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# Are there any collective nouns among lexical plurals in English?

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## Abstract

The grammatical tradition has excluded lexical plurals from the category of collective nouns on the sole basis of their morphology (no discrepancy between singular form and so-called plural reference); but this criterion has led to hesitations, some linguists including, for instance, *cattle* or *people*. This study therefore considers other, semantic, criteria to establish more convincingly whether lexical plurals that denote pluralities of entities may be collective nouns. Relying on distinctions between meronymy and (non-taxonomic) hyperonymy, collectiveness and cohesion, and (*a crew* (collective sense) / (*several*) *crew* (uninflected plural)), it concludes that they are definitely not collective nouns, but aggregate nouns (or senses of nouns). Two sets are established. Some, mainly denoting humans, typically originate in the collective sense of the noun through a coercion mechanism; the others, mainly denoting objects, result from an operation of abstraction. For some of these, the notion of “hyperonyms of plural classes” is put forward.

**Keywords:** collective nouns, lexical plurals, aggregate nouns, hyperonymy, meronymy

## 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the issue of the boundaries of the class of collective nouns, to establish more specifically whether the category might include some lexical plurals. In the grammatical tradition, collective nouns (e.g. *team*) are regarded as having a strictly singular base (e.g. Kirkby 1746: 65, Jespersen 1913: 72, Quirk et al. 1972: 360); a typical definition is that given in the OED (2014): “a substantive which (in the singular) denotes a collection or number of individuals”. But while this paradox between singular form and plural reference is what has captured the attention of grammarians, a strictly morphological criterion appears a rather flimsy argument to exclude lexical plurals:

- the defining features of collective nouns are largely semantic or cognitive in nature, rather than mainly morphological (see the definition above).

- one major defining feature of collective nouns is the notion of internal plural, that is, of a plural that is not the result of a sum, but which results from the interception of a movement towards the singular. In other words, an internal plural construes a “view of plurality that ultimately comes out as externally one, though internally multiple” (Guillaume, ed. Valin et al. 1992: 96, our translation).<sup>1</sup> But the notion of internal plural, initially developed by Guillaume, is by no means restricted to singular nouns. Guillaume (ed. Lowe 2007: 88) applies it to Old French *unes* + [*some plural-only nouns*], such as *unes endentures* (‘dentures’), *unes lunettes* (‘glasses’), etc., which present the plurality as “inhering in a whole or continue” (gloss by Hirtle 2009: 102).<sup>2</sup> The internal plural is also applied to lexical plurals such as French *cieux* (‘heavens’, as

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<sup>1</sup> “Le nombre interne est une vue de pluralité qui se résout *in finem* en une vue d’ensemble extérieurement une, quoique intérieurement multiple.”

<sup>2</sup> Palsgrave indicates that plural *uns/unes* is found with nouns that are said to be plural-only. They serve to denote either a collective whole, that is, a set of units (e.g. *uns degrés*, ‘stairs’), or a group of two objects forming a pair (e.g. *unes forces*, ‘forceps’) (Marchello-Nizia 1979).

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opposed to external plural *ciels* ‘a sum of heavens’, Lowe 2007: 306) or *obsèques* (‘funeral’, Furukawa 1977: 30). In other words, some lexical plurals may exhibit internal plurality, because as they cannot be analysed as *a stem + a plural inflection*, the external form of the noun is more unifying than when a morphological plural is used.

- some lexical plurals, like uncontroversial collective nouns such as *team*, denote a plurality of undifferentiated, autonomous units. For instance, while *measles* or *glasses* are clearly not collective nouns, the status of nouns such as *odds-and-ends*, *belongings* or *cattle* is far less obvious: except for the morphological feature /singular/, they fit the definition given above, denoting “a collection or number of individuals”. Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2004: 1071), for instance, therefore includes *cattle* in her study of collective nouns, and makes it one of her typical examples: “Collective nouns are semantically dual – they refer to a multiplicity of clearly discernible entities ‘hidden’ in a collection, which is either bounded (*herd, family*) or unbounded (*cattle, furniture*) at a higher level of abstraction.” Besides, *cattle* licenses meronymic glosses in some contexts (*These cows are part of the cattle*). It differs from uncontroversial collective nouns in that it also licenses hyperonymic glosses (*Cows are cattle*, vs. \**Players are a team / teams*), but it shares this characteristic with nouns such as singular *furniture* or *crockery*, which some linguists regard as collective nouns (Wierzbicka 1985, 1988; Lammert 2010)<sup>3</sup>. Wierzbicka (1988: 512) uses the term “collective supercategory” for *furniture*-nouns, because as for typical collective nouns, the entities are grouped “on the basis of contiguity and/or function”, not on the basis of similarity. *Furniture* or *crockery* do not denote taxonomic categories, unlike other superordinates such as *bird* or *tree*; instead, the entities are thought of as being of “different kinds”, and as things “which can be used jointly for a similar purpose”. This construal explains why the nouns are non-count, unlike *bird* or *tree*, which may also apply to entities of different kinds, but which subsume the entities under the same kind (birds, trees), so that they can be counted together.

