive Genitive	<i>the child's toys / hair</i>	[the child has toys / hair]
Subjective Genitive	<i>the manager's approval / application</i>	[the manager approved / applied for something]
Genitive of Authorship / Origin	<i>Hemingway's novels / letters</i>	[Hemingway authored the novel / letters]
Objective Genitive	<i>that neighbour's murder / pardon</i>	[somebody murdered / pardoned that neighbor]
Part / Whole Genitive	<i>the roof of the house; the tree's branches</i>	[the roof is a part of the house, just like branches are only a part of the tree] [the partitive meaning is more obvious in <i>five / the best of ...</i>]
	<i>five of the students; the best of the players</i>	
Genitive of Measure	<i>the length of this room; the man's size / weight; the circumference of the earth</i>	[the dimensions of the room / man / earth]
Genitive of Content	<i>a case of curiosities; a cask of Amontillado</i>	[a container / box storing interesting things / Amontillado]
Genitive of Material	<i>a scarf of silk</i>	[a scarf made of silk]
Descriptive Genitive	<i>a winter's day; a feeling of happiness</i>	[the "possessor" is actually described by the genitive structure]
Appositive Genitive	<i>the city of London; the month of July</i>	[the genitive functions like an apposition]

**THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES:
The (OE) Genitive of Measure**

"Genitives of measure have an interesting history. In Old English, the plural genitive marker was not {-s} as it is in Modern English, but rather a vowel, usually *-a*. Sometime later, vowel suffixes were lost in English and so the plural genitive had no ending at all. Eventually, most plural genitives took on the {-s} genitive marker. However, in many regions of the United States, you can still hear speakers say *He lives three mile down the road* or *That ceiling is ten foot tall*. And we all use the old genitive of measure in expressions like *I'm*

¹²² Cf. Quirk *et al.* (1985: 321-322), Berk (1999: 72-73) and Chiriacescu (2003: 76-77).

five foot four. The lack of a plural marker on *mile* and *foot* is a remnant of this ancient form. We see the same phenomenon in *a nine inch stick* and *a two hour lecture*. In genitives of measure, the measurement term is the noun head and the entity being measured always takes the inflectional or periphrastic genitive form.” (Berk, 1999: 72)

THE SYNTHETIC GENITIVE vs. THE ANALYTIC GENITIVE

There is frequently an equally acceptable choice between the two types of genitive. **Prenominal constructions** (*i.e.* Synthetic Genitives) are generally less explicit than **postnominal constructions** (*i.e.* Analytic Genitives). They also usually express **given information** (unlike postmodifiers, which also introduce **new information**).

Often, there is no difference between the two competing genitives (*e.g. the author’s opinion / the opinion of the author; my parents’ house / the house of my parents*). However, there are some factors which may determine the preference of one over the other. Among these factors we may mention:

- ❑ the **gender** or the **animacy** of the possessor
- ❑ the **number** or the **complexity** of the possessor
- ❑ topicality or **textual emphasis**
- ❑ the **presence of pre- or post-modifiers**
- ❑ various **stylistic considerations** (Jespersen (1933: 144), for example, observes that **poets often use a Synthetic Genitive where others would expect an *of*-construction**).

Thus, according to Quirk *et al.* (1985: 323), the semantic features of the genitive noun have a bearing on this choice: “**the [Synthetic] genitive is favoured for classes which are highest on the gender scale**” (*i.e.* [+ human] nouns, either common or proper, collective nouns denoting groups of people, and some [– human] but [+ animate] nouns, usually “higher animals”). To these, we might add geographical names, locative nouns and other nouns of special relevance to human activity.

Jozef Falinski (2011) also counts textual emphasis and stylistic choice among the most important factors accounting for the choice of genitive. However, his main criterion is the position of the referent of the head noun on the so-called “**scale of animacy**”: “**a theoretical scale that goes from a high point of ‘animate / human’ reference to a low point of ‘non-animate / thing’**.” (Falinski, 2011: 121) The further down the scale we go, the greater the likelihood of using a postmodifying *OF*-phrase.

possession, agency	animate	humans		's genitive
			extensions of human	
			higher animals	
			lower animals	
partitive, descriptive	non-animate	things		of-phrase

At the bottom of the scale he introduces a **partitive meaning** (e.g. *the price of gold*) and a **descriptive meaning** (e.g. *the bridge of steel*).

