



THE CATEGORY OF NUMBER IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK: A COMPARATIVE LINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of the grammatical category of number in English and Uzbek. The paper examines how the singular and plural distinctions are expressed morphologically, semantically, and syntactically in both languages. English demonstrates a complex plural formation system with regular, irregular, zero, and foreign plurals, whereas Uzbek plural formation relies on the universal suffix -lar/-lar, which also expresses social politeness, collectivity, and emphasis. The study highlights the typological features of both languages, identifying major similarities and differences and analyzing the challenges learners face during acquisition. The findings contribute to linguistic theory and practical approaches to teaching English and Uzbek grammar.

Introduction: The grammatical category of number is one of the fundamental linguistic categories that reflects quantitative distinctions across languages. Although the concept of number appears universal, its expression varies greatly among languages depending on their typological structure. English, an analytic Indo-European language, and Uzbek, an agglutinative Turkic language, represent two different linguistic systems where the category of number plays an essential role.

In English, the number category is expressed through a wide range of morphological patterns such as regular plural forms, irregular plurals, zero plurals, and uncountable nouns. In contrast, Uzbek uses the plural suffix -lar/-lar, which functions not only grammatically but also semantically and pragmatically. This study aims to provide a detailed comparative overview of the number category in the two languages, focusing on their morphological, syntactic, semantic, and historical features.

Historical Background: Historically, the English number system was far more complex than it is today. Old English possessed multiple plural inflections, including -as, -an, and vowel alternations. Many irregular plurals in Modern English are remnants of these earlier forms. Over time, English underwent morphological simplification, resulting in the dominant plural marker -s.

Uzbek, from its Old Turkic roots, has consistently used the plural marker -lar (with vowel harmony). Historical texts such as the Orkhon inscriptions demonstrate that pluralization

formed an essential part of early Turkic morphology. Over centuries, Uzbek maintained stable plural formation principles with minimal structural change, preserving the agglutinative nature of the language.

The Category of Number in English

English plural formation can be divided into several groups:

1. Regular plurals:

The majority of nouns take the -s or -es suffix, depending on phonological rules:

book – books, bus – buses, class – classes.

2. Irregular plurals:

These include vowel changes, internal modifications, or historically preserved endings:

man – men, goose – geese, child – children, ox – oxen.

3. Zero plurals:

Some nouns maintain the same form in singular and plural:

sheep, deer, fish (in general meaning).

4. Foreign plurals:

Loanwords preserve their original plural forms:

phenomenon – phenomena, criterion – criteria.

5. Countable vs. uncountable nouns:

English strictly distinguishes between countable nouns (table/tables) and uncountable nouns (information, furniture), the latter of which do not take plural endings.

English number marking is obligatory in most grammatical structures, and number affects verb agreement, pronouns, and determiners.

The Category of Number in Uzbek: Uzbek number formation is simpler morphologically but richer semantically. The plural suffix -lar/-lar (with vowel harmony) is the only productive plural marker:

kitob – kitoblar, qiz – qizlar.

However, the suffix carries multiple meanings:

1. Grammatical plurality:

Expressing more than one object: daraxtlar – trees.

2. Respect or politeness:

Used to elevate the status of the person mentioned:

Ota keldilar.

3. Collectivity:

Referring to groups or communities:

yoshlar, oqsoqollar.

4. Optional plural marking:

Plural is not required when a numeral or quantifier is present: uchta kitob (not uchta kitoblar), ko'p odam (not ko'p odamlar). Uzbek lacks a strict countability system; even traditionally uncountable nouns may take plural forms in certain semantic contexts (e.g., maslahatlar, mebellar).

Comparative Analysis

A comparison of English and Uzbek reveals fundamental typological differences:

1. Morphological complexity:

English pluralization is diverse and irregular, whereas Uzbek uses a single predictable plural marker.

2. Countability:

English has a strict countable/uncountable distinction; Uzbek does not.

3. Syntactic agreement:

English verbs agree with subject number:

The boy runs. / The boys run.

Uzbek verbs do not require such agreement.

4. Pragmatic function:

Uzbek plural suffix has social and emotional meanings; English plural does not encode politeness.

5. Semantic flexibility:

Uzbek plural may indicate respect, collectivity, and emphasis, but English plural tends to be strictly numerical.

These differences reflect deeper typological distinctions: English is analytic, relying on word order and auxiliary structures, while Uzbek is agglutinative, relying on suffixation.

Conclusion

The category of number in English and Uzbek reflects the broader grammatical and typological systems of each language. English pluralization is morphologically diverse and often irregular, requiring strict countability distinctions and influencing syntactic agreement. Uzbek pluralization, meanwhile, is morphologically simple yet semantically and pragmatically rich, demonstrating multifunctionality beyond numerical reference.

A comparative understanding of these number systems is essential for language learners, translators, and linguists. The differences also highlight challenges faced by Uzbek learners of English and English learners of Uzbek. Understanding these differences enhances communication efficacy and fosters deeper awareness of linguistic structure.

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