- from a study of the combinatory properties of collective nouns in British English, Depraetere (2003: 96) tentatively concludes that plural *cattle* and *people* (as in *a hundred people*) are the best two examples of collective nouns of English. Her argument is that “the prototypical collectives from a formal point of view will be those groups of individuals that share as few characteristics as possible with any other type of noncollective noun”, that is, which are “[–count (collective) noun], [–[unmarked count noun]], and [+ plural verb only]”. While no collective noun carries all three features, *cattle* and *people* represent the only subtypes of collective nouns that carry the third feature, and *cattle* also exhibits the first feature.

- finally, Jespersen (1913: 93) labels *cattle* or *vermin* ‘plural-only collectives’, despite his initial definition of collective nouns as morphologically singular.

These considerations therefore call for further examination of the status of some lexical plurals, more specifically those that denote pluralities of units. The present study is based on thirty-two of them, drawn from a broad range of existing literature in the domain (including the references cited at the end of this paper). The list shows two subtypes: two lexical plurals obtained from collective uses (e.g. *people* ‘a number of persons’, related to (*a*) *people*; as will be seen, this process is in fact part of a broader phenomenon), and thirty that denote pluralities of units of different kinds (e.g. *cattle*, *odds-and-ends*). The paper will address them in turn (sections 3 and 4), but first lays out

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<sup>3</sup> That status is rejected by others, though (e.g. Joosten 2010).

a number of theoretical considerations on the definition of collective nouns, which will be central for the study and which, if not considered carefully, easily lead to confusion.

## 2. Theoretical considerations on the definition of collective nouns

It is essential, first of all, to define the words “collective” and “nouns” themselves.

### 2.1 The terms “collective” and “nouns”

“Collective”, from the Latin *collectivus* ‘which groups together, gathers’, involves the gathering of a plurality of units, that is, of discrete elements. The collective whole is construed as the result of that operation. A team, for instance, is viewed as a number of players who have been brought together to be part of the same group. A car, on the other hand, is not construed as a set of spare parts, just as rice is not viewed as grains brought together; *car* and *rice* are therefore not collective nouns. The relation between collective wholes and their units is described as a part-whole relation, although, as noted by Cruse (1986: 161), it is only a “near-relatio[n] of the core part-whole relation”, because the parts are autonomous, individual units. The semantic relation between the corresponding nouns, for instance *team:player*, is consequently ranked among cases of meronymy, although there again, owing to the autonomy of the parts, it rather “resembles meronymy” (ibid.).

Saying that a *noun* is collective implies that it has a plurality (in the sense ‘more than one’) feature at *notional* level. This feature is reflected in dictionary definitions. Some nouns are exclusively collective (e.g. *team*), but others only have a collective sense (e.g. *forest* is not collective in the phrase *in the forest*, which construes the forest as a container and not as a group of trees). For these, the context has an influence on which sense is activated; but crucially, the collective sense does exist at notional level. Conversely, *my parents*, for instance, might involve a group of two people, but *parent* is clearly not a collective noun.

In the case of lexical plurals, the plurality feature is by definition present at notional level: the plural is not morpho-syntactic, inflectional, in nature (that kind of plural would be realised on the Number head, if one follows generative conventions, and would yield the interpretation ‘more than one x’), but lexical, inherent (it is realised on n, a categorizing head, which explains why it yields the interpretation ‘internally complex’, or ‘non simplex’, but not ‘more than one x’) (Alexiadou 2011: 35).

The plurality feature, however, is not a sufficient criterion to establish a noun as collective: not all lexical plurals denote pluralities of *units* (e.g. *measles*). In addition, the plurality must be seen as the result of a grouping operation; this seems to be the case for lexical plurals that denote units (e.g. *belongings*).

