

THE NOUN

I. CLASSIFICATIONS

1. Common nouns and proper nouns
2. Concrete nouns and abstract nouns
3. Countable (count) nouns and uncountable (mass) nouns

Uncountable nouns may be:

- a) material nouns, like **air, milk, cotton, bread, pork**, etc.
- b) abstract nouns, like **biology, peace, music**, etc.
- c) names of sports, like **football, skating, swimming**, etc.
- d) names of edible plants, when reference is made to the species itself, like **maize, onion, tomato, potato**, etc.
- e) names of towns, countries, months, etc., like **London, England, February**, etc.

Obs: There are some words which are uncountable nouns in English, but which refer to things that are considered countable in other languages, like Romanian, for instance **advice, luggage/ baggage, homework, money, knowledge, information, news, furniture, progress**.

Partitives

Although uncountable nouns are seen as denoting an undifferentiated mass, quantity and thus countability may be achieved by means of partitive nouns. They may be:

- general partitives, which are not restricted to specific lexical items: **piece, bit, item**
- typical partitives, which are words restricted to certain lexical items and which form expressions with specific uncountable nouns: **bar, lump, fit, grain**, etc.
- measure partitives, which denote exact measurement: **inch, gramme, mile, metre, yard, pound**, etc.

II. THE CATEGORY OF NUMBER

A. Classification of nouns: **variable** and **invariable**

VARIABLE NOUNS: one singular form and one plural form

1. Regular plurals: singular + the inflection **–s**

a) **Spelling problems**

- nouns ending in a sibilant consonant
- nouns ending in **–y**
- nouns ending in **–o**
- letters, abbreviations and numerals

b) **Pronunciation of the inflection –s**

c) **The plural of compound nouns**

- the inflection **–s** is generally added to the final element (e.g. washing-machines, handfuls, forget-me-nots)
 - the inflection **–s** is added to the first element when:
 - this is a noun ending in **–er** or in **–ing** (e.g. passers-by, goings-out)
 - the compound is formed of two nouns linked with a preposition (e.g. editors-in-chief, sons-in-law)
 - the compound is formed of noun + adjective (e.g. courts-martial, attorneys general)
 - compounds with **and** make both elements plural (e.g. ins-and-outs, pros-and-cons)
 - compounds with **man** and **woman** make both elements plural (e.g. women drivers, men singers)
- Obs: woman-haters, man-eaters

2. Irregular plurals

a) **Voicing + -s plural**

- long sound + **-th** [θ] ⇒ plural in [ðz] (e.g. baths, paths)
- **-f(e)** [f] ⇒ plural in **-ves** [vz] (e.g. thieves, leaves)

Obs1: Regular form: chiefs, beliefs, roofs

Obs2: Double form: scarfs/scarves, hoofs/hooves, staffs/staves

- house [s] – houses [ziz]

b) Mutation

Seven nouns (and their compounds) change their root vowel in the plural

c) –en plurals

Three nouns: child-children, ox-oxen, brother-brethren

d) Zero plurals: the same form in the singular and in the plural

1) animal names: fish, trout, deer, sheep, moose

Obs: the fishes of the Black Sea

2) nationality names or other proper nouns ending in **-ese**: Chinese, Viennese, Japanese + the noun Swiss

3) nouns denoting measure, quantity, number, when they are preceded by an indication of number: dozen, hundred, thousand, million, score

4) nouns ending in **-s**: means, works, crossroads, series, species, barracks, headquarters

5) other nouns: aircraft, hovercraft

e) Foreign plurals

Some nouns have been adapted to the English system, others have both the foreign plural and the plural in **-s**, while others have only the foreign plural. When you have a choice, the foreign plural is preferred in the scientific language and the **-s** plural in the everyday language.

1) Latin plurals

- **-us** → **-i** [ai] / **-ora** [ərə] / **-era** [ərə] (e.g. stimulus-stimuli, bacillus-bacilli, genus-genera, corpus-corpora)

Both forms: cactus-i/uses, nucleus-i/uses, radius-i/uses

- **-a** → **-ae** [i:] (e.g. larva-larvae, alga-algae)

Both forms: vertebra-ae/as, formula-ae/as

- **-um** → **-a** [ə] (e.g. bacterium-bacteria, erratum-errata)

Both forms: sanatorium -a/ums, memorandum-a/ums, stratum-a/ums, ultimum-a/ums

- **-ex/-ix** → **-ices** [isi:z] (e.g. codex-codices)

Both forms: matrix-matrices/matrixes, index-indices/indexes, appendix-appendices/appendixes

2) Greek plurals

- **-is** [is] → **-es** [i:z] (e.g. analysis-analyses, basis-bases, crisis-crises)
- **-on** → **-a** [ə] (e.g. criterion-criteria, phenomenon-a)

Both forms: automaton-a/ons

3) French plurals

- **-e(a)u** → **-x** [z] (bureau-bureaux/-s, adieu-adioux/-s)

4) Italian plurals

- **-o/e** → **-i** [i:] (e.g. virtuoso-virtuosi/-os, tempo-tempi/-os, libretto-libretti/-os)

Only regular plural: solo, soprano

5) Hebrew plurals

e.g. cherub-cherubim

seraph-seraphim

INVARIABLE NOUNS: one form only, either singular or plural ⇒ take either a singular or a plural verb

1) **Singular invariable nouns** (+ singular verb)

1. Concrete uncountable nouns: chocolate, sugar, gold, furniture, luggage

Obs. I'd like *a coffee*. Romania's *wines* are famous.

