9 Nominal Morphology

With this chapter, we shift our focus away from the individual sounds of the informant's language, and begin looking more closely at its grammar, which we use loosely to mean syntax, semantics, and morphology. This line of inquiry makes up an important part of field work.

Grammatical investigation does not actually begin at ground zero, however. By virtue of prior inquiry into lexicography and phonology, the investigator should already have some clues about the basic grammatical structure of the informant's language. Additionally, any reading done on the language or the language family to which it belongs will provide further hints.

1. Focus of Inquiry

1.1. Starting Out

When beginning work on the grammar of the informant's language, it is important to start small. One cannot just dive in and start trying to figure out how wh-raising works in Bedouin Arabic without first learning a few things about the morphology of the language. We have found it useful to begin by trying to get a grasp on the system of nominal morphology in the informant's language. This has two obvious advantages. One is that nouns are some of the easiest words to collect in isolation, and so one may come up with a good stock of nouns in several different morphological forms before it becomes necessary to get into lengthier elicitations. The other advantage is that once the investigator has a good handle on the nominal morphology of the informant's language it becomes much easier to parse longer utterances accurately. Without this knowledge, an informant's utterances appear as little more than a string of words (or worse, if you are unable to identify the word boundaries). To see how this works, take a sentence in Latin such as (1).

(1) *poeta rosam amico dat*
poet rose friend gives
'the poet gives his friend a rose'

Even if you know the meanings of the individual words contained in this sentence, it is impossible to decipher its whole meaning unless you have a grasp of Latin nominal morphology. Otherwise, the sentence could have one of six possible meanings: *the poet gives his friend a rose, the poet gives the rose his friend, his friend gives the poet a rose*, etc. It is the endings on the nouns—the morphology—that tell you who is giving what to whom. *Poeta* is marked with the nominative suffix *-a*, *rosam* is marked with the accusative suffix *-am*, and *amico* is marked with the dative suffix *-o*.[22]

The precise goal of working on nominal morphology will inevitably vary from linguist to linguist. For those whose primary area of theoretical interest is morphology, the study of nominal morphology will make up an important part of their research. They may wish to gain as comprehensive an understanding as possible of the whole morphological system in the

[22] This is a highly simplified account of Latin nominal morphology. In reality, all Latin nouns belong to one of five *declensions*, or noun classes. The case and number endings are different for each declension, so that, for example, *-a* is the nominative singular ending for nouns of the first declension, but not for those of any other declension.

ıage. By the same token, there are linguists whose main interests lie outside
hology, but for whom this line of investigation will still prove important.
example, are likely to be interested in morphological phenomena such as
se marking, which are closely linked to syntax.

s vary greatly in the degree to which they show overt marking in their
ogy. When starting work on a previously unstudied language, you cannot
ıat it will have any overt nominal morphology at all. On the other hand, it is
the language will have a system of nominal morphology which seems
complex. Certain Inuit languages are famed for having words made up of
or four suffixes stacked one after the other, each fulfilling a different
way to begin your inquiry is by trying to determine whether the informant's
ɔvert nominal morphology at all.

start with plurals. Most languages which have overt morphology have a
ıe kind, and eliciting plural forms is relatively straightforward. You simply
what his or her word is for a given object, and then ask how to refer to two
bjects. Of course, there may be some difficulties involved. For example,
that your informant gives you may not be the form you want. In
example, plurals in isolation are always given in the definite form, even
m unmarked for definiteness exists. If asked how to pluralize *asdaʁ*, 'star',
mshetsma speaker produces *asdaʁ-nij-e*, 'the stars'. The form *asdaʁ-ner*,
ɔly 'stars', is not used in isolation, which makes the investigator's job

tential problem is that your informant will not understand what you are
this is the central problem of working with an informant, especially where
ıed. Many informants that linguists work with are not proficient in English
ıguists' native language happens to be). They may not understand what
ı say "How do you say 'shoes'"? Even if your informants are proficient in
not be used to examining their languages on an abstract level, divorced
ation. They may not see the point in citing numerous different forms of a
ıo information appears to be conveyed in the process. Still, with a little
e able to get your informants to produce some plurals for you, if their
n. The next trick is to learn all you can about the plural forms you have

d that your informant's language may mark plurals only optionally. This
ın, where the plural marker is often omitted. When asked to form the
Korean informant would be likely to respond with a form identical to the
, the linguist must do a little extra work in order to coax a plural form out
This usually involves coming up with a context which will require the
plural form. In Korean, it turns out that the overt plural is used primarily
ıstructions, as in "Where did you buy those books?" So, by asking the
a sentence which included a demonstrative, the linguist could bring out
n.