(1) Conclusion 1: collective nouns must have a plurality feature at notional level, although this requirement is not sufficient to qualify a noun as “collective”. Lexical plurals that denote pluralities of units fit this criterion.

### 2.2 “Collective” distinguished from “cohesive”

Collective nouns denote pluralities that exhibit “cohesion”; in other words, the units have “the property of being related together” (Acquaviva 2008: 104). As a consequence, noun phrases headed by collective nouns license non-distributive predicates, such as *the team met*. Cohesion, however, is not a sufficient feature: any phrase that denotes a plurality of units has this characteristic; hence *my parents / John and Mary met*.

(2) Conclusion 2: cohesion (evidenced by the possibility of non-distributive predicates) holds for any plurality of units, so that it is not a sufficient criterion to qualify a head noun as *collective*.

Prototypical (i.e. count<sup>4</sup>) collective nouns do differ from the other types of head nouns in the examples above, in that they are the only ones that denote an atom, that is, one element (a collective whole, such as a group), in addition to involving a plurality of individuals. This is obvious when comparing the following examples (borrowed from Link 1983: 129), where the plural gives access to the atomic parts:

- (3) a. The decks [of cards] are numbered consecutively  
b. The cards are numbered consecutively

While in (3b), the atomic parts are each individual card, in (3a), it is each *deck* that is regarded as an atom. Because the collective whole is an atom, an attributive adjective may similarly ascribe a property that applies to the whole, but not to the units: *a big team* does not entail that the individual *players* are big. Furthermore, the relationship between the count collective noun and the unit noun can be glossed as follows:

- (4) (X is the collective noun, Y the unit noun)<sup>5</sup>  
a. *An X is composed of / made up of Ys.*: A deck is composed of / made up of cards.  
b. *A Y is (or may be) part of an X.*: A card is (or may be) part of a deck.

These glosses are also valid in the plural; thus for (4a), *Decks are composed of / made up of cards*. This conceptualisation as an atom is directly related to the count feature associated with these nouns: in English, countability implies boundedness (e.g. Croft 2012: 71).

Based on the atom feature, Acquaviva (2008: 104n) excludes from the category of collective nouns lexical plurals that denote aggregates of heterogeneous entities (e.g. *groceries, belongings*). This conclusion will be provisionally left aside: at this stage of the present study, it could be considered circular to define collective nouns along the sole characteristics of count nouns, and then to exclude non-count nouns on the basis of that definition. What will be retained as central, however, is the idea that cohesion is not a sufficient criterion.

### 2.3 “Members”: meronymy compared with hyponymy

As was mentioned in section 2.1, the relation between a collective noun and the corresponding unit noun is one of (unprototypical) meronymy. The notion of part, more

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<sup>4</sup> The count feature is not inherent in the noun; as is well known, almost any noun can be coerced to function as non-count (Universal Grinder). Still, for a number of nouns (among which *deck* or *team*), “particular forms are [...] conventionally established as either a count noun or a mass noun – or often both. Learning such conventions is part of mastering a language.” (Langacker 2008: 132). Accordingly, here the count feature is regarded as conventionally associated with the collective meaning of the noun.

<sup>5</sup> Both tests are required: (4a) on its own would also test for material (e.g. *Jupiter is composed of gases*); test (4b) alone would hold for any form of meronymy (e.g. *Scotland is part of Britain*).

specifically of member, is therefore central. For the analysis of lexical plurals, it is crucially important to specify this notion of “member”, as it also enters the description of hyponymy.

Both meronymy and hyponymy are, along with instances, semantic relations that establish hierarchies (Stock and Stock 2013: 552). Hyponymy is “a member-class relation”, reflecting “conceptual hierarchy”, while meronymy is “a part-whole relation”, reflecting “the existence of complex structures in concrete reality” (Lass 1999: 564; see also Wales 2014: 62). This difference has two consequences. First, unlike meronymy, hyponymy requires class inclusion (Croft and Cruse 1984: 142); it can be tested with the following strings:

- (5) Sample of possible tests for hyponymy (X is the hyponym, Y the hyperonym):
- a. *Xs are Ys*
  - b. *Xs and other Ys*
  - c. *Of all Ys, I prefer Xs*
  - d. *the class of X is a subset of the class of Y*

Secondly, for meronymy, the part-whole relation does not hold between construed *classes* of elements, but between specific *individuals* belonging to those classes: it is the way the individual parts of each whole are related which generates the hierarchical structuring (Croft and Cruse 1984: 159).

