

Report 1: English Plural and Phonology

FSEM CORE S119: Language as Human Nature

Fall 2025

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Due 11:59PM September 19, 2025

Overview

In marking plurals in English, we often think we just add 's' to make a noun refer to more than one of something (e.g., *one cat* and *two cats*). However, we actually do something a bit more complicated. Say the following sentence and pay attention to the segment that represents plural.

There are cats, horses, and cows on the farm.

Notice that the plural marker is an [s] in 'cats', a [ɪz] in 'horses', and a [z] in 'cows'.¹

¹ There are of course exceptions to the standard plural marking, including *sheep/sheep*, *ox/oxen*, *child/children*. Ignore these cases in this report.

Core Task

Your task is to provide a phonological analysis of the plural ending in English, and, in particular, argue for a phonological rule that can be used to predict which form will appear. You will precede in three steps:

1. Collect and Present Data
2. Provide a Description of the Phenomenon
3. Provide a Phonological Analysis

Below I give brief descriptions of what each section should have. Your report should be between 2-3 pages single spaced Times New Roman size 12. I am looking for clear, well argued points which make use of simple examples that highlight the points you are making. By the end, I want to be convinced of what you think the base representation of the plural is and what the rule(s) are that govern its allophones.

Data

You should collect and transcribe a representative set of English plural words that you will use in your description and analysis. The words should be in a table, and you should transcribe them using

IPA (giving both the English word and the IPA transcription). You shouldn't argue for why these data are representative until you give your description. This section just says out facts of English that you will draw on later.

Description

You should write a simple and clear description of the general pattern. Note, you are not walking the reader through how you arrived at your description, rather you are articulating your current perspective. You should not reference aspects of your analysis here. In particular, you are describing the relevant allophones, leaving aside the phonemes to your analysis.

Analysis

You should write your actual formal analysis, presenting your rules, arguing for their relevance, providing evidence for why you are claiming the phoneme(s) you are, etc. You should clearly state how your analysis is simpler and/or better in some clear way than other reasonable alternatives.