According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 478), there are some **morphosyntactic restrictions** on the use of the genitive. For example, in spoken language, when there is **potential ambiguity between a singular and a plural referent**, a postnominal position will be preferred (e.g. *the house of my parent(s)* instead of *my parents'* or *my parent's house*).

Other situations in which an Analytic Genitive is preferable are those involving **pronouns** (e.g. *in the middle of it*) or **long groups of words** (e.g. *the report of the chairman of the examination committee*).

Postnominal constructions are also necessary in order **to avoid confusion** (e.g. *the daughter of a poor doctor*, rather than *a poor doctor's daughter*), as pointed out by Evelien Keizer (2007: 311). Keizer's conclusion is that

the basic difference between prenominal possessives and postnominal of-constructions is that in the former the relation between the two concepts (possessor and possessee) is either activated or presupposed, whereas in the latter it is not. (Keizer, *op. cit.*, 333)

Summarising the above, the following table presents the factors underlying one choice of genitive or the other:

Synthetic Genitives	Analytic Genitives
animacy	non-animacy
short	complex
given information	new information
activated relationship possessor / possessee	non-activated relationship possessor / possessee

NOUN CASE IN A NUTSHELL

- ❑ The Genitive involves a relationship between a “possessor” and a “thing possessed / possessee” (e.g. *John’s car; the worries of the poor*).
- ❑ There are three types of Genitive: **Synthetic**, **Analytic** and **Double** (which is a combination of the previous two types).
- ❑ The **Synthetic Genitive** comes in one of three shapes:
 - **apostrophe + S** [’s]
 - **apostrophe [’]** (“zero” genitive)
 - **no apostrophe** [] (implicit genitive).
- ❑ The **Elliptic Genitive** is a construction in which the possessor (the ’s phrase) stands alone, the possessee being inferred from the context. (e.g. *It’s not my book. It’s Jonathan’s.*).
- ❑ The **Local Genitive** is an elliptical genitive in which the possessee (people’s homes, various establishments such as restaurants or shops, services or practitioners) is omitted **by convention** (e.g. *St. Paul’s; the grocer’s*).
- ❑ A **Group Genitive** is a type of genitive in which the possessor is an entire noun phrase which receives the genitive marker (e.g. *the **King of Denmark**’s court*).
- ❑ The **’S phrase** may indicate **possession** (e.g. *my cat’s whiskers*), in which case we are talking about a **Specifying Genitive**, or **class** (e.g. *a cat’s whiskers*), in which case we are talking about a **Classifying Genitive**.
- ❑ The so-called **Genitive of Gradation**, a special type of **Analytic (OF-phrase) Genitive**, expresses a **superlative** and consists in the repetition of the noun head (e.g. *the king of kings; the song of songs*).
- ❑ A **Double Genitive** construction is marked both inflectionally and periphrastically (e.g. *that book of Susan’s*).
- ❑ The **Synthetic genitive** is favoured for **classes which are highest on the animacy scale** (i.e. personal nouns, either common or proper).

APPENDIX # 1 GROUPS OF MASS NOUNS

Groups of MASS NOUNS (adapted from Gill <i>et al.</i> , 1998: 8-12)	Examples	a) Uncountable Use / b) Countable Use
The “Cheese” Group	Food and the ingredients which go into food: <i>bread, butter, cereal, cheddar, cheese, chocolate, custard, dessert, dough, dressing, fat, filling, flour, food, gravy, icecream, jam, jelly, margarine, marmelade, meat, mustard, oil, pasta, pickle, rice, sauce, seasoning, soup, spice, spread, starch, stuffing, syrup, vinegar, wheat, yeast</i> etc.	a) <i>Cheese</i> is a dairy product derived from milk. b) We felt a strong temptation, at one point, to turn into a village inn as we passed and have a cheese and a few loaves between us. ¹²³ a) Nine out of every ten people in the world who eat rice are Asians. b) Wild rice is not a rice but an aquatic grass.
The “Beer” Group	Different kinds of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, including ingredients: <i>alcohol, ale, beer, bourbon, brandy, burgundy, champagne, cider, coffee, cola, decaf, gin, juice, lager, liquor, malt, milk, punch, rum, Scotch, sherry, soda, spirit, tea, tonic, vodka, whiskey, wine</i>	a) Most modern beer is brewed with hops. b) European-style beers are widely available. a) I like tea but I love coffee . b) Two coffees , please. This is a nice coffee / tea .
The “Silk” Group	Different sorts of fabric: <i>acrylic, brocade, calico, cloth, cotton, damask, fabric, fur, leather, linen, material, muslin, plaid, polyester, satin, silk, tweed, velvet, wool</i>	a) Silk is my favourite fibre of all. b) She had plenty of cushions covered with a striped silk . a) She was wearing a white cotton dress with red polka dots. ¹²⁴ b) Manchester’s machine-made cottons killed the trade in hand-woven cloth.
The “Plastic” Group	Solid substances, many of which are used in manufacturing and building: <i>alloy, basalt, ceramic, clay, enamel,</i>	a) He found a thin little notebook, covered in plastic . b) It is a biodegradable plastic which melts in

¹²³ Jerome K. Jerome, *On Eating and Drinking*, in *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*.