Meronymy and hyponymy should not be confused when applying tests; this is easily done, as any taxonomy (a sub-type of hyponymy which may be glossed as ‘X is a kind/type of Y’) can be thought of in part-whole terms (Cruse 1986: 179). For instance, about the pair *rose:flower* (taxonomic hyponym:hyperonym), it can be said that a *rose* is a member of the class of *flowers*. But in the case of hyponymy, the whole is a *class*, and the parts are its subclasses<sup>6</sup>.

- (6) Conclusion 3: a gloss in *member* does not guarantee meronymy: if the relation is *member:class*, rather than *member:group*, then the relation is one of hyponymy.

In this respect, a further word ought to be said about collective nouns such as *clergy* or *bourgeoisie*: it might be objected that they denote a social *class*, and that the members of the class are brought together on the basis of common attributes, that is, on the basis of some form of similarity rather than contiguity (unlike *team*). Is *clergy*, for instance, really a collective noun, then, a holonym, or should it be regarded as a hyperonym (e.g. of *bishops*, *priests* and so on)? The answer is that these nouns are indeed collective nouns, because from a linguistic point of view, they do denote groups rather than classes:

- 1) for a pair such as *bishop:clergy*, the tests for hyponymy fail: for instance, \**A bishop is a clergy*, \**bishops and other clergies*.
- 2) in the rare occurrences of the plural, *clergies* refers to several groups: for instance, (Google Books, 2008) *there are other clergies than that of the ordained ministers*.

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<sup>6</sup> It should be added that two collective nouns, such as *committee* and *group*, might stand in a hyponymic relation: *committees and other groups*, *a committee is a group*. Again, here, the perspective is that of class inclusion, which is very different from the collective perspective. In such a relationship, the two nouns have to be collective; if a *member of a group* is considered, for instance, the glosses for hyperonymy do not obtain any more: e.g. \**the/a chairman and other groups*, \**committee members and other groups*.

It can be noted that the tests for hyponymy would become possible if instead of *A bishop is a clergy*, or *bishops and other clergies*, *clergy* was used: *bishops and other clergy*. Here, *clergy* is used as an uninflected plural; it no longer has a collective sense, but is hyperonymic. Section 2.4 analyses this semantic shift in more detail, focusing on the uninflected plural uses. Understanding this shift is crucial to grasp the exact relation between meronymy and hyponymy in the lexical plurals gathered for this study.

#### **2.4 The case of *clergy*-type nouns (*clergy, crew, police, etc.*)**

In some contexts, a small number of English collective nouns such as *clergy, crew* or *police*, are used as uninflected plurals (e.g. *a number of clergy, several crew, two police*).<sup>7</sup> It is not just the verb that carries plural agreement (unlike cases of override semantic agreement such as *this crew have...*, where *crew* is still a collective noun denoting a group); the noun itself is plural. Examples (7) and (8) illustrate these differences:

- (7) (collective sense) There will be times when the crew has to use whatever means they deem necessary to accomplish the flight safely.
- (8) (uninflected plural) Several crew were rescued from both the Citadel, Fleur-de-lis and the Falcon.

In its uninflected plural use, the noun no longer denotes a group; it denotes a plurality of individuals. *Five crew*, for instance, denotes five crew members and not five groups (unlike *five crews*). The noun phrase does not refer to a group, either: *several crew* does not mean ‘several people that form a crew’, but ‘several crew members’, ‘several members of crew’ (Gardelle 2016a). Occasionally, therefore, several individuals referred to as *crew* may not belong to the same crew (ibid.):

- (9) (Google Books, 2013) Bluewater Crew is a traditional crew placement agency, with an Internet-based database of over 46,000 candidates that not only tracks career moves, but also lists qualifications, current situations, locations, references, and even personal information about what each candidate is ideally looking for. This online database of potential crew is accessible 24 hours a day for captains and owners to search, as well as for crew to make updates to their files.

This example shows that the shift in conceptualisation from the collective sense to the uninflected plural sense takes place at notional level: it is a shift from the *notion* of group to the *notion* of members – rather than from a specific group to its specific members. Consequently, the uninflected plural no longer denotes a group, but comes to denote a *class*, a socio-professional category, albeit one in which people are expected to be members of groups (ibid.). Hence a relation in *BE* (*If she comes will she be second-mate or just crew?*, Google Books, 2009): *crew* (plural) is a hyperonym of plural classes (*crew = cooks + stewards + sailors + etc.*). It is an umbrella term for a range of jobs (cooks, stewards, sailors, etc.), and stands in contrast to other classes, such as *captain* (ibid.). The relation to the group, though, is not entirely lost: *crew* are expected to be part of *crews*.

