THE USE OF THE NUMBER FORMS OF NOUNS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN[1]

Abstract: *The paper presents the use of the number forms of nouns in English and Romanian. In English, there are regular and irregular nouns. The plural of some abstract and material nouns may be used to express intensity, great quantity and extent. The stem of an English noun can be used attributively, or in a collective sense. In Romanian, the number opposition of nouns is marked by desinences. There are some nouns which have double forms of the same gender in the singular, and there are nouns which have two or three forms in the plural. Certain Romanian nouns have only one form, either of singular - singularia tantum, or of plural - pluralia tantum. The collective nouns are those denoting a plurality of objects regarded as a single whole.*

Key-words: *stem, number forms, collective nouns, number opposition, desinences, defective nouns*

L'USAGE DES FORMES DE NOMBRE DES NOMS EN ANGLAIS ET ROUMAIN

Résumé : *L'étude présente l'utilisation des formes de nombre des noms en anglais et roumain. En anglais, il y a des noms réguliers et irréguliers. Le pluriel de quelques noms abstraits ou matériels peuvent être utilisés pour exprimer l'intensité, la grande quantité ou l'étendue. La racine d'un nom anglais peut être utilisée comme attributif ou dans un sens collectif. En roumain, l'opoosition en nombre est marquée par des désinences. Il y a des noms qui on des formes doubles pour le même genre au singulier, il y a des noms qui ont deux ou trois formes au pluriel. Certain noms roumains ont une seule forme, soit la forme de singulier – singularia tantum, soit la forme de pluriel-pluralia tantum. Les noms collectifs sont les noms désignant une pluralité d'objets vue comme un tout.*

Mots-clés *: racine, formes de nombre, noms collectifs, opposition en nombre, désinences, noms défectifs*

In English, number is the name of the system contrasting singular and plural. In the first instance, it applies to noun inflection: nouns typically have contrasting singular and plural forms. The singular form is used when speaking about a single referent. The plural form is used to refer to a group referent of two or more members. The semantic opposition of one – more than one is characteristic of countable nouns only.

1. Regular Nouns

An English noun usually has the following forms:
a. the stem: boy, girl, ship;
b. the stem + sibilant-suffix: boys/ boy's/ boys'; girls/girl's/girls'; ships/ ship's/ ships'.
The stem of an English noun is used in different functions:

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- to denote the singular as distinct from the plural number: *I met a girl – I met some girls.* In this case the noun is frequently preceded by an article or another attributive word.
- attributively, no matter whether one or more specimens are meant: *a boy scout – boy-scouts; the slave-trade; a five-pound note.*
- collectively: *he spared neither man, woman nor child; to shoot quail and duck.*

The stem + sibilant-suffix is used in the following functions:
- to denote the plural as distinct from the singular number: *Boys will be boys.*
- as a genitive singular: *the girl's father, the ship's captain.*
- as a genitive plural: *the boys' parents, ships' officers*.

Compound nouns usually add the sibillant-suffix to the last element: *fellow-travellers, schoolmasters, onlookers, good-for-nothings*. Noun-adverb compounds derived from verb-adverb combinations add the plural suffix to the noun: *goings-on, lookers-on, runners-up.* A genitive compound is added to the last element: *looker-on's*. There are compound nouns which usually add the plural suffix to the noun, but the genitive suffix to the last element: *brother**s**-in-law*, but *his brother-in-law's house.* The genitive suffix is also added to the last element of a word-group: *the Prince of Wales's birthday, after a day or two's rest.*

2. Irregular Nouns

All these nouns, with the exceptions of those ending in [lf], contain a long vowel or a diphthong. In the genitive singular the sibilant-suffix is added to the stem in an unvoiced spirant: *a thief's confession.* In the genitive plural the sibilant-suffix is added to the stem in a voiced spirant: *thieves' slang*.

Some nouns have two stems, differing in their vowels, one of which replaces the stem + sibilant-suffix in the function of the plural: *a man – two men*. Compounds in *–woman*, and a few compounds in *–man* form their plurals in the same way: *Englishwoman – Englishwomen, sandwich-man – sandwich-men, snowman-snowmen.*

Groups and compounds with *man* and *woman* for their first element to indicate gender usually pluralize both parts: *man-friend – men-friends; man-servant – men-servants; woman-doctor – women-doctors* (but *man-eaters, woman-haters*).

