

3

NOUNS

- 1 Choose the correct alternative in the following sentences. In case both alternatives are acceptable, explain any difference in meaning.
 - a. My teacher gave me a lot of good advice/~~advices~~ for my exam.
 - b. The house is at the ~~outsirt~~/outskirts of the village.
 - c. For the South Pole Expedition they will have to bring heavy equipment/~~equipments~~.
 - d. I was worried about my ~~physic~~/physics test.
 - e. She couldn't sleep, so she tried to count sheep/~~sheeps~~.
 - f. We really like chicken/chickens.

Both alternatives are acceptable, but the first alternative refers to eating chicken (uncountable) and the second to the animals (countable).
 - g. I have two ~~bottles openers~~ / bottle openers; would you like one of them?

- 2 Correct what is wrong (or awkward) in the following sentences and explain your corrections.
 - a. Sarah is always getting into ~~troubles~~ trouble with her parents.

The noun “trouble” is uncountable in this context, where it has a rather general meaning. “Trouble” can also be countable (when it means “problem”), as for example “she felt all her troubles were over”.
 - b. Paul had forgotten to set his ~~alarm clock~~ alarm clock and overslept.

This compound noun is written in two words.

- c. I would like a ~~binocular~~ binoculars for Christmas.
This is a plural-only noun.
- d. My new jeans ~~fits~~ fit perfectly.
Jeans is a plural-only noun (like *trousers*).
- e. There were two white ~~mouses~~ mice running around in a cage.
This is an example of an irregular plural: *mouse-mice*.
- f. We made a U-turn at the ~~crossroad~~ crossroads.
The noun *crossroads* has the same form in singular and plural.
- g. Three ~~polices~~ police officers were hurt in the attack.
Police is a plural-only noun and does not combine with plural *-s*. In combination with numbers, it is more common to say, e.g., *police officers*, *policemen* or *police women*.

3 Explain the difference in form and meaning between the members of each pair.

- a. 1 They bought a lot of paper.
2 They bought a lot of papers.
The difference in form between the members of this sentence pair is the singular and plural forms of the noun *paper*. In sentence (a1) the noun is uncountable and refers to the substance of paper in general. In sentence (a2) the noun is countable, and the meaning is most likely that they bought a number of newspapers.
- b. 1 The Government has discussed the matter.
2 The Government have discussed the matter.
The difference in form lies in the verb phrases. The auxiliary *have* has singular form in sentence (b1) and plural form in sentence (b2). The noun *government* is a collective noun, which means that it refers to a group of people. Still, the singular form of the verb is used in (b1) because the focus is on the group of people as a unit, whereas the plural form is used in (b2) because the focus is on the individual members of the group.
- c. 1 The front page showed a picture of the Queen of Denmark.
2 The front page showed a picture of the Queen in Denmark.
On the surface, the difference between sentences (c1) and (c2) is the use of the preposition *of* in the first sentence and the preposition *in* in the second. In (c1) the prepositional phrase *of Denmark* functions as postmodifier in the noun phrase (*the Queen of Denmark*) as a kind of genitive construction (the Queen that belongs to Denmark). In (c2) the prepositional phrase *in Denmark* is similarly a postmodifier of *the Queen*, but here it has no genitive meaning and simply means “who is/was in

Denmark". Sentence (c1) refers to a picture taken of the Danish Queen anywhere in the world, whereas sentence (c2) refers to a picture of the Queen of any monarchy in the world taken in Denmark.

- d. 1 The media are incapable of not exaggerating.
2 The medium is incapable of not exaggerating.

The difference in form between sentences (d1) and (d2) is the nouns *media* and *medium* and the singular/plural form of the lexical verb *be*. In (d1) *media* refers to communications, in which case the noun has the same form in the singular and plural. Here the plural form is used. In (d2) the singular form *medium* is used, which can refer a person who claims to be speaking to people who are dead. The plural form of this noun is *mediums*.