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<sup>7</sup> For a fuller list and further detail, see Hirtle (1982, 2009); Gardelle (2016a).

What should this use of *crew* be called? Based on Jackendoff (1991)'s classification of material entities, it will be said to denote an aggregate: *crew* in its plural form corresponds to the aggregate sense of the noun, denoting a plurality of units that is not bounded.<sup>8</sup>

It remains to be understood by what mechanisms this shift in conceptualisation occurs. The nouns involved denote groups of humans; that is, they are nouns that already license plural semantic agreement of the predicate in their collective sense<sup>9</sup>. The hypothesis made here is that the movement is as follows:

- stage 1: collective sense, with grammatical agreement (*this crew has...*): the singular NP denotes mainly the atom, and the verb takes singular agreement. Accordingly, the anaphors are *it* and *which*.
- stage 2: still the collective sense, but with the possibility of semantic override agreement outside the NP (*this crew have...*): the singular NP still denotes mainly the atom, but when there is plural agreement outside the NP, the predicate and the anaphors (*they, who*) apply to the individuals. For instance, *the crew are big* has to ascribe the property *big* to the crew members, whereas *the crew is big* would assess the size of the group.

In English, this stage is available only for collective nouns that denote animates, and is common only for humans (Corbett 2000: 189n). This is probably because humans rank highest on the hierarchy of individuation (Sasse 1993); as a result, the units are more easily accessible in the conceptualisation of the whole than for other collective wholes. For instance, *the family is supporting each other* (where the reciprocal implies differentiation among the members of the group) is ranked by informants as better formed than *??the furniture is piled on top of each other* (Cai 2016: 26) – while *\*the deck (of cards) is piled on top of each other* is totally unacceptable.

- stage 3: aggregate sense, uninflected lexical plural (*these crew have...*): the plural NP denotes units, which are expected to belong to a group of the kind denoted by the collective sense of the noun.

Stage 3 may be analysed as an instance of type coercion, that is, a rather unusual use of the word as regards its grammatical features (plural instead of singular count) (Audring and Booij 2015). This type coercion has corresponding semantic coercion (from group to members), as the loss of the 'count' feature entails a loss of the /+bounded/ seme. The idea of a coercion is evidenced by the following facts: the aggregate sense is obviously secondary to the collective sense and related to it; the range of plural determiners is not freely available (for instance, *these / those* is most common, but numerals, or *a number of*, seem to be restricted to some of the nouns (Gardelle 2016a));<sup>10</sup> and stage 3 is not available for all the collective nouns that denote

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in Jackendoff (1991)'s terminology (which applies to entities, not nouns), an aggregate is not bounded and has internal structure (that is, is made up of units). The label "aggregate" also corresponds to the meaning of the word in the common language: it comes from the Latin meaning 'collected together, assembled', and denotes "[a] complex whole, mass, or body formed by the union of numerous units or particles" (OED 2014).

<sup>9</sup> A shift from singular to plural is also found with non-count animal nouns such as *poultry* and *livestock*, but with a different effect due to the non-count feature: there is no shift from a group to units, but just more salience of the plurality of units. One inanimate noun is involved as well, *flora*, which is (very rarely) found with a plural demonstrative; but this could be a reanalysis of the Latin ending as a morphosyntactic Latin plural.

<sup>10</sup> More generally, the distribution of determiners is rarely compatible with both the aggregate and the collective sense: the associated determiners for the aggregate sense are typically *these/those*, zero (bare

humans (e.g. *\*these committee*, *\*a number of family*). Moreover, occasionally, the noun may be coerced further into accepting the numeral *one*: *one crew*, or *one clergy*, as in (10):

- (10) (COCA, 2002 – borrowed from Gardelle 2016a) The drawing, captioned: “It is reported that Trinity Church is considering the possibility of free pews!” consists of a laborer pointing to the bible as one clergy welcomes him into the church, while another scratches his head in confusion, and the other lifts his hand in a gesture of opposition.

