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THE FUNCTION OF THE SINGULAR FORM OF NOUNS IN THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE

Abstract. The analysis and interpretation of grammatical number seems to be a very complex task, due to the diversity of tools to express it in various languages. The category of grammatical number exists in most languages. As far as the marking of number is concerned, nouns — traditionally — could be classified as count and uncount nouns. Differences in the quantity and function of uncount nouns in different languages could be explained by the speakers' distinct approaches and conceptualizations reflected in word-formation processes and in everyday language use. Because of the differences in (uniform or less uniform) conceptualization we cannot predict whether the noun denoting a particular entity is countable or not. In the Hungarian language (as well as in other Uralic languages) nouns are used in the singular quite often where a plural form can be observed in most Indo-European languages. The meaning of this (unmarked) singular in Hungarian can be plural, too, e.g. the form *könyv* 'book', *paradicsom* 'tomato', *alma* 'apple' can refer to any number of books, tomatoes, apples, so the number is neutral. Unlike the unmarked singular, the marked form always denotes the plural: the forms *könyvek* 'books', *paradicsomok* 'tomatoes' always refer to the plural. In Uralistics, this function is often called *numerus absolutus* (or *numerus indefinitus*), which does not denote number or explicit quantity. As it does not even refer to a concrete individual (token) or a type it is more appropriate to interpret it as a function. In Hungarian the use of the singular form in the sense of *numerus absolutus* can be considered in numerous cases. The aim of this paper is to collect singular forms in the function of *numerus absolutus* on the one hand, and to interpret and define *singulare tantum* in Hungarian on the other.

Keywords: Hungarian, morphology, *numerus absolutus* (*numerus indefinitus*), *singulare tantum*, *plurale tantum*, count nouns, uncount nouns.

1. The marking of number

Analysis and interpretation of grammatical number seems to be a very complex task, due to the diversity of the means to express it in various languages. The category of grammatical number exists in most languages. In languages marking the number of the nominal the marker is inherent in nouns, but the possibility to distinguish between numbers does not apply to every noun.

As far as the marking of number is concerned, nouns — traditionally — could be classified as countable nouns and uncountable nouns.

2. Countable nouns

Investigating the relevant data of several languages, we can assert that in the case of countable nouns the marking of number in most languages follows the basic "singular ~ plural" opposition, e.g. *paper* ~ *papers* (English), *das Papier* ~ *die Papiere* (German), *la carta* ~ *le carte* (Italian), *бумага* ~ *бумаги* (Russian), *papír* ~ *papírok* (Hungarian). There are, however, languages in which, in addition to the obligatory distinction between singular and plural of the (better known) languages spoken in Europe, there are other oppositions: some languages use the dual for indicating two units (e.g. Samoyed, Mansi, Khanty, Maltese, Sami), and the triple for indicating three units (e.g. some Oceanic languages), still others are able to indicate a few by using the paucal number (e.g. the Baygo language spoken in Sudan). We can read about even more special cases in literature: there are extensive systems that are able to indicate five different numbers (e.g. the Sursurunga language spoken in Papua New Guinea). We can also find examples of optional numerus marking: in the Baygo language there are special forms without reference to the entities number (see Corbett 2000 : 2). There are also languages (e.g. the Pirahã language spoken in Brazil) that completely lack the category of number. In these languages the concept of plural is expressed by connecting comitative/associative postpositions and various verbal quantifiers (see Corbett 2000 : 50–51).

3. Uncountable nouns

Uncountable nouns usually do not have the distinction of number: they either have only singular forms (singulare tantum), e.g. *sár* 'mud', *homok* 'sand', *tej* 'milk'; *wheat* 'búza', *air* 'levegő', *health* 'egészség', or only plural forms (plurale tantum), e.g. *javak* 'possessions', *történetek* 'happenings', *léptek* 'steps', *mézesetek* 'honeymoon'; *oats* 'zab', *measles* 'kanyaró', *trousers* 'nadrág'. The differences in quantification and the function of uncountable nouns in different languages could be explained by the speakers' distinct approaches and conceptualizations reflected in word-formation processes and in everyday language-use. Because of the differences in (uniform or less uniform) conceptualization we cannot predict whether the noun denoting a particular entity is countable or not. True, mass nouns, for example, are mostly uncountable both in English and Hungarian (e.g. *olaj* 'oil', *gold* 'arany', *wood* 'fa'; *homok* 'sand', *tej* 'milk', *liszt* 'flour'). Nevertheless, it is rather hard to define what we consider a mass noun. In English, e.g. *bread*, *soap*, and *chalk* are mass nouns (uncountable), while their Hungarian equivalents (*kenyér*, *szappan*, *kréta*) are countable.