¹²⁴ Carlos Acosta, *No Way Home: A Cuban Dancer’s Tale*.

	<i>granite, lava, limestone, metal, plastic, steel, stone, vinyl, wood</i>	temperatures above 50 degrees. a) Stainless steel is produced by combining steel with chromium. b) A major problem in using iron and many steels is corrosion.
The "Lipstick" Group	Cosmetics and skin-care products: <i>aftershave, blusher, cleanser, conditioner, cream, deodorant, fragrance, gel, gloss, lipstick, lotion, mascara, perfume, scent, shampoo, soap, toothpaste</i>	a) Red lipstick will add some colour to your face. b) A strong lipstick with little or no eye make-up has always been a very smart French look.
The "Cough Mixture" Group	Medications and health-care products: <i>anesthetic, antiseptic, balm, cough mixture, ointment, sunscreen, laxative, medicine</i>	a) Is cough mixture the same as cough syrup? b) Some cough mixtures cause drowsiness.
The "Bleach" Group	Chemical substances which are used, for example, for cleaning / painting / killing things: <i>adhesive, bleach, cleaner, detergent, dye, fertilizer, gas, glue, ink, insecticide, lubricant, paint, polish, repellent, resin, solvent, varnish</i>	a) The bright boxes of soap and bleach stood in a neat row on a shelf on the wall. b) Bleaches can erode the enamel of the tooth.
The "Acid" Group	Technical names for chemical substances: <i>acid, chloride, nitrate, oxide, peroxide, phosphate, sulphate</i>	a) These fossils can be easily dissolved out of limestones with acid . b) It contains high amounts of laureate, a fatty acid used in the manufacture of soaps, shampoos and detergents.
The "Fossil Fuel" Group	Different kinds of fuel: <i>diesel, (fossil) fuel, oil</i>	a) A switch away from fossil fuel across the world can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 25 and 50 per cent. b) The price of a fossil fuel can go up quite a lot if demand grows faster than supply.

The “Moss” Group	Simple forms of plant and fungus: <i>fungus, grass, lichen, moss, mould, seaweed</i>	a) <i>Moss had been growing all over the pathway.</i> b) I suspect it is not <i>a moss</i> but a lichen.
The “Compost” Group	Substances in which plants grow or which are added to the soil: <i>compost, manure, soil</i>	a) <i>Half fill the bowl with moist compost and plant several bulbs.</i> b) For this I made up <i>a compost</i> of decent loam, peat and grit.
The “Fluid” Group	Superordinate or general terms for a range of substances which have a particular physical form: <i>concentrate, fluid, liquid</i>	a) <i>Drain off any liquid that is left on the rice.</i> b) <i>They always say you should drink a lot of liquids if you are ill.</i>
Nouns with Other Meanings	<i>poison, pollen, potpourri, tobacco, venom, wallpaper, wax, writing paper, wrapping paper</i>	a) <i>Tobacco cannot be sold to children under 16.</i> b) He experimented <i>with a wide variety of tobaccos.</i>

APPENDIX # 2 SUMMARY OF NON-COUNT NOUNS

Summary of Non-Count Nouns (Berk, 1999: 81-82)		
Non-count Nouns with Singular Verbs	Non-count Nouns Ending in {-s} with Singular Verbs	Non-count Nouns Ending in {-s} with Plural Verbs
The milk is sour. Beer makes me sick. Gasoline is cheap. Oil rises to the top. The sand was hot. Salt gets hard. Paper costs a lot. Iron is a strong metal. Chocolate is fattening. This dirt is heavy. Their jewelry is ugly. Badminton is strenuous.	Checkers bores my dad. Billiards requires skill. Darts is my favourite game. Mumps makes your glands swell. Rickets [rahitism] is caused by a lack of vitamin D. Shingles is hard to cure. [Some speakers use plural verbs with some or all of these nouns.]	Your glasses have orange lenses. The binoculars are over here. His pants are plaid [tartan]. My jeans are on the bed. The pliers are on the bench. The tweezers look broken. These linens are dirty. The dregs taste disgusting.

