



LEXICALISATION OF PLURAL FORMS OF NOUNS

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Annotation: article explores the phenomenon of lexicalisation of plural noun forms in the English language. While pluralisation is generally regarded as a grammatical process indicating quantity, certain plural forms evolve beyond their original function and acquire distinct lexical meanings. These plural forms, such as customs, premises, and glasses, often diverge semantically from their singular counterparts and function as independent lexical items. The article examines the linguistic characteristics of such lexicalised plurals, provides illustrative examples, and discusses the grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic implications of their usage. It also briefly considers similar phenomena in other languages, highlighting the broader relevance of lexicalisation in linguistic theory and language evolution.

Key words: lexicalisation, plural nouns, semantics, English morphology, fixed expressions, idiomatic usage, noun forms, language evolution, lexical divergence, grammaticalisation

Introduction

In English and other languages, pluralisation is typically understood as a grammatical process applied to singular nouns to indicate more than one entity (e.g., cat → cats). However, in some cases, plural forms of nouns evolve to acquire meanings distinct from their singular counterparts, becoming fixed expressions or new lexical items in their own right. This phenomenon is known as the lexicalisation of plural forms. It represents a significant intersection between morphology, semantics, and lexical development in natural language.

Definition and Characteristics

Lexicalisation of plural forms refers to the process through which a plural noun, initially formed through regular grammatical rules, develops a separate



meaning or usage that is not strictly the plural of its singular base. These lexicalised plurals often:

- Gain idiomatic or specialised meanings,
- No longer correspond directly to the singular in usage,
- Can be used as fixed expressions or proper terms,
- Occasionally do not even have a commonly used singular form.

Examples in English

1. Customs – While custom refers to a tradition or habitual practice, customs most often refers to border control authorities or import/export regulations.
2. Glasses – The plural form refers to spectacles, a tool for vision correction, whereas the singular glass refers to the material or a drinking vessel.
3. Goods – While good as a singular can mean "something beneficial," goods usually refers to merchandise or items for sale.
4. Premises – The plural noun premises refers to a building or land, while premise in the singular form has a logical or argumentative meaning.
5. Riches – This plural form denotes wealth, whereas rich is usually an adjective, and the noun form a rich is rarely used or archaic.

Semantic Divergence

One of the defining traits of lexicalised plurals is semantic divergence. The meaning of the plural form moves away from a mere numeric modification and becomes a distinct concept. This divergence is often driven by socio-cultural, pragmatic, or historical usage patterns that solidify over time.

Grammatical Implications

Lexicalised plural forms may behave irregularly in terms of syntax and agreement:

They may take singular or plural verbs depending on their lexical status (e.g., The premises is large vs. The premises are located downtown).

They may resist re-singularisation or back-formation due to lack of usage of the original singular noun.

Lexicalisation in Other Languages



Although this paper focuses on English, similar phenomena occur in other languages. For example, in French, *vacances* (holidays) and *fiançailles* (engagement) are used in the plural but have no common singular forms. In Russian, the word (an abacus) has a plural form that denotes a tool rather than multiple counts.

Causes of Lexicalisation

Several linguistic mechanisms and external factors contribute to the lexicalisation of plurals:

Idiomatic usage: Phrases such as *in good spirits* or *in high places* give rise to fixed plural expressions.

Professional and technical domains: Fields such as law (*proceeds*, *damages*), economics (*funds*), and fashion (*trousers*) often rely on lexicalised plurals.

Etymological evolution: Historical language change and borrowing can lead to such plural fixations.

Conclusion

The lexicalisation of plural forms illustrates the dynamic nature of language, where morphology, semantics, and usage patterns intersect to create new lexical items. Understanding this process sheds light on how languages adapt, evolve, and respond to communicative needs. It also offers valuable insights into the interaction between form and meaning, highlighting how grammatical structures can give rise to entirely new vocabulary through common usage and cultural embedding.

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