In English there are other uncountable (no-plural) nouns not regarded as mass nouns, whose Hungarian equivalents are regarded as countable (they do have a plural form), e.g. *advice* 'tanács(ok)', *furniture* 'bútor(ok)', *information* 'információ(k)', *permission* 'engedély(ek)', *homework* 'házi feladat(ok)'.

For instance, by native English speakers a *pea* is regarded big enough to be taken as a unit, as opposed to native Russian speakers, who treat vegetables and fruits consisting of small grains and berries as homogeneous units and so they denote them by nouns existing only in the singular

form, e.g. *зорох* 'borsó; pea', *малина* 'málna; raspberry', *вишня* 'meggy; sour cherry'. In the Arabic language, *shajar* 'forest' as a collective noun is uncountable. They specify one single tree by the special suffix *a* (*shajar-a*). It is interesting that both the individual name and the collective noun can be used in the plural, but while the plural of the collective noun refers to the type, the plural of the individual name refers to the token (cf. see Cruse 1994 : 2858).

4. The functions of singular forms in Hungarian

Singular is a grammatical category that refers to one single thing or person, as opposed to plural, which applies to more than one thing or person (in some languages to more than two, three, or four ones). The singular form is usually unmarked, and the plural can be produced — depending on the type of the language — by means of affixes (e.g. Hungarian *asztal* ~ *asztalok* 'table ~ tables'), inflection (e.g. English *foot* ~ *feet* 'láb ~ lábak'), or reduplication (e.g. Japanese *yama-yama* 'mountains'). In certain languages, as well as in certain word classes, the plural does not have a separate marker. In such cases, it is a modal word or the context that reveals the grammatical number. \emptyset ('zero') is a special case that also requires the plural form in certain languages (e.g. English \emptyset *persons*, or Spanish \emptyset *personas*).

It is an interesting and presumably original feature of the Hungarian language that the traditional "singular ~ plural" opposition does not always materialize sharply: in certain cases we have the unmarked (that is, singular) form even if, as far as reality is concerned, the meaning is certainly plural, and in a number of other languages — incl. most of the Indo-European ones — the plural is obligatory (cf. see Korompay 1991 : 259). These rules of the use of number — based on the congruous testimony of Uralic languages and Hungarian language history — have been valid ever since the Proto-Hungarian period. These singular forms have, in fact, collective meanings, but the majority — according to the traditions of our language — is not referred to by separate grammatical means (plural). A significant fluctuation was triggered only by Latin influence in the Old Hungarian period (cf. *mindenszentek* 'All Saints' Day', *háromkirályok* 'epiphany', *összes angyalok és szentek* 'all angels and saints' etc.), but it did not result in any serious modification of the traditions (cf. see Korompay 1991 : 270–271). The meaning of the (unmarked) singular in Hungarian can be plural, too, e.g. the form *könyv* 'book', *paradicsom* 'tomato', *alma* 'apple' can refer to any number of books, tomatoes, apples, so the number is neutral. Unlike the singular, the marked form always denotes the plural: the forms *könyvek* 'books', *paradicsomok* 'tomatoes' always refer to the plural. As Nádasy humorously put it, it would be better to call the form *alma* 'apple' "numberless", and the form *almák* 'apples' "numerous" (see Kálmán, Nádasy 1999 : 233).

5. The meaning of "numerus absolutus" or "numerus indefinitus"

Works discussing morphosyntactic issues of Uralic languages (e.g. Winkler 1913; Ravila 1935; 1941) usually refer to the singular — denoting an indefinite quantity or unidentifiable number — function of the unmarked (\emptyset number)

singular forms by using the terms "numerus absolutus", "numerus indefinitus". Ravila was the first to ascertain that singular in the function of numerus absolutus was already present in Proto-Uralic?, just as in most Uralic languages (cf. Ravila 1935 : 49; 1941 : 2–3). Later on it was Fokos-Fuchs (1962) who described the numerus absolutus more thoroughly. From this study it seems obvious that the numerus absolutus does not denote number or explicit quantity, it does not even refer to a concrete individual (token) or a type, it is more appropriate to interpret it as a function. The use of the singular form in the meaning of numerus absolutus in Hungarian can be considered normal in the following cases:

5.1. Hungarian prefers and uses the singular when referring to an undefined quantity (indefinite number) — in the case of both uncountable quantity (mass nouns and collective nouns) and countable quantity. We use the singular whenever we can. E.g. *virágot/bogyót/epret szedünk, és nem virágokat, bogyókat, epreket* 'we pick flower, berry, strawberry, not flowers, berries, strawberries', *paradicsomot/krumplit/banánt veszünk a piacon* 'we buy tomato, potato, banana on the market', *rágjuk a körmünket* 'we bite our nail', *fogat mosunk* 'we wash our tooth', *bélyeget/jelvényt/szalvétát gyűjtünk* 'we collect stamp, badge, napkin'. *tetű ment a hajába* 'a louse got into his hair', *a ruhámat megette a moly* 'my cloth has been eaten by a moth', *folyik a szó belőle* 'lit. the word is flowing from him/her' etc. The nouns in the above examples are not always obviously singular according to their semantic content, rather, they are semantically indefinite in number; that is, they can be one or more, it is irrelevant. Anyway, the agreement of these examples invariably has to be in the singular (cf. see Kádár 2007 : 136–137). The preference of singular implies that native Hungarians may see things in big(ger) units, thinking in terms of categories rather than of smaller units.

In Hungarian we can refer to several unidentifiable individuals by singular nouns, e. g. *jön a török!* 'the Turk is coming!', *a konyhakertet lerágta a nyúl* 'the kitchen garden has been gnawed by the rabbit', *inget vettem* 'I have bought a shirt'. In these sentences the singular *török* 'Turk', *nyúl* 'rabbit', and *ing* 'shirt' do not refer to quantity. Their semantic content can only be inferred from the context, the situation or further pieces of information. Their content can either be interpreted as singular: 'a man of Turkish nationality is coming', 'it was one rabbit that ruined the kitchen garden', and 'I have bought one shirt', or they can be in the plural: 'the Turks are coming (= a group of plundering Turkish soldiers)', 'it was rabbits that have ruined the kitchen garden', and 'I have bought several shirts' (cf. Honti 1995 : 164).

5.2. The dominance of singular is also manifested in the use of mass nouns (certain groceries, crops, threshed seeds). Regardless of how much or many we have of them, snow, mud, sand, coal, oil, apple, corn, tomato, milk etc. are still just in the singular, e.g. *a kukorica már a magtárban van* 'the corn is already in the granary', *a rozst már learatták* 'the rye has already been reaped', *bogyót szed* 'lit. he is picking a berry', *epret eszik* 'lit. he is eating a strawberry'. These nouns in the examples can, theoretically, have plural forms, but their occurrence is rather rare. We use *homok* 'sand', *levegő* 'air', *zsír* 'fat', *víz* 'water', *tej* 'milk' in the plural only when they denote types, e.g. *murvás homokok* 'shingly sands', *ipari levegők* 'industrial airs', *nyomás-tűrő zsírok* 'pressure-proof fats', *ásványvizek* 'mineral waters', *anyatejek*

'breast-milks'. The latter is the famous example of Ferenc Papp, who found it in the title of an article published in a popular scientific weekly (*Élet és Tudomány* 1970 18 : 856). The article discussed the differences between human breast-milk and the breast-milk of different animals. Papp's comment: "We needed the word form 'anyatejek' (breast-milks), maybe just once in a thousand years, but we could form it" (Papp 1979 : 132).

Also, the mass nouns with an attributive function in a predicate nominal always remain in the singular, and there is no agreement in number, e.g. *csupa sár vagytok!* 'you are covered in mud all over!', *tiszta víz lettiünk a nagy eső miatt!* 'we got completely soaked in the heavy rain!'.
5.3. In quantifier structures the noun is always unmarked (singular). In these structures, therefore, the noun itself cannot unequivocally refer to number, but the attributive adjunct, that is the number marked by the quantifier (which can be a cardinal number, an indefinite number, or the general pronouns *minden* 'everything', *mind* 'every', *összes* 'all'), can refer to plurality, e.g. *öt/sok/minden hajó* 'five/many/every ship'. In Hungarian we traditionally express the grammatical content by the attributive only (which means doing it once), whereas the same grammatical content is indicated doubly in Indo-European languages: by the attributive and the plural form of the word.