3. Nouns with Only One Number Form

Many abstract and material nouns never take a plural suffix*: courage, despair, haste, slag.* The same applies to many collective nouns,such as *cattle, clergy, police*. Among names of animals, *deer* and *sheep* never take a plural suffix: *a herd of deer, twenty sheep*. Some nouns never occur without a plural suffix, being known as *pluralia tantum* : *riches, thanks, tongs*.

Some other nouns in *–s* are usually construed as plurals, though the singular construction also occurs: *All possible **means** have been adopted – Every **means** have been tried; The **headquarters** of the army were at Windsor – Macbeth did not direct his battles from a remote **headquarters**.*

Others, although plural in form, yet they are construed as singularar: ***Mathematics** is not his strong point; **Measles** is a disease.*

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4. Plurals and Genitives of Classical Nouns

Classical nouns often keep their classical plural forms: *crisis – crises; larva – larvae; phenomenon – phenomena.* Some of them have an English as well as a classical plural, the English form being naturally preferred in familiar speech: *cactus – cacti / cactuses; index – indices / indexes; memorandum – memoranda / memorandums.* Others have become completely naturalized and always take the English plural suffix: *irises; museums; orators; prospectuses, specimens,* etc.

Classical names in a sibilant mostly use the stem with an apostrophe added in writing in the function of the genitive: *Achilles' death, Eschylus' plays, Menelaus' wife, Lucretius' poem.*

5. The Use of the Number Forms in English

● The stem of a noun is used to denote the singular as distinct from the plural, the stem + sibilant being used in order to denote the plural as distinct from the singular. This applies only to names of persons and animals, and the things that are countable, and they include many words for more or less abstract ideas, such as *hour, mile, walk, ride, mind, hope, virtue*, etc.

● A singular noun preceded by a definite article may denote a class of persons, animals or things thought of as a single entity:

The Wild Duck is a resident British bird.

It may also stand for an abstract idea for which the thing denoted by the noun serves as an instrument:

The pen (=writing, the writing word) is mightier than the sword (=fighting, war).

The plural of some abstract and material nouns may be used to express intensity, great quantity and extent:

I have my doubts.
The sands of the desert.
The waters of the lake.
Tossed between hopes and fears.
The moon was already bright in the heavens.

● Some abstract and material nouns occur in the plural to denote different kinds or degrees of the idea expressed: *alcohol, tobacco; coffees, teas, wines, soils.*

The plural names of things are sometimes used in familiar English as names or nicknames for persons who are professionally connected with them. Thus, *boots*, for the hotel-servant who cleans boots; *buttons* for a liveried page; *carrots*, for a red-haired person; *chips*, for a ship's carpenter; *Guns*, for the Gunnery Officer of a destroyer; *Sparks*, for a wireless operator. In *Torps*, for the Torpedo Officer, and *props*, for the property-man in the theatre, *s* is added to shortened forms. In American English, names of seasons, days and parts of the day are often used with the *s*-suffix to denote repeated occurrence:

He was accustomed to working *nights* (at night).

...the heat that's descended on us. One expects it here *summers* (in summer).

These *s*-forms are really adverbs.

● The stem of an English noun may be used attributively, no matter whether one or more specimens are meant. This applies to groups of two separate nouns as well as to compounds and the border-line between these two types is often difficult to draw. This also appears from the spelling, the same collocation being sometimes written as two separate

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words (*head master*), sometimes with a hyphen (*head-master*), sometimes as a single word (*headmaster*). In the majority of cases, usage is fairly settled. Thus, always *boy scout*, but *bookcase*.There are some cases that may be distinguished:

♦ Groups of the type *boy scout(s), girl guide(s), lady doctor(s)*, whose first element serves to indicate gender, inflect the last element only.

♦ With the *boy scout movement* we pass over to type two: a noun (*scout*), in spite of its plural meaning, takes the singular form as an attributive adjunct to another noun (*movement*). Other examples are: *a stamp collector, a negro insurrection, a man-eater, a tooth-brush, soldier speech.*

♦ Type three is a special case of type two: the attributive noun, denoting an amount, a weight, a measure, etc., is preceded by a numeral higher than one, which otherwise requires the plural suffix: *five pounds,* but *a five-pound note; ten miles,* but *a ten-mile walk, two pence halfpenny,* but *a twopenny- halfpenny stamp.*

♦ The fourth type consists of compounds whose first element takes a plural suffix: *billiards,* but *billiard-table; the Balkans,* but *the Balkan peninsula; an ash-pan (ashes); a holiday course, barrack-life (*life in *barracks); a spectacle-case (* to wear *spectacles); a card-sharper (*to play *cards).*

● The use of the noun-stem in a collective sense is common between sportsmen with reference to wild animals: *to shoot duck*, but *a farmer raises ducks*. Similarly, *to catch fish, trout, salmon, cod; fowls (= hens) in a farm-yard,* but *snares for wildfowl; herds of antelope, buffalo, giraffe, zebra.*

These stems may be preceded by a numeral: *six mackerel, a few antelope.* When the number is small, the collective meaning may be less evident:

He caught *two salmon* and *three trout*.