2. Abstract uncountable nouns: music, progress, nonsense, information, knowledge, advice, homework, difficulty, work, research, dirt
 Obs. After many *failures/ difficulties*, he succeeded.
3. Proper nouns: John, Romania, October
4. Nouns ending in –s
 - news
 - diseases: measles, mumps
 - sciences: optics, linguistics, statistics
 Obs. The *statistics show* that imports are low.
 - games: cards, dominoes, draughts, darts, billiards
 Obs. dartboard, billiard-room
5. Abstract substantivized adjectives: the good, the evil, the useful

2) **Plural invariable nouns** (+ plural verb)

1. Nouns denoting parts of the body: bowels, tonsils, entrails
2. Nouns denoting a state of mind: hysterics, blues, spirits
3. Nouns denoting articles of dress: trousers, shorts, flares, tights, braces, pyjamas, tails
 Obs1: Number contrast is achieved by means of **a pair of** (e.g. He has only *two pairs of trousers*.)
 Obs2: When used attributively, these nouns are singular (e.g. *a trouser leg*).
4. Nouns denoting tools and instruments consisting of two parts: scales, scissors, glasses/spectacles, tongs, pincers, (nail/hairdresser's) clippers, bellows
 Obs1: He wore *a pair of earphones*, which were plugged into a tape-recorder.
 Obs2: *a spectacle case*
5. Proper nouns: the Highlands, the Alps, the Netherlands
6. Verbal nouns in –ing: savings, earnings, belongings, proceedings, surroundings
7. Other “pluralia tantum”: clothes, customs, wages, premises, stairs, eaves, congratulations
 Obs: His *whereabouts is/are* unknown.
8. Substantivized adjectives: chemicals, riches, valuables, goods, the rich, the poor, the dead
 e.g. Their *riches were* donated to charities.

The poor are suffering.

9. Unmarked plurals: cattle, clergy, people, police, military, vermin, poultry

e.g. These cattle belong to my grandparents.

Obs1: **people** → countable noun

Obs2: **poultry** → singular noun

B. Number and meaning

The following situations are possible:

1. Nouns with **two plural forms, each having its meaning(s)**: brother, genius, staff
2. Nouns with **one meaning in the singular and a different meaning in the plural**:
air – airs, nylon – nylons, advice – advices, content - contents
3. Nouns whose **plural form has two or more meanings**: effect – effects¹/effects²,
custom – customs¹/ customs²/ customs³
4. Nouns that, besides the regular plural, have a **plural form which is identical with the singular form and which has a collective meaning**: cannon – cannons/cannon,
horse – horses/horse
5. Nouns that are **countable in one meaning and uncountable in another meaning**:
hair, business, character, game, sport

III. THE CATEGORY OF GENDER → not richly developed in English; the gender usually coincides with the sex of the beings or objects denoted

A. Categories of gender

1. Masculine:

- represented by nouns denoting male beings (e.g. man, brother, son, uncle, king)
- can be replaced by **he** and referred to by **him** or **himself**

2. Feminine:

- represented by nouns denoting female beings
- can be replaced by **she** and referred to by **her** or **herself**

3. Neuter:

- represented by nouns denoting inanimate objects, substances, abstractions
- replaced by **it**.

Obs: Collective nouns (e.g. class, family, government) are considered to be neuter and may be replaced by either **it** or **they**.

e.g.

4. Common/ Dual:

- represented by nouns denoting beings, which have only one form for both masculine and feminine (e.g. cousin, friend, teacher, neighbour)
- the gender proper of such nouns becomes obvious in the context:

e.g.

Obs1: **Man** is mortal. The **horse** is a noble animal.