- 4 Read the following text and answer the questions below:

I wish I could head back to UK

By Sarah Passey, Orange, Australia

I can fully understand why Brits are leaving Australia and wish I could be one of them. My family emigrated in 2005 with three young children. Although my husband's job in the Australian healthcare service allows him a much better quality of life than the NHS, for the rest of us life has been very hard. The children struggled to fit into the school system here, the cost of living is more than it used to be and life away from the major cities is so soulless. You would be amazed how much you can end up missing UK things like regional accents, a sense of history and belonging. On a recent trip back, my eight-year-old rolled about laughing in the lush greenness of a local lawn and announced that she loved English grass. (bbc.co.uk)

- a. Identify two proper nouns in this text.
Alternatives: Australia, the NHS, UK
- b. What is the plural form of *eight-year-old*?
eight-year-olds
- c. Are the following nouns countable or uncountable (as used in the present text)?
family (line 2) *countable*, *children* (line 2) *countable*, *job* (line 3) *countable*, *life* (line 4) *uncountable*, *history* (line 7) *uncountable*, *belonging* (line 7) *uncountable*, *lawn* (line 8) *countable*, *grass* (line 9) *uncountable*.

- d. Find three compound nouns of the following three types: (i) spelt as one word: *healthcare*; (ii) spelt with hyphenation between the words: *eight-year-old*; (iii) spelt as two words: *school system, healthcare system*.
- e. Find the following types of noun phrases in the text: (i) head with premodifier realized by an adjective: *young children, English grass*; (ii) head with premodifier realized by a noun: *healthcare service, school system*; (iii) head with a postmodifier realized by a prepositional phrase: *quality of life, sense of history, cost of living*; (iv) head with both a premodifier and a postmodifier: *a much better quality of life, my husband's job in the Australian healthcare service, UK things like regional accents, a recent trip back, the lush greenness of a local lawn*.

5 Findings from the British National Corpus at <http://corpus.byu.edu/>.

- a. The 20 most frequent nouns in the corpus:

TIME, PEOPLE, WAY, YEARS, YEAR, WORK, GOVERNMENT, DAY, MAN, WORLD, LIFE, MR, NUMBER, PART, HOUSE, CHILDREN, SYSTEM, PLACE, CASE, END

- b. Use the “Top 20” list from question (5a) and give the following information on each noun: is it proper or common? Countable or uncountable? Singular or plural? Collective?

TIME: common, uncountable, singular

PEOPLE: common, plural-only (can also be countable, singular when it refers to a particular group of people)

WAY: common, countable, singular

YEARS: common, countable, plural

YEAR: common, countable, singular

WORK: common, uncountable

GOVERNMENT: common, countable, singular, collective

DAY: common, countable, singular

MAN: common, countable, singular OR common, uncountable when it refers to “modern man” or the like

WORLD: proper, uncountable OR common, countable when it refers to different worlds couples live in or the Arab world as compared to the Western world

LIFE: common, uncountable OR common, countable, singular when it refers to the lives we live or the like

MR: common, countable, singular (although plural form is generally out of the question when *Mr* is used as a title)

NUMBER: common, countable, singular

PART: common, countable, singular

HOUSE: common, countable, singular

CHILDREN: common, countable, plural

SYSTEM: common, countable, singular

PLACE: common, countable, singular

CASE: common, countable, singular

END: common, uncountable (the opposite of the beginning) OR common, countable, singular

- c. Above the list of frequent nouns (on the corpus website) click on “COCA” after “COMPARE”. This will give you a similar list of the most frequent nouns in the American corpus. Which words occur among the top 20 in COCA that do not occur in the BNC top 20 list? Do any of them reflect American culture?

SCHOOL, PRESIDENT, THINGS, STATE, WOMEN, PERCENT, STUDENTS, FAMILY

Frequent references to the president of the US and states reflect the political system of the country. Frequent references to words such as *school* and *students* indicate that education is a very important value in American culture. In the same manner *family* may reflect the importance of family values. Note, however, that some of the differences may be due to other things as well, for example the kinds of texts that have gone into the two corpora or spelling conventions: *percent* is more frequent in the American corpus because it is most commonly spelt as two words (*per cent*) in British English. Similarly, *students* may be more frequent than in British English because it has a wider meaning in American English (American *students* = British *pupils* and *students*).