The first way of producing plurals that comes into the mind of many
odifying the noun with a number greater than one—does not work in
ı general rule, numbers select the singular form of the noun the modify:
c.

1.2. Irregularities

Irregular forms exist in every natural human language. They occur in phonology, morphology, and syntax, and so you are bound to encounter some before you get too far along in working on your informant's grammar. At times, morphological irregularities will serve only as a source of frustration. You may feel that you are wading through a sea of irregular forms while you are just trying to get at the basic rules of nominal morphology. Irregular forms may also be of great interest, however. Just as it is important for a linguist to discover not only what can be said in a language, but also what cannot be said, it is also valuable to know what sorts of irregular forms exist in the informant's language. One may discover all sorts of things about the history of the morphological system of the informant's language, or one may stumble upon an irregular form which explains some otherwise perplexing grammatical feature. In English, for example, the irregular alternation between singular *foot* and plural *feet* not only tells us something about the history of English, it also introduces us to a whole sub-class of irregular plurals such as *goose/geese,* and the less well-accepted *moose/meese,* which I have in my dialect.

Still, there is no denying that irregular forms can be a hassle, particularly when you are just getting started on nominal morphology. It is a maddening fact about language that morphological irregularity is often most common in very basic lexical items, precisely those words that a linguist is likely to use in initial elicitations. It is easy to see how this works if we imagine a linguist from a far-off part of the world coming to do fieldwork on English. This investigator might ask for the plurals of some basic words, such as *child, foot,* and *mouse.* The informant would respond: *children, feet* and *mice.* With just these examples to work with, it would be impossible to come up with an accurate general rule of English pluralization. In fact, the investigator would have done much better with *thumbtack, carburetor* and *chicken.* For this reason, it is always best to try out a variety of words when looking for a morphological rule. It is also important to be sure that the words you collect do not all fall into some obvious natural class, such as "mammals" or "long, pointy things" which might all share a specific morphological feature not associated with other lexical items.

As mentioned above, no language is entirely consistent in the way it marks morphological features. Nonetheless, whether one is looking at plural morphology, or case endings, or any other morphological markers, most languages will exhibit some regular patterns. Typically, one can determine whether a given morphological marker is the most regular or dominant by checking to see if it is the one employed with new words. Taking pluralization as an example, it is generally the case that the basic plural marker in a language is the one used most productively with new words. So, if you suspect that a certain morpheme is the standard plural marker in your informant's language, you may wish to check its productivity. You might, for example, prompt the informant with a word that would not normally occur in the plural, or with a recent loan word, such as "television" or "computer". Keep in mind, however, that some languages have special rules for loanwords, so you will have to test your results by checking some native words as well. Some languages have no dominant plural marker, though. In Polish, for example, the phonological features of the final syllable of the stem determine what plural ending will be used, even for loanwords. In general, the best strategy is simply to test as many forms as it takes until you can come up with a rule, or several rules, that seem to work.

Incidentally, although checking the productivity of a form may seem entirely logical to a linguist, an informant may not respond well to attempts to elicit unfamiliar forms. Informants are often extremely reluctant to produce utterances expressing hypothetical situations of the sort dreamed up by linguists. This problem frequently arises with words that are not normally pluralized, such as non-countable nouns (mud, water) and place names. The

latter type caused problems with one of our Armenian informants, who was particularly unresponsive where imaginary or impossible scenarios were concerned. As it turned out, one of our students was particularly interested in figuring out how plurals were formed in the informant's dialect, and so she came up with the idea of asking the informant to pluralize *Vankʰ*, the name of his hometown. This was actually an excellent idea, since *Vankʰ* is a real word taken from the informant's language, but it is not one that is likely to be pluralized often. The chances were good that *Vankʰ* would be pluralized using the most productive plural marker found in the language. The informant, however, refused to provide the student with a plural form. "No two *Vankʰ*", he said, emphatically. "Only one *Vankʰ*!" The student asked him to imagine a world in which there were two *Vankʰ*s, and he steadfastly refused several times, on the grounds that there was only one *Vankʰ*, and that the existence of more than one *Vankʰ* was inconceivable. This stalemate was finally resolved when another student asked the informant to imagine that a group of Armenians from the town of *Vankʰ* emigrated to the United States and founded a new town, which they also called *Vankʰ*. The informant then said, "Oh, yes, then we would say *Vankʰ-er*".