The coerced sense seems to arise from a need to find a (morphologically) simple hyperonym to name the units, when only compounds or complex NPs are available in the lexicon (e.g. *clergyman*, *member of the clergy*, *crew member*). Coercing the collective noun into an aggregate sense may prove no more costly than more complex lexicalised phrases (e.g. *crew member*) from a cognitive standpoint, and has another two advantages. First, the uninflected plural form emphasises the link to a group (as it contains no extra information such as “member” or “man”), while clearly differentiating this sense from the collective sense (e.g. *crew* [plural] vs. *crews*). Secondly, it marks a low degree of individuation of the units, which is in keeping with the value of the uninflected plural (morphological this time) in the rest of the language (*three elephant\_*, *two aspirin\_*, etc.) (Allan 1986: 132, Hirtle 2009: 96–102).

It can be concluded from these analyses that nouns such as *crew* are polysemous; they have a main collective sense, but (at least for some speakers) also a secondary aggregate sense, which denotes units. The analyses also lead to the following conclusion:

- (11) Conclusion 4: expecting entities to belong to groups does not necessarily make the noun that denotes them a collective noun: *crew* in its aggregate sense (which may be regarded as a lexical plural, in that sense only)<sup>11</sup> denotes a *class*, not a group. In specific contexts, an NP headed by *crew* may refer to a well-circumscribed plurality (e.g. *these crew*, *those five crew*), but this does not make the noun collective: the same can be said of any definite NP that denotes a plurality, such as *my parents*.

Now that these central theoretical considerations have been laid out, let’s consider the set of lexical plurals gathered from the literature for this study. Section 3 first considers those for which the lexical plural use is derived from count collective uses: *people* and *folk*.

### 3. Lexical plurals derived from count collective uses

From the analyses carried out in section 2, it can be clearly established here that *people* and *folk* in their lexical plural use are not collective:

- they denote classes, not groups: for instance, (Google Books, 2015) *The Apostles and other folk are praying together in the upper room.* / (2016) *Refugees are*

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noun), numerals and plural quantifiers. Only *the* and, very rarely, *one*, may combine with either sense; the context will normally disambiguate.

<sup>11</sup> As was mentioned above, for some speakers, *a crew* (meaning an individual) is possible, so that for them, *crew* in its aggregate sense would not be a lexical plural.

*people, not candy*. In this last example, *people* is a (non-taxonomic) hyperonym of *refugees*.

- the associated quantifiers (*some folk / several people*) quantify units, not groups.

*People* and *folk* also exist as singular count collective nouns (or more precisely, with a collective sense, associated with a count feature): *we are one people* (Google Books, 2009), *the folk of the Hebrews* (OED, 1851; *folk* is archaic in that sense today). They are borrowings from French *peuple* and Germanic *volk* respectively, two words which are collective nouns, meaning ‘(a) people’. It can be concluded, therefore, that *people* and *folk* have undergone the same coercion mechanism as *crew*-type nouns: starting from a collective sense, they were coerced into an aggregate sense, with an associated uninflected plural form, denoting several members of a *class*, although these members are mentioned in the context of pluralities (several people or folk at a time).

The uninflected plural, here again, signals a low degree of individuation. *People* contrasts with *persons*: the OED defines *people* as the “unmarked plural of *person*”, while *persons* “emphasizes the plurality and individuality of the referent”. Plural *folk* contrasts with count *folks*, which, according to the OED, has replaced plural *folk* except in dialect (there are a number of occurrences in recent works on Google Books, though, for instance with the phrase “a hundred folk”). This shift to *folks* would require specific research, but the preference for the -s, that is, for more marked individuation, could be related to the extension of the noun: it tends to be used for rather small numbers of individuals (e.g. *my folk, they are nice folk, a hundred folk*, but ?*a million folk*).

There are two differences between *people / folk* and *crew*-type nouns: the collective sense is no longer the main sense (for *folk*, it is even no longer available for present-day English), and the link with the collective sense is very much backgrounded in the aggregate sense. For instance, it is unlikely that a phrase such as *six hundred people (attended the premiere)* should be spontaneously glossed as *six hundred individuals who are part of a people / of peoples*. The fact that neither *people* nor *folk* can be used for a single person, however, suggests that some form of link with the collective sense remains: the use of the nouns in the singular would make the aggregate sense too much of a competitor for the collective sense.<sup>12</sup>

In conclusion, while *people* and *folk* are often cited as lexical plurals, these uses are only one sense of the words, albeit the main one in present-day English. As such, *crew*-type nouns should be grouped together with them in semantic classifications: they, too, have an aggregate sense, derived from the collective sense and realised as lexical plurals – although with *crew*-type nouns, the aggregate sense is more secondary, and makes the link to the collective whole much more salient. All these nouns may be labelled “nouns with a collective sense and a derived aggregate sense”, and the lexical plural use corresponds to the aggregate sense. In terms of frequency, today *crew*-type nouns are mainly collective, and secondarily aggregative (meaning that the collective sense is the sense most commonly used compared to the aggregate sense); while *people* and *folk* are mainly aggregative, and secondarily collective. *Crew* (also *clergy, police*, for instance) is in addition a hyperonym of plural classes: *crew* = *cooks + stewards + sailors + etc.* This, however, is not a requirement for coercion to the aggregate sense; what matters is the search for an umbrella term for the units. Thus *people, folk*, or other *crew*-type nouns such as *gentry*, do not have natural hyponyms.

