

Understanding English Grammar: A Linguistic Introduction

Exercises for the Introduction

1. Form vs. Function

Indicate whether the following terms refer to elements of the conceptual (e.g. functional, symbolized, semantic, pragmatic, etc.), or elements of the formal (e.g. structural, syntactic, morphological, etc.) side of the linguistic sign. (C for conceptual and F for formal are perfectly adequate responses):

noun	preposition	event	spelling
agent	focus	stress	ideas
perspective	suffix	noises	topic
force	stress shift	meaning	vowels

2. Morphological and Lexical Expression

For each of the following pairs of singular and plural nouns, indicate which type of expression is involved in the formation of the plural -- morphological or lexical. If it is morphological, indicate which of the four morphological processes it represents (prefixation, suffixation, stem change, or stress shift). If it is lexical, indicate which of the three subtypes of lexical expression is involved (weak suppletion, strong suppletion, or isomorphism). Some of these may be tricky or controversial. The first example is done for you.

Singular	Plural	
dog	dogs	Morphological, suffixation.
deer	deer	
person	people	
goose	geese	
ox	oxen	
child	children	
mouse	mice	
knife	knives	
cactus	cacti	
crisis	crises	

3. The discourse stage

Explain the use of definite and indefinite articles in the following text according to the discourse stage metaphor. The articles are highlighted and numbered (excerpt from Paige (1998:8)¹.

Rodney P. Kellerman glanced at his gold-plated pocket watch and pulled **a** (1) sheaf of papers from **a** (2) drawer of **the** (3) desk that Pinkerton's provided him. Five minutes later there was **a** (4) knock at **the** (5) office door and **a** (6) boy in **a** (7) yellow-and-green plaid waistcoat opened it wide enough to admit his shoulders and **a** (8) head of unruly hair.

"Young lady t' see you, sir," he said.

"Show her in, please," Mr. Kellerman said, resolving that this interview should be conducted with far greater dignity on his part than **the** (9) last.

The (10) young woman who entered and took **the** (11) chair on **the** (12) other side of **the** (13) desk was, according to **the** (14) information he had gathered, **an** (15) orphan raised by her mother's family, at present unemployed, and **a** (16) spinster.

¹ Paige, Robin. 1998. *Death at Bishop's Keep: A Victorian mystery*. New York: Berkley Publishing Group.

4. Form, meaning and use

The following are some examples of "errors" actually made by Second Language Learners of English. For each error:

A. Restate the example in a more standard way.

B. Indicate if the error has to do with form, meaning, use, or a combination of these, and explain your answer.

The first example is done for you.

a. I am interested in teaching method for non-native English student.

Answer: A. I am interested in teaching methods for non-native English students.

 B. This is a problem with form and meaning: The speaker has not associated the *form* of the plural ending, *-s*, with the *meaning* of plurality.

b. I hope to take a chance to be part of research team.

c. Students' listening, speaking and writing skills are not on the similar level as their grammar skills.

d. In prior to undergo the major study, let's look into . . .

e. What is discourse markers?

f. On Table 1 is shown the result of my study.

g. After this, I had shown that discourse markers were needed to understand the lecture.