Searching for irregular morphological forms also provides the investigator with an opportunity to embark on what can, in some cases, be a very useful endeavor: training the informant. By using a few carefully chosen words, an investigator may demonstrate to the informant the difference between regular and irregular plurals, for example. At this point, she may ask the informant to think up some other words with irregular plural forms. If the informant sees what the investigator is looking for, and is inclined to help out, he may come up with a whole list of irregular forms with little or no prodding.

1.3. Key Features of Nominal Morphology

In cases where there already exists a body of literature on the informant's language, or on some related language or languages, one may have a good idea of what to look for in terms of how the system of nominal morphology is likely to work. It is often the case in field work, however, that no such literature exists. In this situation, the investigator needs to have some idea of what features to look for. Of course, the world's languages are highly varied, and so one must always be on the lookout for unexpected morphological phenomena. Still, when working on nominal morphology, you cannot go wrong by checking for feature distinctions in three major areas: case, number, and gender.

Number is perhaps the easiest feature to check for. As discussed above, it is generally not too difficult to find out if an informant's language makes a morphological distinction between singular and plural nouns. It is worth noting, however, that there are other possibilities for number distinctions. Many languages have a dual form, which is a separate morphological category used when speakers refer to two of something.

Students who have worked with a language with a rich case system such as Latin, Russian, or Finnish will have no problem understanding what is meant by "case". Still, for some students this is not a familiar concept, so a quick overview is in order. Case marking identifies the roles played by the various noun phrases in a clause. This task is carried out by word order in English, where the difference in meaning between "the man bites the dog" and "the dog bites the man" is conveyed in the different word order. Case marking accomplishes this same task in a different manner. In Polish, for example, two sentences with the same word order can mean very different things, as seen in (2).

(2) a. *mɛ̃ʃtʃɨzna t̪sawujɛ kobjɛtɛ̃* <*Męzczyzna całuje kobietę*>
'The man kisses the woman.'
b. *mɛ̃ʃtʃɨznɛ̃ t̪sawujɛ kobjɛta* <*Męzczyznę całuje kobieta*>
'The woman kisses the man.'

In (2a), the nominative ending *-a* on *męzczyzna* identifies the man as the subject (clause, and the accusative ending *-ę* on *kobietę* identifies the woman as the direct objec (2b), the change in the endings has the effect of changing the meaning of the sent Languages such as Polish which have rich case systems encode many grammatical rela in their case systems. The case-marking on a Polish noun phrase tells you whether it i subject, the direct object, the indirect object, the instrument of some action, the point of o of some action, the object of some other noun phrase, etc. Not all languages with systems are as complex as Polish, but on the other hand, some are much more complex.

Aside from the subject/object distinction, which is generally encoded by wa nominative and accusative case markers—or the ergative/absolutive distinction, w normally uses ergative and absolutive case markers—one should look for case forms wl indicate possession, or modification of one noun phrase by another noun phrase. In Engl for example, we indicate possession by adding an enclitic *-s* to the noun phrase referrin the possessor, as in *the teacher's pet*. Your informant's language may also ref relationships of this kind between noun phrases morphologically.

Some languages also exhibit what is called *inalienable possession*. Working with Vank^h informant, our students stumbled upon this problem when they asked the inform how to say 'hand', and he replied with the word *t̪serkʰəs*. At first, the students assumed t this was an atomic, monomorphemic synonym to the English word. When they tried usi *t̪serkʰəs* in a few sentences, however, they discovered that it showed some surprisi properties in terms of case marking (3).

