

Linguistics 201 – Spring 2007, Section H
February 23

Homework Assignment III
Due: Wednesday, February 28 (beginning of class)

1. *English Plurals*

So far we have assumed that English has just one plural morpheme (apart from the irregular forms), we've called it *-s*. Upon closer inspection we find that there are actually three allomorphs of this morpheme: [z], [s], and [ɪz].

Your task on this homework is to come up with a little rule system that can model how English speakers might form the plural form of a given noun root.

The first step is to identify what the environments are in which the allomorphs occur. To do that, sort the following roots into four lists – a list of roots that take the [z] allomorph, one of roots that take the [s] allomorph, one of [ɪz]-taking roots, and one of roots that works differently (i.e. irregulars).

List of roots:

goose, cat, dog, house, bear, deer, group, rock, bus, child, garage, bush, match, lamb, hen, ring, pill, ox, box

Roots that take [z]:

Roots that take [s]:

Roots that take [ɪz]:

Irregulars:

To figure out which roots go where, pronounce the plural version of each word, and listen to the last (two) sound(s). [ɪz] should be easy to hear – after the last sound of the root, you should hear the [ɪ] vowel. To distinguish the [z] and [s] allomorphs, hold the last sound of plural form, and check whether your vocal folds are vibrating – can you hear the “humming” and feel the vibration of your larynx in your throat?

After you have sorted the roots, you want to figure out what the ones in each category have in common that distinguishes them from the other categories. Set aside the irregulars for that, we already saw that they have to be memorized one by one. Keep in mind that I've given you the English *spelling* of the words, which can be deceiving – listen to how the roots actually *sound* when you pronounce them (for instance you don't hear the last letter in bush – the word ends with an [ʃ] sound, not an [h] sound).

The roots that take the [ɪz] allomorph share the following property:

The roots that take the [z] allomorph share the following property:

The roots that take the [s] allomorph share the following property:

Lastly, let's put everything together: To form the plural form of a English noun root, do the following (Watch out for the order in which you proceed and test your rule):

Check if the root _____ . If so _____

_____ . If not, check if the root _____

_____ . If so use the _____ allomorph. If not, check if the root _____

_____ . If so use the _____ allomorph,

otherwise use the _____ allomorph.