APPENDIX # 3 PARTITIVES (I)

- ☐ Some nouns can be quantified by means of **general partitive phrases**. The most frequent: A PIECE OF (advice / evidence / gossip / knowledge / (good / bad) luck / news / nonsense / information / scandal / work), AN ITEM OF (clothing / furniture / news), A BIT OF (chocolate / cloth / exercise / fun / patience), or even AN ACT OF (aggression / brutality / cruelty / decency / injustice / kindness / love / perfidy / Quixotry / selfishness / selflessness / wisdom).
- ☐ Other, more specific / specialized quantifiers (partitive phrases):

B ☐ <i>a bag of time</i> (o groază de timp / timp berechet) ☐ <i>a ball of wool / thread / meat / snow</i> (un ghem de lână / ață; chiftea; bulgăre de zăpadă) ☐ <i>a bar of chocolate</i> (o tabletă de ciocolată) ☐ <i>a barrel of wine / beer</i> (un butoi cu vin / bere) ☐ <i>a basket of fruit</i> (un coș cu fructe) ☐ <i>a bed of lichen / roses / watercress</i> (un strat de licheni / trandafiri / cresson) ☐ <i>a bevy of canaries / larks / people / quails</i> (un stol de canari / ciocârlii / prepelițe; un grup de oameni) ☐ <i>a blade of grass</i> (un fir de iarbă) ☐ <i>a bottle of milk</i> (o sticlă de lapte) ☐ <i>a bowl of soup</i> (un castron cu supă) ☐ <i>a box of chocolates</i> (o cutie cu bomboane de ciocolată) ☐ <i>a box of matches</i> (o cutie de chibrituri) ☐ <i>a breath of air</i> (o pală / gură de aer) ☐ <i>a brood of chick(en)s</i> (pui cloțiți în același timp) ☐ <i>a bunch of keys</i> (o legătură de chei) ☐ <i>a bunch / bouquet of flowers</i> (un buchet de flori)	C ☐ <i>a cake of soap</i> (un săpun / o bucată de săpun) ☐ <i>a can of beer / fish</i> (o cutie de bere / o conservă de pește) ☐ <i>a carton of cream / custard / milk / yogurt</i> (o cutie de smântână / cremă de ouă / lapte / iaurt) ☐ <i>a choice of products</i> (o gamă / un set / o selecție de produse) ☐ <i>a cloud of dust / smoke / mosquitoes</i> (un nor de praf; roi de țânțari) ☐ <i>a clove of garlic</i> (un cățel de usturoi) ☐ <i>a clump of trees / thistles</i> (un pâlă de copaci; un mănunchi de ciulini) ☐ <i>a collection of coins / stamps</i> (o colecție de monede / timbre) ☐ <i>a colony of ants</i> (o colonie de furnici) ☐ <i>a covey of grouse / partridges</i> (un stol de potârniche) ☐ <i>a crew of sailors / pilots</i> (un echipaj: marinari, piloți etc.) ☐ <i>a crop of fruit / apples / grapes</i> (recoltă de fructe / mere / struguri etc.) ☐ <i>a crowd / mass / multitude of people</i> (o mulțime de oameni) ☐ <i>a crumb of bread</i> (o firimitură de pâine) ☐ <i>a cup of coffee</i> (o ceașcă de cafea)
D ☐ <i>a drop of water / rain</i> (un strop de apă / ploaie)	F ☐ <i>a family of apes / beavers / gorillas</i> (o familie de maimuțe / castori / gorile) ☐ <i>a fillet of beef</i> (un file de vită) ☐ <i>a flight of birds</i> (un stol de păsări în zbor) ☐ <i>a flock of birds / lice / people / sheep</i> (un stol de păsări; un grup de oameni; o turmă de oi)
G ☐ <i>a gaggle of geese</i> (un cârd de gâște)	H ☐ <i>a head of cattle / cabbage / garlic / lettuce</i> (o