(3)	a.	*t̪serkʰəs*	(NOMINATIVE/ACCUSATIVE)	'hand'
	b.	*t̪serkʰ-av-əs*	(INSTRUMENTAL)	
	c.	*t̪serkʰ-əm-əs*	(LOCATIVE)	

Looking at the data in (3), the class first considered the possibility that the ca markers had been infixed into the root morpheme. This set off some warning signals, sinc infixing is relatively rare cross-linguistically. They also noticed that the plural form, 'hands was *t̪serkʰer* and that the possessive, 'his hand', was *t̪serkʰə*, without the final *–s*. The student eventually figured out that *t̪serkʰəs* is not itself a root, but rather a combination of a roo *t̪serkʰ*, and a possessive marker, *-(ə)s*. It turns out that the words for body parts are expresse with inalienable possession in Vank^h, which is to say that they always occur with a possessiv marker, even in citation form. (3a) therefore means not just 'hand', but 'my hand'. In (3b) anc (3c), the case-marker is not an infix, but rather a suffix which simply attaches closer to the root than the possessive marker.

Unlike English, many languages exhibit grammatical gender. In Yiddish, for example, every noun is marked masculine, feminine or neuter: *di feder, dos bukh*, and *der tsimmer* mean 'the pen', 'the book' and 'the room', respectively. *Di feder* is feminine, while *dos bukh* is neuter and *der tsimmer* is masculine. The distribution of nouns among these three classes is arbitrary. If your informant's language has grammatical gender, then describing and analyzing this system will lead to a much better understanding of the overall system of nominal morphology.

Determining if there is grammatical gender requires eliciting the words for inanimate objects and other non-human nouns, as well as for human nouns. Check to see if the words for 'time' or 'street' or 'book' show gender marking, for example. Of course, many languages have gender systems which are different from the more familiar Indo-European ones. In Swahili, for example, nouns are divided into classes which would seem completely foreign even to a speaker of Russian or German, even though these languages both have grammatical gender. Swahili distinguishes grammatically between 'humans', 'thin, extended objects', 'extended body parts', 'abstract qualities', and 'miscellaneous/animals', among others. One of the great challenges of field work can be discovering what sorts of nominal classes exist in the informant's language, given the fact that many informants are completely unaware (at least consciously) of such distinctions in their own languages. The Swahili informant that I worked with had no conscious knowledge of the intricacies of the Swahili noun class system; he simply made these distinctions without giving any thought to the matter. In such a situation, one cannot rely too heavily on the informant to describe his own language. The only way to get at this sort of information is through a process of careful, thorough elicitation.

A final aspect of nominal morphology which deserves some mention is numeral classifiers, which are common in many East Asian languages. It is not entirely clear whether numeral classifiers belong under the heading Morphology or Syntax, or under Number or Gender, for that matter. Fortunately, these distinctions are not crucial for our purposes. What it is important to know is that numeral classifiers are out there, and that they can be extremely confusing for an English speaker.

In languages such as Chinese, Japanese, and Korean, numeral modifiers are always accompanied by classifiers which indicate what type of object is being counted. This is somewhat similar to saying 'three glasses *of milk*' in English, except that the classification system is much more robust in these languages than in English. In Korean, for example, books are counted using different classifiers than are dogs, so that one actually says something like 'three volumes of book' or 'four dogs of animal' to mean 'three books' or 'four dogs'. In fact, there is no grammatical way to express a specific number of anything in Korean without using a classifier.

2. Elicitation Techniques for Nominal Morphology

The most important thing to do when preparing for an elicitation session is to plan ahead. When you are working on nominal morphology, you should try to come up with a word/phrase list—a list made up primarily of nouns, presumably—that you can intersperse throughout your session with the informant. The actual words (or phrases, if you need them) can be selected from among those shown in any of the word lists in Chapter 3, or you can make up your own. What is important is that you organize the list in a way that makes sense to you, and that will allow you to proceed through the elicitation session efficiently. So, if you plan to use the word 'carrot', then you may want to put not only 'carrot' on your list, but also 'carrots'. Needless to say, 'carrot' and 'carrots' should not be at opposite ends of your list. You may also wish to designate spaces for the various cases that 'carrot' may appear in. If you find that the informant's language has four cases, then you should always elicit and transcribe the forms of a given word in the four cases in the same order. It may also be useful to leave a space for the gender of each word. In the end, organizing a word list and setting up a notebook accordingly is not unlike setting up a spreadsheet. Each English word you use will correspond roughly to an entry in your notebook; within each entry you want to have a number of distinct 'fields' into which you can put information, and you want these fields to be organized the same way for each entry.

