

Homework Assignment III (cont'd)
Due: Friday, March 9 (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 any 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, laugh_N, love_N

Roots that take [z]: [ber], [dag], [rɪŋ], [hɛn], [pɪt], [læm], [lʌv]

f.i. [dag] – [dagz], etc.

Roots that take [s]: [kæt], [rɒk], [grʊp], [lʌf]

f.i. [kæt] – [kæts], etc.

Roots that take [ɪz]: [hɑʊs], [bʌs], [gəʀɑ:ʒ], [buʃ], [mæʃɪ], [baks]

f.i. [gəʀɑ:ʒ] – [gəʀɑ:ʒɪz], etc.

Irregulars:

[gʌs] ([gɪs]), [dɪr] ([dɪr]), [fɪˈaɪld] ([fɪˈɪldrən]), [ɒx] ([ɒxən])

(The irregular plural 'oxen' of 'ox' is what I've learned in my high school English class. Many of you guys seem to agree that 'oxes' is perfectly ok – either one should work with the system you come up with in the end.)

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

They all end in a so-called sibilant sound ([s],[z],[ʒ],[ʃ] in English). (Since we didn't talk about the term sibilant in class, listing them or using another classification like "alveolar or postalveolar fricative" would have been ok too.)

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

They end in a voiced sound.

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

They end in a voiceless sound.

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 _____ is irregular _____. If so _____ use the memorized irregular plural form _____. If not, check if the root _____ ends in [s],[z],[ʒ], or [ʃ] _____. If so use the _____ [ɪz] _____ allomorph. If not, check if the root _____ ends in a voiceless sound _____. If so use the _____ [s] _____ allomorph, otherwise use the _____ [z] _____ allomorph.

Show, step by step, how your rule works for one example of each of the four categories (irregular, [ɪz], [z], [s]):

- 1) [gʌz]: check 1: It is irregular. Therefore: Look up the memorized form [gɪz].
- 2) [buʃ] check 1: It is not irregular. Check 2: It does end in a sibilant sound. Therefore: use the [ɪz] allomorph to form [buʃɪz].
- 3) [pɪt] check 1: It is not irregular. Check 2: It doesn't end in a sibilant. Check 3: It doesn't end in a voiceless sound. Therefore ("otherwise") use [z]: [pɪtɪz]
- 4) [kæt] check 1: It is not irregular. Check 2: It doesn't end in a sibilant. Check 3: It does end in a voiceless sound. Therefore use [s]: [kæts].