The collective noun-stems may take a plural predicate and plural attributive and anaphoric words:

There *were* many *fish* at that time of the year and the best time to catch *them* was during the night.

Names of plants may also be used collectively without a plural suffix, though they do not take a plural predicate, or plural anaphoric words:

Oak and *beech* began to take the place of willow and elm.

The first from the *poppies* appeared beside the last of the wild *narcissus.*

● There are nouns whose stems are used in a collective sense are *craft* (= ship, boats), *aircraft* (= airplanes), *horse* (= cavalry), *foot* (= infantry):

Seventy odd *craft* made up their fleet.

Two of our *aircraft* are missing.

Nouns like fruit(s), hair(s), coal(s), coin(s), may be used in the stem-form as collectives, and in either the singular or the plural to denote single specimens: *put some more coal on the fire – a few coals are still glowing ; his hair is grey – he has some grey hairs.*

Nouns denoting a fixed number fall into two groups. *Brace* (= two) and *gross* never take a plural suffix: *Several brace of partridges; Ten gross of buttons*. Others take no plural ending when preceded by a definite numeral, or by *several* or *a few*:

A few *score* yards.

Three *dozen* eggs.

Several *dozen* figs.

Five *hundred* years.

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But: (Some) *dozens* of aeroplanes.

Scores of people.

Many *thousands* were killed.

Plural names of objects consisting of two equal parts, such as *tongs, bellows, spectacles, scissors, trousers*, etc., are often preceded by *pair of* in order to enable them to take a word expressing number. In this function *pair* is called a *numerative*:

I wouldn't touch it with *a pair of tongs*.

He boasted only *two pair of trousers*.

Other numeratives are *head* (before collective names of animals, esp.*cattle*), *piece* and *bit* before abstract and collective nouns. *Head* never takes a plural suffix in this function, but *piece* and *bit* do: Twenty *head* of cattle; What *a piece* of luck; Various *bits* of news.

6. The Number Forms of Nouns in Romanian

Romanian differentiates morphologically the singular and the plural. The plural is formed by the addition or change of the final vowel of the singular noun, very often accompanied by other vocalic and /or consonantic shifts in the noun stem, consonant deletion, and / or the interposition of other phonemes. Occasionally, the plural noun has the same form as the singular. A few nouns are defective by missing either the singular or the plural, and there are some nouns which can form the plural in several ways, depending on the meaning.

In Romanian, the number opposition of nouns *singular - plural* is marked by desinences which, in most of the cases, are categorical: *astru / aştri, codru / codri, tigru / tigri, câine / câini, şarpe / şerpi, iepure / iepuri, colibă / colibe, cafea* / cafele, curea / curele, arie / arii, felie / felii, avion / avioane, pod / poduri.

In this flexion there are also a few aspects that are relevant or irrelevant: *an / ani, lup / lupi, naş / naşi, arici / arici, răţoi / răţoi, pui / pui, nume / nume, cleste / cleste,* etc., where the distinction is emphasized by the number marks of the determinatives (articles, adjectives, numerals), or by the number desinences of the verbs in their syntactical relations.The number inflexion is tightly linked with the grammatical gender, meaning that the same morphemes have a double value of the two categories (the gender suffixes can also be the number desinences of the singular).

The number inflexion with nouns is more difficult to be illustrated as compared to the verbal inflexion as regards the analysis of morphemes, because the presence of the characteristic vowel represents an essential thing when declining a noun.

7. Multiple Forms of Singular and Plural

Some nouns have double forms of the same gender in the singular. The causes of this fluctuation are: the territorial or social differentiation, the speakers' uncertainty in adopting a form or other by the time the literary language norms impose one of them or both. Here are some double forms related to the regional or social circulation of the duplicates: *berbec / berbece, colind / colindă, flutur / fluture, glonţ / glonte, oaspe / oaspete, pântec / pântece.* There are also three forms of the singular: *ciorchine / ciorchin / ciorchină; geamăn / gemen / gemene*.