Building upon this principle, you can do yourself a big favor by numbering each word on your list. This way, when you elicit the various forms of a word, you can transcribe the informant's responses into your notebook, and then just jot down the number corresponding to that word, rather than having to gloss each response. So, each notebook entry will contain all the various morphological forms of the word in question—organized the same way for each entry—accompanied by a number corresponding to the number assigned to that word on your original list. You can then go back later and see which word corresponds to that number. Of course, if the informant gives you any additional information about the meaning of the word, such as "this word can mean 'carrot' or 'carrots'", you will also have to include this information in your entry.

Another point which cannot be stressed enough when discussing working with informants is that one must attempt to keep the session interesting for the informant. There are, in fact, people who get a thrill out of trying to dream up as many different morphological forms of "chicken" as possible. Unfortunately, you cannot count on your informant being such a person. So, when trying to get determine whether there is a morphological difference between "chicken" in the nominative and the genitive, you might try eliciting "the chicken's husband" rather than just "the chicken's beak", just to keep your informants on their toes.

3. Pronominals

When working on nominal morphology, many linguists like to pay particular attention to the pronominal system of the informant's language, as pronouns figure heavily in the syntax and morphology of many languages. Pronominal systems are of special interest in that they often contain irregular forms, suppletive forms, fused forms, and so forth. Furthermore, pronominal systems often exhibit feature distinctions which are otherwise unattested in the language. In English, for example, overt case marking is found only on pronouns (4), (5).

(4) a. *The hunter* shoots the bear.
b. The bear shoots *the hunter*.

(5) a. *He* shoots the bear.
b. The bear shoots *him*.
c. *The bear shoots *he*.

In (4), the full noun phrase 'the bear' is uninflected in both subject and object position. In (5), on the other hand, only a nominative pronoun is acceptable in subject position, and only an accusative one in object position.

It is often the case when working on pronominal systems that one cannot tell if a given word is actually a pronoun or not. Fortunately, there is a way to test this, based on the fact that pronouns typically replace full noun phrases, and not just part of a noun phrase. Because they replace full NPs, pronouns cannot be modified by adjectives, determiners, or other elements which modify nouns or other sub-phrasal nominals. If you find that a word in your informant's language can be modified by an adjective or some other complement, then it is a good bet that it is not a true pronoun. Some languages, such as Korean, for example, do not have a "complete" set of true pronouns in the way that English does. So, in Korean there is no true pronoun corresponding to 'he', 'she' or 'they'. All of these are expressed with the phrase *kɨ saram*, which actually means 'that person' or 'those people'. One can verify that *kɨ saram* is not a true pronoun by observing that it can be modified with an adjective such as *miguk*, 'American'. By contrast, **American he* or **that American he* would be ungrammatical in English.

Keep in mind, however, that tests such as this one are by no means guaranteed to work. There will always be cases in which it is just about impossible to tell what grammatical category a word or morpheme really belongs to. I once watched a colleague's dissertation defense get taken over by a room full of linguists arguing about whether the Cape Verdean clitic *-e* is a pronoun or a copular verb.

Another problem that one may encounter in field work, and particularly when working on pronominal systems, is the dissimilarity between one's own language and that of the informant. As the world's most notorious monoglots, we English speakers tend to assume that other languages work pretty much the way ours does. So, we assume that everyone divides the world up into 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person referents of either the singular or the plural variety. We also think it natural to distinguish grammatically between male and female human beings in the 3rd person singular, but not in the plural, or in the other persons. So, we differentiate between *he* and *she*, but not between *you* (m.) and *you* (f.). Speakers of other languages often do things differently.

In Finnish, for example, the pronominal system makes no distinction between genders. Quechua also makes no distinctions along gender lines in its pronominal system, but it does distinguish between 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' groupings in the first person plural (6).

(6) *ɲuqa-ntʃ'ik* (1ST.PL.INCL.) 'we, including you'
ɲuqa-j-ku (1ST.PL.EXCL.) 'we, not including you'
(Data adapted from Lyovin 1997)

An English-speaking linguist working on Quechua might not know about the inclusive/exclusive feature distinction, and might miss it entirely. For this reason, one should constantly be on the lookout for all sorts of feature distinctions when working on pronominal systems. In particular, there are some common phenomena not found in the English pronominal system that one should watch for: (a) the existence of an impersonal 4th person, as in Hausa, (b) the marking of a dual number, as in Yup'ik Eskimo, and (c) distinctions according to levels of honor or respect, as in Japanese and Korean.