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<sup>12</sup> Although *folk* is no longer used in a collective sense in contemporary discourse, that sense is still part of present-day culture and knowledge of the language (at least for a number of speakers), through historical documents.

#### 4. Lexical plurals denoting pluralities of entities of different kinds (e.g. *cattle*, *belongings*)

The list drawn for this study contains only one noun for animals, *cattle*, and one for humans, *literati*. All the others denote pluralities of objects:

- Latin plurals :<sup>13</sup>
  - ia*: *memorabilia*, *exonumia*, *paraphernalia*, *regalia*, *insignia*, *pyrobilia*, *juvenilia*, *militaria*
  - iana*: *Victoriana*, *Shakespeariana*, *ballooniana*, *petroliana*, *breweriana*, etc.<sup>14</sup>
  - ica*: *erotica*, *judaica*, *hebraica*
  - a*: *ephemera*
- Plurals in -s:
  - ings*: *belongings*, *furnishings*
  - deadjectival plurals: *durables*, *valuables*, *goods*
  - other: *groceries*, *arrivals*, *supplies*, *spoils*, *covers*, *odds-and-ends*, *bits-and-pieces*

##### 4.1 Focus on *cattle*

This section will focus specifically on *cattle*, which Jespersen (1913), Depraetere (2003) and Koptjevskaja-Tamm (2004), among others, cite as a collective noun.

The conclusion reached in this paper is different. A comparison between *herd* and *cattle* shows that *cattle* is an aggregate noun, more specifically a superordinate hyperonym, like *crew* in its aggregate sense:

- the “group” effect in a sentence such as *We drove the cattle through the hills* is merely an instance of cohesion, due to the fact that the NP denotes a plurality; it would be achieved similarly with *the animals*, where *animal* is obviously not a collective noun.

- like *crew* in its aggregate sense, *cattle* is compatible with numerals to denote a number of *units*: e.g. *a hundred cattle*. This is impossible with *herd* (*a hundred herds* denotes a hundred groups).

- the noun *cattle* itself indicates the nature of the units; *the herd*, in contrast, would refer to the group. That is why it is possible to find *cattle* as the complement of a collective noun, to specify the nature of the elements that compose the collective whole: *a herd of cattle*, which is impossible with a collective noun in the singular (*\*a group of herd*, *\*a group of a herd*). Similarly, in some varieties of English, *cattle* may be used as a modifier to specify a broad kind of animal: Sturgis (2015) reports that some farmers in Australia, Scotland and Canada use the term “cattle beast”, as in *In 1851 the ratio was six sheep to one cattle beast* (Google, NZ, 2008). While *cattle* narrows down the kind of animal, this sort of compounding with *herd* (“a herd animal”) would exhibit a very different semantic relation with the head noun: it would specify the type of group to which the animal belongs (not specifying the kind of animal).

- *cattle* names a class, with hyperonymic relations to *cows*, *calves* and so on: the tests *cows are cattle*, *cows and other cattle* apply, and the units are members of a *class*, not of a group (e.g. *cows are members of the class of cattle*). As with *crew* in its aggregate

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<sup>13</sup> A number of Latin plurals are occasionally re-interpreted as non-count singulars (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 345). But this reanalysis is occasional and marginal, so that these nouns are indisputably lexical plurals. The same goes for lexical plurals in -s, a handful of which are occasionally reanalysed as the inflectional plurals of count nouns (e.g. *goods* → *a good* in the business sector).

<sup>14</sup> The suffix is productive and, as shown by a Google search, leads to the formation of nonce words such as *warholiana*, *alumniana*, *Viking-iana* and so on.

sense, the members of the class are expected to be part of groups (herds), but conclusion 4 (in (11) above) has shown that this is not enough to make it a collective noun. Moreover, the cattle in a given place (at a fair, for instance) may belong to different herds.