5.4. Native Hungarian speakers usually interpret two or more things as a unit, as a category. This is especially true in the case of words denoting paired body parts and pieces of clothes belonging to them, e.g. *szem* 'eye', *fül* 'ear', *kar* 'arm', *láb* 'leg', *váll* 'shoulder' and *cipő* 'shoe', *csizma* 'boot', *papucs* 'slipper', *harisnya* 'stocking', *zokni* 'socks', *kesztyű* 'gloves' (e. g. *fáj a lába* 'his leg hurts', *szép a szeme* 'his eye is beautiful, *cipőt húz a lábára* 'he wears a shoe on his foot', *papucsot vásárol* 'lit. he buys slipper'). While we generally use the singular in these cases, the plural is not impossible, either, cf. e.g. *fájnak a lábaim* 'my legs hurt'. Taking the names of paired body parts as one unit is also found in sayings that refer to actions that need at least two individuals, e. g. *szeme közé néz valakinek* 'he/she looks into sb's eye', *idegen kutjának lába közt a farka* 'lit. a strange dog has its tail between its leg'), *összeüti a bokáját* 'lit. he/she clicks his/her heel', *kezét a szívére kulcsolta* 'lit. he/she clasps his/her hand onto his/her heart', *eltalálta szarva közt a tőgyét* 'lit. he/she got the cow's udder in between her horn', meaning 'got the wrong sow by the ear' (cf. see Kertész 1913 : 307–313). It is also specific to Hungarian and to some other Finno-Ugric languages that when denoting one of the double body parts we use the word *fél* 'half' instead of *egy* 'one', e. g. *félszemű* 'lit. half-eyed', *fél lábbal* 'lit. with half leg', *fél fogára (!) sem elég* 'lit. not enough for half of his tooth'. In Indo-European languages such a thing would be unthinkable. These phenomena seem to be distantly related to the question of dual (the marking of dual has not survived in Hungarian, maybe the dim ending of the form *kettő* 'two' is a trace of the old **-k* (> **-γ*)).

5.5. In the case of multiple singular subjects we normally use a singular predicate, e.g. *Mária és Péter is eljött* 'both Mary and Peter came', meaning *eljöttek* 'they came'.

5.6. We also normally use the singular when talking about onea similar type of possession of each of many possessors, e.g. *a képviselők feleségükkel együtt érkeztek a fogadásra* 'lit. the delegates arrived with their wife', as

opposed to *a sejkék feleségeikkel együtt érkeztek* 'the sheiks arrived with their wives', *a férfiak megemelték kalapjukat* 'lit. the men pulled off their hat' (not *kalapjaikat* 'hats').

5.7. In certain copulative expressions we have the singular instead of the expected plural, e.g. *Ezek a párok szinonimának tekinthetők* 'lit. these pairs can be considered a synonym' (not *szinonimáknak* 'synonyms').

6. Singulare tantum in Hungarian

Among nouns there are words with a complete paradigm and those with a defective one. The defective group includes, for example, singulare tantum: these are — according to the classical definition — lexemes whose line of conjugation systematically lacks plural word forms. It seems that in Hungarian we cannot tell with absolute certainty whether a word is singulare tantum or not, because in Hungarian there is no noun whose plural could not be formed theoretically, i.e. grammatically (all that happens is that the result might sound strange or unusual, e.g. *sarak* 'muds', *levegők* 'airs'). It seems better to define singulare tantum as follows: lexemes that potentially have a complete conjugation, but from this complete paradigm only the singular is normally used. The situation is similar in Russian: *лаи* 'káromkodás; swearing', *гордость* 'büszkeség; pride', *медь* 'rész; copper'. The missing plural forms of these singulare tantum (as far as their form and meaning are concerned) can easily be formed by using explicit markers if needed, e. g. *лаи, гордости, меди*.

6.1. In Hungarian there are lexemes that are singulare tantum when they are used as mass nouns (e.g. *homok* 'sand', *víz* 'water', *levegő* 'air', *zsír* 'fat'), but when they denote a type we can form their plural forms (*murvás homokok* 'shingly sands', *ásványvizek* 'mineral waters', *ipari levegők* 'industrial airs', *nyomástűrő zsírok* 'pressure-proof fats', *anyatejek* 'breast-milks'). This is also familiar in English, e.g. *five Dutch cheeses* (type), *many light beers* (type).