If you succeed in quickly eliciting the basic pronominal paradigms in the informant's language, there is always the option of doing more advanced work. For example, many linguists just can't get enough of reflexive pronouns, which have been and continue to be one of the hottest topics in generative linguistics. Of course, most of the excitement centers around the syntactic distribution of reflexives (which we discuss in Chapter 11), but one can begin by collecting a few reflexive forms. They should not be too difficult to elicit, as they generally occur in the object position of clauses in which the subject and the object share the same referent, as in *She$_i$ injures herself$_i$*. In order to convey to the informant what a reflexive is, you should first find a construction, like the one above, which forces its use. Once you have found an example of a reflexive, you can ask the informant to give you other examples of this word in different forms and constructions. Beware, however, that the form used for reflexives may also be a regular word in the informant's language, such as 'self' or 'body'. It may also be the case that your informant's language has reflexives which are not morphologically distinct from non-reflexive pronouns, so your search may not pan out.

4. Stumbling Blocks

Even the most careful investigator is sure to run across a number of problems when collecting data on nominal morphology. In addition to the usual foul-ups resulting from miscommunications, carelessness, or even recalcitrance on the part of the informant, there are certain potential traps which are specific to the sub-field of nominal morphology.

- **Beware of numbers.** If you try to elicit a plural form by pointing to a group of objects, keep in mind that your informant may specify the exact number of objects in question, rather than give a generic plural. This may pose unwanted problems for you, since in many languages nouns accompanied by a number do not appear in the plural. This is the case in Standard Armenian, for example, where you say *ʃun*, 'dog', *ʃun-er* 'dogs', and *hiŋg ʃun* 'five dog'. *Hiŋg ʃuner* can also be forced, but it has a specific referent, and is not the most natural form.

- **Beware of noun classes.** Working with a Swahili-speaking informant, I once asked how to say 'telephone', and was told that the word is *simu*. When I asked for the plural form, I found that it is also *simu*. On these grounds, I decided that plurals were unmarked in Swahili. Of course I was wrong, but there was no one to catch my error. As mentioned above, Swahili groups nouns into a variety of classes based on their semantic properties. The word for 'telephone' belongs to a noun class for which there is no plural marker. Had I elicited a word from another noun class, such as *ʃati*, 'shirt', (plural: *maʃati*) I would have found there are plural markers for many nouns.

- **Don't forget about phonology.** Morphological marking may be affected by phonology, so when you find a given morphological form, you should be sure to try it out with a few words with different sounds in them. In Polish, for example, the masculine singular locative case is marked differently depending on the final consonant of the root. Generally, it is formed with *-e*, as in *teatrze* [*tɛatʃə*], which is the locative of *teatr* [*tɛatr*] 'theater'. After any palatalized stop, however, or after a *k* or a *g*, it is formed with *-u*. So, the locative of *kiosk* [*kjosk*] 'kiosk' is not **kioske* but *kiosku*. If your informant's language has a system like this one, then figuring out the nominal morphology will be impossible without paying considerable attention to phonology.

- **Beware of overlapping forms.** In the pronominal systems of many languages, certain morphemes do double or triple duty, or worse. In English, for example, the word *you* serves as both a 2nd person singular and plural pronoun. In German, *ihr* can mean 'you (pl.)', 'her (dat.)', 'her (possessive)', or 'their'. When working on the pronominal system of your informant's language, you should keep in mind that the same morpheme may show up in one or more cases, genders, or numbers. If this situation does arise, you may wish to ask the informant how speakers go about eliminating ambiguity when context does not suffice. For example, most English speakers have a strategy for distinguishing between *you* (sg.) and *you* (pl.). Some examples are *you guys*, *you all*, *you 'uns*, *y'all*, and the Boston favorite, *youse*. One should always be on the lookout for such forms.

