

# Singular, plural, and mass nouns

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# Classification I

Subclasses of sg, pl, and mass  
(adapted from Lasersohn 2011)

- ▶ ordinary singulars

- (1) a. book
- b. student

- ▶ collective (group/bunch/swarm) nouns (singulars)

- (2) a. committee
- b. swarm

# Classification II

- ▶ lexical plurals

- (3) a. cattle
- b. police

- ▶ ordinary plurals

- (4) a. books
- b. students

- ▶ individuated pluralia tantum

- (5) a. scissors
- b. glasses

# Classification III

- ▶ neat (heterogeneous/fake/object) mass nouns

- (6)
  - a. furniture
  - b. footwear

- ▶ mess (homogeneous) mass nouns

- (7)
  - a. water
  - b. gold

- ▶ mass plurals

- (8)
  - a. clothes
  - b. leftovers

# Patterns I

| property    | ord.sg | coll.sg | lex.pl | ord.pl | pl.tant | ≈mass | mass | mass.pl |
|-------------|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|-------|------|---------|
| agree       | sg     | sg/pl   | pl     | pl     | pl      | sg    | pl   | pl      |
| cumul.ref   | *      | *       | ✓      | ✓      | ✓       | ✓     | ✓    | ✓       |
| bare        | *      | *       | ✓      | ✓      | ✓       | ✓     | ✓    | ✓       |
| <i>much</i> | *      | *       | *      | *      | *       | ✓     | ✓    | ✓       |
| numerals    | *      | *       | ?      | ✓      | *       | *     | *    | *       |
| <i>many</i> | *      | *       | ✓      | ✓      | ✓       | *     | *    | *       |
| distr.pred  | ✓      | ✓       | ✓      | ✓      | ✓       | ✓     | *    | *       |

# Properties I

Agreement: singular vs. plural

- ▶ ordinary singulars

- (9) a. The book is on a table.  
b. \*The book are on a table.

- ▶ collective nouns

- (10) a. The committee is failing to achieve its goals.  
b. The committee are failing to achieve their goals.

# Properties II

- ▶ lexical plurals

- (11) a. \*The cattle is being slaughtered.  
b. The cattle are being slaughtered.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

- (12) a. \*The books is on a table.  
b. The books are on a table.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

- (13) a. \*The scissors is on a table.  
b. The scissors are on a table.

# Properties III

- ▶ neat mass nouns

- (14) a. The furniture has been destroyed.  
b. \*The furniture have been destroyed.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

- (15) a. This water has been contaminated.  
b. \*This water have been contaminated.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

- (16) a. \*Your clothes looks good.  
b. Your clothes look good.



## Properties IV

### Cumulative reference

- (17) a.  $\exists xy[P(x) \wedge P(y) \wedge x \neq y] \wedge \forall xy[P(x) \wedge P(y) \rightarrow P(x \oplus y)]$   
b.  $A$  is  $X$  and  $B$  is  $X$ ; therefore  $A$  and  $B$  together are  $X$ .

▶ ordinary singulars

- (18) \*This is a book and this is a book; therefore these two entities together are a book.

▶ collective nouns

- (19) \*This is a committee and this is a committee; therefore these two entities together are a committee.

# Properties V

- ▶ lexical plurals

(20) This is cattle and this is cattle; therefore these two entities together are cattle.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

(21) These are books and these are books; therefore these two entities together are books.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

(22) These are scissors and these are scissors; therefore these two entities together are scissors.

# Properties VI

- ▶ neat mass nouns

(23) This is furniture and this is furniture; therefore these two entities together are furniture.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

(24) This is water and this is water; therefore these two entities together are water.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

(25) These are clothes and these are clothes; therefore these two entities together are clothes.

# Properties VII

## Possibility of bare forms

- ▶ ordinary singulars

(26) \*Book is on a table.

- ▶ collective nouns

(27) \*Committee is failing to achieve its goals.

# Properties VIII

- ▶ lexical plurals

(28) Cattle are slaughtered for their meat.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

(29) Books are on a table.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

(30) Scissors are on a table.

# Properties IX

- ▶ neat mass nouns

(31) Furniture has been destroyed.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

(32) Water has been contaminated.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

(33) Clothes have been bought.

# Properties X

Compatibility with the quantifier *much*

- ▶ ordinary singulars

(34) \*Much book is/are on a table.

- ▶ collective nouns

(35) \*Much committee met.

# Properties XI

- ▶ lexical plurals

(36) \*Much police came walking down the road.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

(37) \*Much books are on a table.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

(38) \*Much scissors are on a table.



# Properties XII

- ▶ neat mass nouns

(39) Much furniture has been destroyed.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

(40) Much water has been contaminated.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

(41) Much clothes have been bought.

# Properties XIII

## Compatibility with cardinal numerals

- ▶ ordinary singulars

(42) \*Five book are on a table.

- ▶ collective nouns

(43) \*Five committee met.

# Properties XIV

- ▶ lexical plurals

(44) ?Five police came walking down the road.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

(45) Five books are on a table.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

(46) \*Five scissors are on a table.

# Properties XV

- ▶ neat mass nouns

(47) \*Five furniture has/have been destroyed.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

(48) \*Five water has/have been contaminated.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

(49) \*Five clothes have been bought.

# Properties XVI

Compatibility with the quantifier *many*

- ▶ ordinary singulars

(50) \*Many book is/are on a table.

- ▶ collective nouns

(51) \*Many committee met.

# Properties XVII

- ▶ lexical plurals

(52) Many police came walking down the road.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

(53) Many books are on a table.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

(54) Many scissors are on a table.

# Properties XVIII

- ▶ neat mass nouns

(55) \*Many furniture has/have been destroyed.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

(56) \*Many water has/have been contaminated.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

(57) \*Many clothes have been bought.

# Properties XIX

## Stubbornly distributive predicates

- ▶ ordinary singulars

(58) This book is small.

- ▶ collective nouns

(59) This committee is small.



# Properties XX

- ▶ lexical plurals

(60) These cattle are small.

- ▶ ordinary plurals

(61) These books are small.

- ▶ pluralia tantum

(62) These scissors are small.

# Properties XXI

- ▶ neat mass nouns

(63) This furniture is small.

- ▶ mess mass nouns

(64) \*This water is small.

- ▶ plural mass nouns

(65) \*These clothes are small.

# Assignment I

- ▶ Read Section 1 in Lasersohn (2011) [see Study Materials in IS]
- ▶ Analyze the battery of the tests introduced above
- ▶ Decide which tests can be applied to your language
- ▶ Think of distinct classes of nouns in your language
- ▶ Apply the relevant test to different classes of nouns in your language
- ▶ Classify nouns in your language according to the results
- ▶ Submit the classification including examples, glosses, translations, and comments [via Homework Vaults in IS]