6.2. There are lexemes that can be used in the plural only in special cases, e. g. in literary texts (*ég ~ oh, egek!* 'sky/heaven ~ oh, heavens!', *menny ~ fölment a mennyekbe* 'heaven ~ he ascended to heaven'). A special case is the word *God*, which in monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam), for theological and grammatical reasons can only be a singular noun. Its plural form is only possible in texts with polytheistic religious content, e.g., *Mythology is about the life of Greek gods*.

6.3. Collective nouns as well as mass nouns are usually considered singulare tantum. Collective nouns have an inclusive meanings: they denote a group of more than one individuals or objects (animate or inanimate entities). Its meaning inherently includes plurality, e.g. *lakosság* 'population', *személyzet* 'staff', *gulya* 'herd', so they denote more than one thing even in the singular. It is debated whether we can regard a superordinated concept (with the meaning of superiority over many different subordinated concepts) as a collective noun. Keszler regards the *furniture, fruit, flower*, and *tool*-type nouns as collective nouns (Keszler 2000 : 129), while most other works do not (cf. *A magyar nyelv könyve* 1995 : 161; *Hangay* 1995 : 224–227; *Laczkó* 1997 : 35; *Szófajtani elemzések* 2003 : 41): They think that a "real" collective noun can never be applied to a single individual

(e.g. **János Kovács, the population of the village said that...* Szófajtani elemzések 2003 : 41). However, the words *furniture, fruit, flower* etc. can occur as individual names in their singular use (as a concept denoting a type), e. g. *he did not like any furniture in the department store, give me that tool right now!*

It seems that the collective sense is quite relative: sometimes we can use collective nouns in plural, although they have individual meanings then, e.g. *erdők* 'woods', *népek* 'peoples', *tömegek* 'masses', *osztályok* 'classes'. Since the collective noun in its narrowest sense — according to its meaning — is not really used in plural, it would perhaps be better to use the term collective noun only for the nouns with suffixes, whose morphological structure already shows what group of identical individuals they denote, see the following examples:

— words with the suffix *-(V)s*, e.g. *cseresznyés* 'cherry-garden', *cserjés* 'thicket', *kukoricás* 'cornfield', *fenyves* 'coniferous forest', *tölgyes* 'oak plantation', *akácós* 'acacia grove', *bükkös* 'beech-grove';

— words with the suffix *-sÁg*, e.g. *magyarság* 'the Hungarian people', *ifjúság* 'youth', *igazgatóság* 'directorship', *katonaság* 'military', *vezetőség* 'management', *rokonság* 'kinship', *parasztság* 'peasantry', *értelmiség* 'intelligentsia', *hegység* 'mountain range', *erdőség* 'woodland', *rendőrség* 'police', *helyhatóság* 'municipality';

— words with the suffix *-zat*, e. g. *csillagzat* 'asterism', *billentyűzet* 'keyboard', *fegyverzet* 'armaments', *személyzet* 'staff', *növényzet* 'vegetation', *virágzat* 'inflorescence', *ruházat* 'clothing', *állványzat* 'scaffolding'.

6.4. Nouns denoting abstract, general concepts are usually also used in the singular, e.g. *létezés* 'existence', *élet* 'life', *égbolt* 'sky', *Isten* 'God', *növekedés* 'growth', *fejlődés* 'development', *elmúlás* 'passing', *négyszögletűség* 'squareness', *fertőzöttség* 'infectedness', *rabság* 'captivity', *szabadság* 'freedom', *boldogság* 'happiness', *becsület* 'honesty', *jóság* 'goodness', *harag* 'anger', *stressz* 'stress', *egészség* 'health', *düh* 'rage', *siketség* 'deafness', *vakság* 'blindness', *matematika* 'mathematics', *fizika* 'physics'.

6.5. We also use in the singular the names of things known or considered to be single or unique, e.g. *világ* 'world', *Dózsa György* 'György Dózsa', *Egyenlítő* 'Equator', *Europa* 'Europe', *Magyarország* 'Hungary', *Debrecen* (name of a town in Hungary).

6.6. Nor do we use the plural in the words referring to natural phenomena and natural formations that do not have well confinable boundaries, e.g. *füst* 'smoke', *köd* 'fog', *hő* 'heat', *por* 'dust', *levegő* 'air', *talaj* 'ground'. A *ködfolt* 'nebula' and *füstjel* 'smoke signal' are different, as they do have perceptible boundaries, and the words *folt* 'spot' and *jel* 'signal' are already words that tolerate and even welcome the plural.