☐ <i>a glimmer of light / hope</i> (o licărire de lumină / speranță) ☐ <i>a grain of corn / humour / pepper / rice / salt / sand / truth</i> (un bob / o boabă de porumb / piper / orez; un dram de umor; un fir de nisip; un grăunte de sare; un sâmbure de adevăr) ☐ <i>a group of friends</i> (un grup de prieteni) ☐ <i>a gust of wind</i> (o pală / rafală de vânt)	vită; o căpățână de varză / usturoi / salată) ☐ <i>a herd of cattle</i> (o cireadă de vaci) ☐ <i>a hive of bees</i> (un stup de albine) ☐ <i>a host of daffodils</i> (un câmp / o grămadă / spuzenie de narcise)
I ☐ <i>not one iota of difference / truth</i> (nici cea mai mică diferență / nici urmă de adevăr)	L ☐ <i>a leg of pork</i> (un jambon) ☐ <i>a levy of money</i> (o sumă de bani, ca taxă) ☐ <i>a loaf of bread</i> (o franzelă) ☐ <i>a lock of hair</i> (o șuviță de păr) ☐ <i>a lump of coal / sugar</i> (o bucată de cărbune ; un bulgăre de zahăr)
J ☐ <i>a jar of jam</i> (un borcan de gem) ☐ <i>a joint of beef</i> (o halcă de vită)	
M ☐ <i>a morsel of bread / food</i> (o bucățică / îmbucătură de pâine / mâncare) ☐ <i>a murder of crows / ravens</i> (un stol de ciori / corbi)	N ☐ <i>a nest of mice / wasps</i> (un cuib de șoareci / viespi)
	O ☐ <i>oodles of money</i> (grămezi de bani)
P ☐ <i>a pack of cards / dogs / lies / wolves</i> (un pachet de cărți; multe minciuni; o haită de câini / lupi) ☐ <i>a pinch of cinnamon / pepper / salt</i> (un vârf / strop de scorțișoară / piper / sare) ☐ <i>a pint of beer</i> (pint = 0.57 l (GB) / 0.473 l (USA)) ☐ <i>a pot of milk</i> (o oală cu lapte) ☐ <i>a pride of lions</i> (un grup de lei)	R ☐ <i>a ray of hope / light / sunshine</i> (o rază de speranță / lumină / soare) ☐ <i>reams of paper</i> (teancuri de hârtie) ☐ <i>a round of applause</i> (o rundă de aplauze)

S ☐ <i>a school / shoal of fish / whales</i> (un banc de pești; un grup de baleen) ☐ <i>a series of incidents</i> (o serie de incidente) ☐ <i>a set of cutlery</i> (un set de tacâmuri) ☐ <i>a shoulder of mutton / veal</i> (jigou; pulpă de oaie / vită) ☐ <i>a shred of cloth / evidence / fabric / dignity / paper / truth</i> (o fâșie de pânză; o dovadă cât de mică; o urmă de demnitate / adevăr; un petic de hârtie) ☐ <i>a skein of geese</i> (un stol de gâște sălbatice care zboară în formă de V) ☐ <i>a slew of lawsuits / reporters</i> (o groază de procese / reporteri) ☐ <i>a slice of cake / lemon</i> (o felie de tort / lămâie) ☐ <i>a sliver of glass</i> (un ciob de sticlă) ☐ <i>a sloth / sleuth of bears</i> (un grup de urși) ☐ <i>a snippet of conversation</i> (o frântură de conversație) ☐ <i>a spate of bombings / thefts / violence</i> (un val / o avalanșă de bombe / furturi / violență) ☐ <i>a spell of crying / (good / bad) weather</i> (o criză de plâns / o perioadă de vreme bună) ☐ <i>a sprig of dill</i> (o crenguță de mărar) ☐ <i>a squeeze of lemon</i> (un strop de lămâie) ☐ <i>a stable / stud of horses</i> (o herghelie de cai) ☐ <i>a string of pearls / beads / islands</i> (un șirag de perle / mărgel; un șir de insule) ☐ <i>a stroke of good luck</i> (un noroc (chior)) ☐ <i>a stud of horses</i> (o herghelie de cai) ☐ <i>a suit of clothes</i> (un costum de haine) ☐ <i>a surfeit of wine</i> (un exces de vin) ☐ <i>a swarm of insects</i> (un roi de insecte)	T ☐ <i>a tablet of antibiotic / soap</i> (un comprimat de antibiotic / un săpun) ☐ <i>a team of researchers</i> (o echipă de cercetători) ☐ <i>a thread of cotton</i> (un fir de bumbac) ☐ <i>a tin of soup / sardines / tomatoes</i> (o conservă / cutie de supă / sardine / roșii) ☐ <i>a touch of anxiety</i> (puțină neliniște) ☐ <i>a tube of toothpaste</i> (un tub de pastă de dinți) W ☐ <i>a warren of rabbits</i> (o familie / o vizuină de iepuri) ☐ <i>a wink of sleep</i> (un pui de somn) ☐ <i>a word of abuse / advice</i> (o insultă; un sfat)
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APPENDIX # 4 PARTITIVES (II)

THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Birds (II). A Descent of Woodpeckers “It is likely that the habits of [the green] woodpecker gave rise to the company term, as it <i>descends</i> to the ground more frequently than the other two species. It does so to feed on its favourite food of ants. [...] The term <i>descent</i> may also arise from the ability of the green woodpecker to <i>descend</i> a tree, moving backwards down the trunk with its head uppermost. The third possible derivative of the term is the bird’s occasional habit of moving from tree to tree, swooping downwards from the top of one to the base of another in the manner of a treecreeper.” (Palin, 2017: 19)	THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Birds (III). An Exaltation / Flight of Larks “This evocative collective noun, dating from the fifteenth century, was used by James Lipton for the title of his 1968 book, <i>An Exaltation of Larks or The Venereal Game</i>. C.E. Hare, however, in his authoritative work, <i>The Language of Sport</i>, points out that the term is a fanciful, if long-standing name for larks in flight. Rather than being a true company term, it refers only to larks which soar into the sky and sing. The correct term for a number of larks is <i>flight</i>, a term derived from the lark’s characteristic behaviour when disturbed. Larks often socialise in large numbers.” (Palin, 2017: 25)
THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Birds (IV). An Unkindness of Ravens “It was thought long ago that the breeding ravens gave no parental care to their chicks. People imagined that they expelled the young from the nest, leaving them to fend for themselves until they saw that they were the colour they ought to be [a glossy black]. It was said that such <i>unkindness</i> was repaid by the youngsters, however, for when the parents were old and their beaks worn, their offspring would offer no help. [...] In their mountainous, or coastal cliff home, ravens do in fact display a perceived <i>unkindness</i>. They will often not tolerate other birds near them, and although they scavenge, they will also kill small birds (often in the nest) and mammals with their massive bill.” (Palin, 2017: 87)	THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Animals (I). A Kindle of Kittens Cats have six collective nouns which may be applied to them. There is first the “true term” <i>clowder</i>, then the terms <i>destruction</i> and <i>dout</i> (sometimes wrongly copied as “dour”) which apply just to wild cats, a <i>cluster</i> of domestic cats (sometimes appearing as <i>clutter</i>), a <i>glaring</i> of cats, obviously relating to the cats’ eyes at night, and finally a <i>kindle</i> (sometimes written as <i>kinder</i>), a term which applies to young cats or kittens. All of these nouns have very early references in mediaeval literature (the most recent reference for <i>kindle</i> being in <i>The Book of St Albans</i> of 1486). <i>Kindle</i> is also applied to young rabbits and hares. (adapted from Palin, 2017: 41)
THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Animals (II). A Mute of Hounds	THE CASE OF CURIOSITIES: Group Partitives: Animals (III). A Yoke of Oxen

Hounds have a number of different collective nouns: *leash*, *couple*, *brace*, *pack*, *mute*, *kennel*, *hunt* etc. A *leash* is a set of three hounds, especially greyhounds; a *couple* is a term for a brace of hunting dogs usually applied when they are running; the word *brace* is another legitimate collective noun; *pack* and *mute* are two more general terms for an unspecified number of hounds (from Old French *meute* meaning “pack” or “kennel”). The word *kennel* itself is a genuine noun of assembly for hounds as well as a place in which dogs live. Finally, a *hunt* is both a group of hounds and a group of huntsmen, as well of course as the chase itself. (adapted from Palin, 2017: 53)

The group terms listed for oxen are *yoke*, *team*, *drove* and *herd*. Whereas the term *yoke* clearly relates to just a pair of oxen joined together under a frame of wood, the word *team* is a more flexible number of animals pulling a plough or wagon (applicable to horses, too). A *drove* is a “true company term” also listed as a collective noun used for asses, cattle, hares, sheep and “beasts”. Similarly, *herd* is a true company term, in that it can also be used to refer to: antelopes, asses, bucks, buffaloes, cattle, chamois, deer, elephants, giraffes, goats, hares, harts, horses, porpoises, seals, shorthorns, swine, sperm whales and wolves! (adapted from Palin, 2017: 95)

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