

Т.О. Боронникова, Э.В. Лелека

Уральский федеральный университет имени первого Президента России Б.Н. Ельцина
г. Екатеринбург, Россия

Семантика русского и английского числа существительных. Сходства и различия.

При изучении любого иностранного языка люди волей-неволей проводят параллель с родным языком, переносят грамматические особенности одного языка на другой, что приводит к путанице в процессе изучения. В статье рассматривается категория числа имени существительного в английском и русском языках, выделяются группы существительных, обладающих особенными числовыми характеристиками, устанавливаются сходства и различия между английскими словами и их русскими эквивалентами.

Semantic characteristics of the category of number of Russian and English nouns. Similarities and differences.

Every language has grammatical categories of nouns. The English language numbers the two of them (the category of number and case), while the Russian language contains the three of them (the category of number, case and gender). The category of number seems to be the most difficult for students, but at the same time quite interesting for analysing.

In the present work we would like to study the category of number of English nouns and compare it with the Russian one.

The category of number in modern English, as well as in Russian, is expressed by the opposition of the plural form of the noun to the singular form of the noun. Their categorial meaning is clear at first sight: the singular number shows that only one object is meant, while the plural number denotes more than one object. This is apparently obvious for such correlations as *table – tables* (*стол – столы*), *boy – boys* (*мальчик – мальчики*), etc. However, there are some nouns that do not show a contrast between singular and plural. They are divided into several groups.

Singularia tantum nouns. These are nouns which have only a singular form and no plural forms. The group of Singularia tantum includes the names of abstract notions (*friendship* (*дружба*), *love* (*любовь*), *music* (*музыка*), etc.); names of mass materials (*water* (*вода*),

air (воздух), *snow* (снег), etc.); names of some collective inanimate objects (*furniture* (мебель), *foliage* (листва), *linen* (белье), etc.). These subgroups denote concepts which are incompatible with the idea of countability, which means that the reason for the absence of the plural form is extralinguistic. Consequently, equivalents of such nouns in Russian also lack plural forms for the same reason. However, there is one more subgroup of Singularia tantum nouns of heterogeneous semantics which presents difficulties for Russian learners of English, because the reasons for the absence of the plural form are language-specific and the number characteristics of these English nouns and their Russian equivalents do not coincide. For example, some of these nouns have equivalents in Russian which are used only in the plural (*cream* (сливки), *ink* (чернила), etc.). There are rational explanations of numeral characteristics of these nouns in both English and Russian. While the use of *cream* and *ink* only in the singular is caused by their semantics (nouns denoting things which have neither shape nor precise limits can not be counted and therefore have no distinction between singular and plural), the reason of the use of *сливки* and *чернила* only in the plural is both in their lexical meanings and morphological structures. At the same time, Russian equivalents to some of these nouns have both singular and plural forms (*advice* (совет – советы), *research* (исследование – исследования), *news* (новость – новости), etc.). It can explain why such English words are mistakenly treated by Russian students as the ones having plural forms. David Crystal, a British linguist, academic and author, in one of his interviews said: “The weight of usage produced by the non-native speakers of English in the world is bound to have an effect on the way the English language evolves. It is simply because the thing that drives language change more than anything else is contact, mutual influence... Look at the way non-countable nouns are being made countable in many parts of the English learning world. Words like *furniture* having a plural *furnitures*, *information* being *informations*, *research* being *researches*. I would never use these forms as a native speaker of English, but you will increasingly find them being used. And, in fact, recently, in one or two occasions I have caught myself actually saying *informations*, because it seemed to be exactly what I wanted to say, a very concrete, specific notion of information, not the general abstract mass-noun notion. And then you look it up in the Oxford English dictionary and you find that once upon a time *information* was countable in English” [6]. Despite this observation,

academic English denies plural forms of these words and do not recommend to use them.

Pluralia tantum nouns. These are nouns which have only a plural and no singular forms. The group of Pluralia Tantum includes nouns denoting objects consisting of two similar halves (*trousers* (брюки), *spectacles* (очки), *scissors* (ножницы), etc.); nouns (concrete or abstract) which have collective meaning. As for the first subgroup, Russian equivalents of such nouns are also used only in the plural. The reason of the lack of singular forms is common for both languages are connected to lexical meanings of these words. But the second subgroup presents more difficulties for Russian students. A limited number of such words have Russian equivalents which are also pluralia tantum (*tropics* (тропики), *slops* (помои), *sweepings* (отбросы), etc.). The others have equivalents which either have both singular and plural forms (*goods* (товары – товар), *eaves* (карнизы – карниз), *preserves* (консервы – консерва); *tidings* (известия – известие), *goings-on* (поступки – поступок), etc.), or only a singular form (*clothes* (одежда), *wages* (заработная плата), *oats* (овес), etc.). The number characteristics of these English nouns and their Russian equivalents do not coincide in most cases and therefore should be learnt.