7. The main semantic groups of *singulare tantum*

In Hungarian, based on corpus material the following semantic groups of *singulare tantum* can be distinguished:

I. Individual names:

1. mass nouns, e.g. *homok* 'sand', *sár* 'mud', *tej* 'milk', *víz* 'water', *genny* 'pus';
2. groceries, crops, threshed seeds (in the mass sense), e.g. *hús* 'meat', *hal* 'fish', *paradicsom* 'tomato', *paprika* 'pepper', *rozs* 'rye', *kukorica* 'corn';

3. words denoting natural phenomena (without confinable boundaries), e.g. *köd* 'fog', *füst* 'smoke', *por* 'dust', *levegő* 'air', *talaj* 'ground';

4. words denoting abstract concepts, e.g. *stressz* 'stress', *feszültség* 'tension', *szenzáció* 'sensation', *szleng* 'slang', *ártatlanság* 'innocence', *jóság* 'goodness', *becsület* 'honesty', *egység* 'unity', *egészség* 'health';

5. names of objects known or considered to be single, e.g. *Egyenlítő* 'Equator', *Ráktérítő* 'Tropic of Cancer', *Baktérítő* 'Tropic of Capricorn', *Európa* 'Europe', *Magyarország* 'Hungary', *Debrecen* 'name of a town in Hungary', *Dózsa György* 'György Dózsa'.

II. Collective nouns:

1. words denoting groups of people, e.g. *zsűri* 'jury', *kollektíva* 'collective', *nép* 'people', *elit* 'elite', *csoporthatóság* 'team', *bizottság* 'committee';

2. nouns with a collective suffix, e.g. *kukoricás* 'cornfield', *lucernás* 'alfalfa-field', *állványzat* 'scaffolding', *növényzet* 'vegetation', *lakosság* 'population', *diákság* 'studentry';

3. official bodies, institutions, e.g. *rendőrség* 'police', *katonaság* 'military', *határőrség* 'border guards', *hatóság* 'authority'.

8. Agreement of *singulare tantum*

We can find examples for the agreement of both form and meaning between the *plurale tantum* subjects and predicates in the corpus.

1. The subjects of *singulare tantum* collective nouns — despite their plural meanings — usually require singular predicates: *a nép elégedetlen* 'lit. the people is dissatisfied', *a tömeg énekel* 'the crowd is singing'. They cannot have plural subjects even when they are predicates: *az első osztályosok a versenyben a legügyesebb csapat voltak* 'the first graders were the best group in the competition', *a magyarok régóta a Kárpát-medencében élő nép* 'Hungarians are a people who have lived in the Carpathian Basin for a long time' (Keszler 2000 : 129).

2. The mass noun with an attributive function in the predicate nominal also always remains singular, and here there is no agreement in number, e.g. *csupa sár vagytok!* 'you are covered in mud!', *tiszta víz lettünk a nagy eső miatt!* 'we got completely soaked in the heavy rain!'.

9. Summary

In the Hungarian language (like in other Finno-Ugric languages) nouns are used in the singular quite often where in most Indo-European languages a plural form can be observed. In Uralistics, this function is often called *numerus absolutus* (or *numerus indefinitus*). The aim of this investigation was to collect the functions of the singular form and singular forms in the function of *numerus absolutus* on the one hand, and to interpret and define *singulare tantum* in the Hungarian language, on the other.

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**ФУНКЦИИ ФОРМЫ ЕДИНСТВЕННОГО ЧИСЛА СУЩЕСТВИТЕЛЬНОГО
В ВЕНГЕРСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ**

Анализ грамматической категории числа (numerus) — это сложная задача, поскольку средства для ее выражения в разных языках различаются. С точки зрения маркирования выделяются счетные и несчетные числа. Разница между количеством и роль несчетных имен зависят от отношения носителей языка к категории числа и от концептуализации, касающейся словообразования и словоупотребления носителей. Единственное число в венгерском языке часто используется в отношении множества предметов, обозначаемых существительным, когда многие языки — например, большая часть индоевропейских — пользуются множественным числом. На содержание множественности, немаркированной (т. е. маркированной нулевой морфемой \emptyset) в единственном числе, указывает термин *numerus absolutus* (или *numerus indefinitus*). В данной статье, с одной стороны, рассматривается употребление венгерских существительных в единственном числе, с другой, делается попытка дать определение венгерских существительных категории *singulare tantum*, т. е. неполного (дефективного) склонения.