- **Beware of suppletive forms.** Another factor to consider when working with pronominal systems is the high incidence of suppletive forms. You may find that the morphological variations between pronominal forms in the informant's language are entirely unpredictable, even if full NPs are inflected in a consistent manner. In Polish, for example, the nominative form of the 3rd person masculine singular pronoun, *on*, is morphologically unrelated to the accusative/genitive form, *jego/go*. Also note that the accusative/genitive pronoun is cited as either *jego* or *go*. *Jego* is the free form of this pronoun, whereas *go* is a bound form, a clitic. The existence of both bound and free pronouns within a pronominal system is a common cross-linguistic phenomenon, found in languages ranging from French to Malay. Be careful, though, before you decide that you

have found a real instance of suppletion. It is sometimes the case that apparently suppletive forms belong to the paradigm of another word. When you encounter an apparently suppletive form, see if it has any other morphologically related forms.

- **Watch out for interference from English.** When collecting data on case and grammatical gender, the chances of interference from English are few, since English has neither of these. When eliciting singular/plural distinctions, however, we often forget that the number distinctions drawn in English are by no means universal. A word such as *scissors* is plural in English, but its synonyms in many other languages are singular, as in Armenian *mkrat* (sg.). Likewise, a word which is singular in English may be plural in another language, as with Polish *drzwi* (pl.) 'door' [*dʒvi*]. Note that *drzwi* and *scissors* are plural in form but singular in meaning; this is a common phenomenon.

- **Beware of free morphemes.** There are languages in which plurals are marked with a free morpheme which does not attach to the root. This means that you may mistake an independent word for an inflectional affix. Calypso (the English-based creole of St. Thomas) provides an example of such a system, in which a separate word is added to a noun to indicate plurality (7).

(7) a. *də got* 'the goat' b. *də got dɛm* 'the goats'

Under normal circumstances, we would not have known that *dɛm* was an independent word. Fortunately for us, our Calypso informant is also a native speaker of standard English, and very knowledgeable about linguistics. He explained to us, based on his intuitions as a native speaker, that *dɛm* should be treated as a word. Informants of this type are rare, but if you happen to meet any, then you should make use of their abilities. Furthermore, try to avoid letting your expectations override what your informants actually produce. A field worker familiar with French, for example, might become very suspicious upon hearing a French Caribbean Creole speaker produce *nu* for 'you (plural)'. ([*nu*] in French means 'we'; 'you (plural)' is [*vu*].) In this case, though, the informant is correct; some French Creoles have extended *nu* to serve as both first person plural and second person plural pronouns.

- **Look out for optional/alternative forms.** In many languages, nouns which typically take an irregular affix of some kind may optionally take a regular one. In the Kesab dialect of Armenian, for example, words which normally take the irregular *-uda* plural ending can also take the regular *-ir* plural, as seen in (8).

singular	**irregular plural**	**regular plural**	**gloss**
uortʃ	*uortʃuda(kʰ)*	*urtʃir*	bear (n.)
vərt͡s	*vərsədakʰ*	*vərt͡sir*	male

This reinforces the point that it is very important to check for all possible forms when looking at a grammatical phenomenon. Do not be satisfied with your informant's first response to an elicitation. It is always best to check for variants of the forms you collect.

Suggestions for further reading

Readers who are interested in taxonomic morphology and the problems involved in breaking down words into individual morphemes can consult a range of books and articles in the structuralist tradition, including Harris 1942 and Nida 1948. For theoretical aspects of verbal morphology, one can consult the relevant portions of Spencer 1991 and Carstairs-McCarthy 1992.

Exercises

1. Make up a list of English nouns which contains both 'count nouns' and 'mass nouns'. For example, *book* is a count noun, since you can say *two books*, while *dirt* is a mass noun—*two lumps of dirt*, but not **two dirts*. Elicit the corresponding forms from your informant and see how these concepts are treated in his or her language.

2. Collect a short text from your informant and go through it carefully, circling or underlining each noun or noun phrase. Try to identify the gender, number and case of each nominal element. If your prior work has shown you that some other feature, such as animacy or definiteness, is morphologically relevant, try to determine the feature values of these, too. Wherever you cannot identify all the feature values for a nominal element, go back and check it with further elicitations, so that you can fill out your analysis.

3. Collect two sets of nouns, belonging to two semantic classes (e.g. females and animals). See if you can identify any morphological features that distinguish the two.

4. Collect the full paradigm (singular, plural, and so on) for a noun in your informants' language. Discuss the techniques you used to collect the forms (including how you came up with carrier sentences you employed), and detail any difficulties that you encountered.