Section 9  nouns and pronouns

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language notes

Speakers of European languages, which distinguish countable and uncountable nouns grammatically in much the same way as English, do not have too much difficulty in this area, although some uncountable English words have countable equivalents in some other languages, which can lead to continuing mistakes:

*Can you give me an advice?
*I need some more informations.

Speakers of other languages may have more difficulty with the English countable-uncountable distinction:

*We need another paint on the wall.
*The candidate did not have much supporter.

This is because, in many languages, there is no grammatical difference between the two kinds of noun. It may not be enough to explain that the English distinction depends on whether things ‘can be counted’ or not. In students’ languages, counting may work in the same way for both kinds of noun, with the equivalent of ‘one piece metal’, ‘two pieces metal’; ‘one piece car’, ‘two pieces car’, for example (only more complicated than that!). It’s probably better to talk about whether things naturally come as separate items or not. Learners have particular difficulty in cases where the difference seems rather arbitrary (compare oats/wheat, advertisement/publicity, attack/aggression, job/work). And words for consumables often have both countable and uncountable uses, as do many abstract nouns.

possible further activities

Other languages  Do students speak or know languages in which the uncountable words in Exercise 1 can normally be made plural? (Note: not all languages have a singular/plural distinction.)

Personalisation  Get students to complete one or more of the following sentences:

I don’t see much point in …ing …
I don’t have much chance of …ing …
I didn’t have much difficulty in …ing …

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language notes

‘Pronunciation for grammar’ has an exercise which will help students to hear whether group nouns are followed by singular or plural verbs.

possible further activities

Groups in the class  Get students to complete some or all of the following sentences. Tell them not to use can (because this doesn’t have different singular and plural forms).

The majority of people in the class …
A minority of people in the class …
A large number of people in the class …
A small number of people in the class …
A couple of people in the class …

Internet: group nouns  Invite students to check on the internet to see whether they can find examples of the team, my family and the audience followed by are or have. What about the

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use.

➔ Section 9 continues
names of well-known British football teams (e.g. Manchester United or Arsenal)? Are these normally followed by is/has or are/have?

**Internet: quantifying expressions** Can students find any examples of “the majority of us is” or “a number of people is” on the internet? How common are these compared with the “the majority of us are” and “a number of people are”? (Note that a singular verb is often there because of an earlier noun, not because of majority or number.)

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**Language notes**

When talking about several people each doing or having the same thing, students’ languages may use a singular noun where English prefers a plural:

>*They all put on their coat and went out.*

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**Pages 128-129**

**Language notes**

See note to students on page 124. The differences between the different ways of putting nouns together in English are complicated. The guidelines on these and following pages will help, but it’s not possible to give completely clear and simple rules. Students’ languages may put a noun modifier after a head noun, or they may use prepositional structures rather than noun + noun. This can lead to occasional mistakes even at this level:

>*There’s a meeting (of) budget this afternoon.*

**Possible further activities**

**Vocabulary expansion: finding examples** Ask students how many noun + noun combinations they can find in the classroom, or think of in a typical house or town (‘computer table’, ‘wall poster’, ‘light switch’, ‘kitchen door’, ‘soup spoon’, ‘clothes shop’, …). Ask them to find ten or more in advertisements for food or drink.

**Examples in text** How many noun + noun combinations can students find on one page of a newspaper or magazine?

**Headlines** Ask students to find news headlines (in newspapers or on the internet) which have strings of three or more nouns.

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**Pages 130–131**

**Possible further activities**

**Visual punctuation** Say some nouns (mixed singular, plural and irregular plural). Keep to nouns for people. Students add the possessive endings by drawing them in the air, like this:

*sister* – students draw apostrophe s
*doctors* – students draw apostrophe
*children* – students draw apostrophe s

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**Language notes**

Expressions like have a think, take a look, common in spoken English, do not generally have equivalents in other languages. Students may be inclined to prefer one-word verbal expressions (think, look).

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use. ➔ Section 9 continues
In some languages, ordinary nouns have grammatical gender. Even advanced students may occasionally use *he or she* for things (especially living creatures), reflecting the mother-tongue gender:

“Look at that spider! She’s enormous!”

Some grammars may say that ships and countries are referred to with feminine pronouns *she* etc. However, this is no longer common.

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**Language notes**

This is one of those areas that are on the frontier between grammar and vocabulary. In order to be sure what structure is used with a particular noun, it is generally necessary to consult a good dictionary. Some common cases are practised here, and others are listed on pages 308–309.

‘Pronunciation for grammar’ will help students to hear unstressed words in these structures, and to pronounce them with a natural rhythm.

**Possible further activities**

**Personalisation** Get students to complete some or all of the following sentences, with their own ideas:

- I have no desire for …
- I have no wish to …
- I disagree with people’s criticism of …
- I have a feeling that …
- There is a common belief that …
- There is no need for people to …
- I don’t like the thought of …ing …

**Pages 134–135**

**Language notes**

The choice between subject and object pronouns in English is complex, depending partly on syntactic position and level of formality. Students whose languages make a simple consistent distinction between the equivalents of *I* and *me* may find English usage confusing in this respect, and may feel, wrongly, that *It is I* or *as old as she* are more ‘correct’.

In double subjects and objects containing pronouns, the *I/me* distinction often breaks down completely in informal usage:

*John and me saw a great film yesterday.*

*All debts are cleared between you and I.* (Shakespeare: Merchant of Venice)

These are not mistakes, although some native speakers believe they are wrong. They are simply examples of informal standard spoken usage. Students should however avoid these structures in formal writing, where they are definitely unacceptable.

**Possible further activities**

‘*Me*’ Ask questions like the following. Students answer ‘Me’ or ‘Not me’.

- Who likes fish?
- Who speaks [name of language]?
- Who was born in March?
- Who can drive?
- Who goes to bed late?
- Who gets up early at weekends?

An asterisk (*) indicates an incorrect form or use. ➔ Section 9 continues
Who goes skiing?
Who's been to the US?

Then, if you like, you can ask the questions all over again and ask for more complete short answers (‘I do’, ‘I was’, ‘I can’, ‘I don’t’ etc).

**pages 136–137**

**possible further activities**

*A world of perfect leisure* In a world of perfect leisure, things would do themselves. Food would cook itself; houses would clean themselves; … Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to find at least ten more examples.

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**language notes**

In American English, *his* is sometimes used as a possessive equivalent of *one*:

*One should always keep his promises.*

This is unusual in British English.

**possible further activities**

* Complaints Students imagine that they are grumpy old men and woman, always complaining about what ‘they’ are doing. For example:
  - They’re always digging up the roads.
  - They keep putting prices up.

Can they add five or more complaints?

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**language notes**

Some people feel that the singular use of *they* must be wrong, because ‘*they* is plural’. In fact *they*, like *you*, has both singular and plural uses. This singular indefinite use of *they* has been common in informal English for centuries.

The grammar of the substitute word *one* is quite complicated, and students can easily get confused:

*I would like a one with a big garden.*

**possible further activities**

*Acting: ‘a … one’* Put students in groups. Tell them that they are in a room. Give each group a card with an adjective. In turn, the groups have to show what kind of room they are in by mime or acting, without using the word on the card. The others say what kind of room it is, using *one* (‘a cold one’, ‘a big one’ …). Possible adjectives:

* cold, hot, big, small, dirty, beautiful, dark, noisy *

You can do the same kind of activity with other nouns (e.g. *car, dog, child, …*). Not every group has to have the same noun.