In the plural, two or three forms may appear more often:

◄ The masculine nouns which have a specific plural, but also a feminine one, oscillate between masculine and neuter, a distinction which appears in the plural with the oppositions: *-i, -e, -uri*: *câmpi-uri, combustibili-e, compuşi-e, explozivi-e, nuclei-e, produşi-*

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*e, suporţi-uri, torenţi-e.*The fluctuation is explained by the fact that these nouns are, by a majority, borrowings and they belong to various technical fields. The double forms mark a semantic differentiation: *curenţi / curente, cristali / cristaluri, membri / membre, globi / globuri.*

◄ The feminine nouns with double plural forms are quite numerous, but one could not speak of neologisms here. There are double forms of plural in *–e* and *-i* with nouns which have in the singular the desinence *–a* or *zero* : *basmale / basmali, cazmale / cazmali, muşamale / muşamali, tarlale / tarlali.* There are also plural forms with the desinences like: *-e, -i*: *capşune-i, cârje-i, coale-i, coperte-i, falange-falangi, hale-hăli, plute-pluţi, regule-i, sape-săpi, tarabe – tarăbi.*

The use of the plural in *–uri* together with that in *–i* removes the homonymy and leads to a semantic differentiation. Thus we may have morphological homonyms like: *cărni / cărnuri; mâncări / mâncăruri; lâni / lânuri; blăni / blănuri.*

◄ In the class of the neuter nouns, there are plural forms of nouns finishing in *–e* and *–uri* and their situation resembles that of the feminine nouns, because the plural in –e extends: *ansamble, apetite, cămine, contacte, ghivece, refrene, şire, zăgaze*.

A lot of nouns which at present have the plural in *–e* have the plural in *–uri* with the classical writers: *biliarduri* (Eminescu), *costumuri* (Bolliac), *diamanturi* (Neculce), *excesuri* (Bălcescu), *palaturi* (Alecsandri), *albumuri* (Caragiale).

In most of the cases, the various plural forms mark semantic differences: *plane* (matematică) / *planuri, strate* (geologie) / *straturi, mijloace / mijlocuri, rapoarte / raporturi.*

8. Defective Nouns

The are nouns in Romanian that may have only one form, either of singular – *singularia tantum*, or of plural – *pluralia tantum*. For example, the persons' names and surnames: *Gheorghe, Ion, Maria, Ionescu, Vasilescu, Fieni, Ploiesti, Ulmi..*

There are also toponyms which are used only in the singular*: Balta, Constanţa, Dunărea, Oltul, Siretul, Turnul*, etc., or abstract nouns that are used only in the singular: *adevăr, dreptate, inţelepciune, toleranţă*, etc.

Pluralia tantum are nouns defective of singular and they are usually toponyms: *Fieni, Gheorghieni, Botoşani, Urziceni, Vadurile, Carpaţi, Balcani*; some of them are nouns made up of two identical parts: *bretele, ochelari, pantaloni, cleşte, foarfeci*; or collective nouns like: *icre, bucate, moravuri, mendre, nazuri.*

9. Collective Nouns

There are nouns which denote a plurality of objects seen as a whole. These are called collective nouns: *brădet, mărăciniş, rufărie, muncitorime, ţărănime*; others denote a plurality without expressing the elements they are made of: *brigadă, echipă, popor, oaste, herghelie*.

The collective nouns which specify the number of their compounds are: *companie, pluton, divizion, regiment, duet, deceniu, veac, mileniu.*

When the plural of a noun has the value of an exact number, the objects being presented in the context are grouped together: mă dor *ochii, urechile, mâinile, picioarele*; *părinţii* sunt acasa, etc.

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Conclusions

In English, the category of number represents the grammatical distinction corresponding to the difference between the form of one or more than one nouns (unity and plurality). There are regular nouns, irregular nouns and nouns with only one number form. The plural of some abstract and material nouns may be used to express intensity, great quantity and extent. Other abstract and material nouns occur in the plural so as to denote different kinds or degrees of the idea expressed. The stem of an English noun may be used attributively, this applying to groups of two separate nouns as well as to compounds.

In Romanian, number is the grammatical category denoting the reference which is made to one or more representatives of a class of notions and speaks not about the form of a noun, but about its morphological and grammatical meaning.

The number opposition of nouns is, in most of the cases, marked by desinences. There are some nouns that have double forms of the same gender in the singular, while there are others that have two or three forms in the plural.

Some Romanian nouns may have only one form, either of singular – *singularia tantum*, or of plural – *pluralia tantum*. There are also collective nouns which denote a plurality of objects seen as a whole or that can specify the number of their compounds.

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