Obs2: **s/he, wo/man, firefighter, spokesperson, Member of Congress, homemaker, mail carrier**

B. Means of expressing the gender of animate nouns

1. Different words, one for the masculine and one for the feminine: boy-girl, gander-geese, bachelor-spinster
Obs: father-mother-parent, boy-girl-child
2. Composition, with the help of words denoting sex (**male-female, boy-girl, man-woman, he-she, bull-cow, cock-hen, dog-bitch**) or some proper names (**billy-nanny, tom-tib, jack-jenny**)
e.g. milkman-milkwoman, male cousin-female cousin
3. Suffixation
 - **-ess** added to the masculine to form the feminine
Obs. Spelling problems
 - other (less productive) suffixes added to the masculine: **-ine** (hero-heroine), **-ina** (czar/tzar- czarina/tzarina), **-a** (don-donna), **-ette** (usher-usherette), **-ix** (executor-executrix)
 - two suffixes added to the feminine to form the masculine (e.g.)
4. Nouns denoting animals are generally considered to be neuter; however, in personifications:
 - big and strong animals (e.g. horse, lion, elephant, dog, eagle) are said to be masculine
e.g. The **lion** was very proud of **his** mane.
 - small animals (e.g. cat, mouse, hare) are looked upon as feminine
e.g. The **hare** was afraid of **her** own shadow.

Obs: In fairy-tales, the gender of animals or plants often depends on the author.

C. Inanimate nouns in personification

As a rule, inanimate nouns are neuter. However, in the poetical and the rhetorical style or even in everyday speech, they may be treated as either masculine or feminine.

1. Nouns which can be **masculine** denote:
 - a) natural elements and phenomena characterized by force: wind, sun, winter, ocean, sleep, death

e.g.

b) violent passions and actions: anger, fear, crime, war, love

e.g.

c) rivers and mountains: the Danube, the Thames, Mount Everest

e.g.

2. Nouns which can be **feminine** denote:

a) natural elements and phenomena implying fertility or attachment: earth, moon, sea, spring, morning, evening

e.g.

b) gentle feelings or abstractions: hope, modesty, devotion, friendship, peace, truth, fame

e.g.

c) negative passions and feelings: jealousy, ambition, revenge, pride, treason

e.g.

d) countries viewed as political or economic units

e.g.

e) vessels or vehicles to which an affectionate attitude is attached: ship, car, bus, boat

e.g.

IV. THE CATEGORY OF CASE

Some grammarians speak about 2 cases in English: genitive/possessive and common.

Others support the idea of 4 cases: the nominative, the possessive, the dative and the accusative.

A. The Nominative: has the syntactic function of a subject, predicative or apposition

B. The Genitive: has the function of an attribute or a predicative

a) From the point of view of meaning, the G may be:

- possessive
- of origin
- subjective
- objective
- descriptive
- partitive
- of measure

b) From the point of view of form, the G may be:

1) The **synthetical (Saxon) G**:

- 's added to the singular number or to the irregular plural
e.g. the **girl's** house, the **women's** letters
- ' added to the regular plural or to proper nouns ending in -s
e.g. the **girls'** books, **Dickens'** works

Obs1: pronunciation problems

Obs2: group genitives

The synthetical genitive may be used with the following types of nouns:

- nouns denoting persons and names of persons
e.g.
- nouns denoting other beings when given some importance or in personification
e.g.
- nouns denoting measurement, time, space, quantity, value
e.g.

Obs: Measurement can also be expressed by means of a compound adjective.

e.g.

- collective nouns

e.g.

- inanimate nouns in personification, i.e. geographical names, vehicles, abstractions, natural phenomena, institutions, celestial bodies

e.g.

Obs: When such nouns are followed by a superlative adjective or by **only**, **first**, **last**, the synthetical G may be replaced by a prepositional phrase with **in**

e.g.

- other nouns of special relevance to human activity

e.g.

When the head noun is not expressed, we may speak of **the elliptic genitive**.

e.g.

- 2) The **analytical G** with the preposition **of** is used mainly with neuter nouns (e.g. the cover of the book).

In certain situations, it is preferred to the synthetical G:

e.g. the responsibility **of the man at the wheel**. the murder **of John**, a great admirer **of Shakespeare**, the suffering **of the poor**

(Explain each situation!)

- 3) The **double G** is a construction with a synthetical and an analytical genitive (e.g. a friend of Henry's)

Obs: a portrait **of Rembrandt** vs. a portrait **of Rembrandt's**

C. The Dative: marked by the prepositions **to** and **for** or by word-order; it has the function of an indirect object.

Sometimes, it can modify a whole sentence:

e.g. **To John**, there is nothing more beautiful in the world.

It can also indicate direction:

e.g. He waved his hand **to the girl** from the train.

There are two types of dative:

1) The prepositional D is used in the following situations:

- when the Acc precedes the D (e.g.)
- after verbs like **announce, belong, communicate, describe, explain, introduce, listen, suggest, translate, speak, occur, reply, dictate** (e.g.)
- when the D is governed by an adjective or noun (e.g.)

2) The D without a preposition is used when the D precedes the Acc (e.g.)

D.The Accusative: can function as a direct object, a prepositional object, an adverbial or an attribute.

e.g.

Obs1: Certain verbs are followed by two accusatives: **answer, ask, envy, forgive, hear, save, teach**

(e.g.)

Obs2: Certain verbs are followed by a noun in the Acc which is a cognate object. This noun is usually modified by an adjective. (e.g.)