Nouns with the descriptive plural. These are uncountable nouns which are used in the function of the countable noun. Therefore, plural forms of these nouns have a pronounced stylistic colouring (*the snows of the Arctic* (снега Арктики); *the sands of the Sahara Desert* (пески Сахары); *the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea* (голубые воды Средиземного моря), etc.). The opposition of “one – more than one” does not apply here: we could not possibly say *three snows*, *ten sands*, or *five waters*. The plural forms in such correlations as *snow – snows* (снег – снега), *sand – sands* (песок – пески), *water – waters* (вода – воды) serve to denote a landscape or seascape in order to impress (the ground covered by snow, a vast stretch of water, etc.). Such plural forms are commonly used for stylistic purposes in English and Russian literary prose and poetry.

Nouns with a fully lexicalised plural form. The plural forms of these nouns develop completely new meanings which the singular do not have at all. For some of these nouns there is the same process taking place in Russian. The most evident example is the word *paper*. While in the singular, *paper* (бумага) denotes material, but in the plural *papers* (бумаги) means notes or documents. However, such cases of perfect

coincidence between English nouns and their Russian equivalents are rare. There are some more examples of nouns with a fully lexicalised plural form in English: *tear* (one drop falling from the eye) and *tears* (treacles on the cheeks as tokens of grief or joy), *potato* (one item of the vegetables) and *potatoes* (food), *sky* (the vault of heaven) and *skies* (the same sky taken as a direct or figurative background), etc. A limited number of nouns in English have only the plural form and lack the singular (pluralia tantum nouns), but they happen to be homonyms of nouns which are used in both forms: *colour* – *colours* (hues) – *colours* (regimental flags); *a force* – *forces* (powers) – *forces* (an army); *a custom* – *customs* (habits) – *customs* (taxes on imported goods), etc.

Names of subjects, diseases and games. This group presents the most difficulties for learning, because there are more exceptions than rules, and because there are only few coincidences. Names of subjects in English and Russian are treated as singular despite they look like they are plural in English (*mathematics* (математика), *physics* (физика), *ethics* (этика), *politics* (политика), etc.). However, some of these nouns are occasionally used in the plural in English when a particular person's work or activities are meant (*politics* (political belief), *statistics* (numerical information), *economics* (financial system), etc.). Names of diseases, while plural in origin, are treated singularly in English because just one disease is discussed (*diabetes* (диабет), *tumps* (свинка), *measles* (корь), etc.). Other rules of the usage of such nouns are given in Russian: names of chronic or long-term diseases are used only in the singular (*рак*, *язва*, *цинга*, etc.), while the names of slight or temporal diseases have both singular and plural forms (*простуда*, *ангина*, *инфаркт*, etc.). Some names of games are always in the singular (*bowls*, *billiards*, *draughts*; *боулинг*, *бильярд*, *домино*, etc.), while others are in the plural (*chees*, *hide-and-seek*, *blind man's buff*; *шахматы*, *салки*, *прятки*, etc.).

Collective nouns. These are nouns which denote groups of people or animals (*family* (семья), *clergy* (духовенство), *herd* (стадо), *poultry* (птица), etc.). Collective nouns in English are used in two ways: they either indicate the group as a single undivided (used with singular predicates), or as a collection of individuals (used with plural predicates). For example, *His family was well known in their town* – *My family keep a close eye on me*. However, it is impossible in Russian to use the predicate in the plural form retaining grammatical structure of the collective noun (singular number) because of the rules of concord. If we use this noun in the plural, we still do not reach the same opposition “group as a whole” –

“group as consisting of a number of individuals”. Those nouns, which can be used in the plural, denote several groups (*несколько семей, несколько стад*) while in the plural. In order to show this opposition, either multitude valent predicates (*разогнать оркестр, распусть парламент, ит.д.*), or adverbs of quantity (*много молодежи, мало духовенства ит.д.*) are used with collective nouns in the singular.

Thus, basically the grammatical category of number in both English and Russian shows the opposition of the plural form of the noun to the singular form of the noun. At the same time these forms are not always connected with the idea of oneness or more-than-oneness. There are plenty of nouns with non-numerical semantics – collective, material nouns, and also nouns which do not change for singular and plural (the so-called *singularia and pluralia tantum*). The usage of some nouns is explained by peculiarities of their lexical meaning, grammatical structure, or origin. However, there are still a lot of English and Russian nouns which numeral characteristics are under discussion.

Список литературы:

1. Блох М. Я. Теоретическая грамматика английского языка. – М.: Высш. школа, 1983. – С. 57-62.
2. Викулова Е. А. Теоретическая грамматика современного английского языка. – Екатеринбург: Изд-во Урал. ун-та, 2014. – С. 27-29.
3. Крылова И. П., Гордон Е. М. Грамматика современного английского языка. – М.: Книжный дом «Университет»: Высшая школа, 2003. – 448 с.
4. Ляшевская О. Н. Семантика русского числа – М.: Языки славянской культуры, 2004. – С. 147-150, 163-164, 309-311.
5. Crystal D. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language/ D. Crystal Cambridge Univ. Press. 1995. P. 200-201.
6. Macmillan EducationELT. URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=YJ29zDW9gLI (дата обращения: 25.01.2016).