A final word may be said about the expected plurality of kinds. It is in fact related to the superordinate status of *cattle*: a count superordinate in the plural (e.g. *toys*, *vehicles*) is just as unlikely to be used for a single sub-class (e.g. *vehicles* just for cars). *Cattle*, like *toys* or *vehicles*, is a hyperonym of plural classes (the only difference being that the plurality is not obtained via a unit word + -s), so that the glosses for the two types of nouns are similar: *cattle* = *cows* + *oxen* + *zebus* + *etc.*, *vehicles* = *cars* + *lorries* + *motorbikes* + *etc.* Such glosses would be impossible for *herd* (?? *a herd is xx + ...*, ?? *herds are xx + ...*).

This, in turn, gives a clue as to the reason why *cattle* exists at all. An umbrella term was needed at this level of abstraction, to stand in contrast with other classes: a Google search for “cattle and” yields *sheep*, *hog (industry)*, *crops*, *calves*, etc. In other words, there is a functional similarity among the various kinds of cattle that accounts for the creation of a class.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4.2 Extension to the remainder of the list

Like *cattle*, none of the lexical plurals under study are collective nouns; for instance, one finds *Starbucks collectible cups and other memorabilia*. Even for *belongings*, which is mainly used with a possessive determiner in a specific context to denote a group of items, the bare noun in its generic use does not indicate a group. For instance:

(12) (Roger Dean Kiser, ‘Little Missy’,  
<http://depts.gpc.edu/~heritage/RogerDeanKiser.htm>, accessed September 2016)  
“You got any belongings?” He asked.  
“What are belongings?”  
“Things,” he said.  
“Things?” I repeated.  
“Stuff, clothes, and money?” he said [...].

This is different from the kind of answer that *what are herds?* would yield: the definition would have to include the notion of groups.

It will therefore be concluded that these nouns are aggregate nouns (the aggregate sense being their only sense). As with *cattle*, they are superordinate terms, created because the units of different kinds have to be considered together at a given level of abstraction: they are categories of collectibles (e.g. *breweriana*), what makes a room not bare (*furnishings*), food that is bought in the same shop (*groceries*), objects that often end up together because they do not belong to neat categories (*odds-and-ends*), etc. All the nouns are morphologically transparent, indicating explicitly what the shared feature is. They have what Acquaviva (2008) terms a *whatever* reading; for instance, *petroliana* are any collectibles that have anything to do with petrol stations, *ephemera* any paper collectibles. The feature shared by the members of the class may be a domain (e.g.

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<sup>15</sup> Because the paradigm is plural, perhaps, and because the plurality of kinds is cognitively salient (more so, for instance, than with count *animal*), the noun is a lexical plural – except, unsurprisingly, in specialised cattle breeding discourse, which shows very rare occurrences of *one cattle* (Google search, 2016). This would require further exploration.

*petroliana* and most collectibles), an era (e.g. *Victoriana*), a culture (e.g. *judaica*), a function (e.g. *furnishings*, or lack of definite function: *odds-and-ends*, *bits-and-pieces*), an origin (e.g. *spoils*) or a quality (e.g. *belongings* are whatever belongs [to someone]; *literati* are originally any literate people, later on any people interested in literature).

Are these nouns hyperonyms of plural classes? For some of them, it is indeed possible to establish a list of hyponyms, of subclasses into which the hyperonymic class may be subdivided. The possible hyponyms of *covers* and possibly *furnishings* are easy to list; and for collectibles, guides offer such subdivisions. For instance, guides to ephemera propose such categories as cigar box labels, playing cards, postcards, bookmatch covers, razor-blade wrappers, etc. But this “etc.” is important: except for *covers* and possibly *furnishings*, which apply to a relatively small number of types of items, it is difficult, or even impossible, to draw an exhaustive list. This is particularly true of nouns such as *belongings* or *odds-and-ends*. These two nouns are superordinate nouns, but not part of well-established nominal hierarchies because they denote transversal classes, rather than classes that naturally subdivide into smaller classes. Because they are superordinate nouns, they are expected to be divisible into subclasses (e.g. on Google, one finds *Musings on movies, music, and other odds and ends*, which construes *movies* and *music* as subclasses of *odds and ends*), but an item may be directly assigned to the class (e.g. article title: *The Cost of Fantasy Football and Other Odds and Ends*, Google), without the mediation of subclasses.

Because items are typically assigned to the class *odds-and-ends* or *belongings* without the mediation of subclasses, these two nouns are very close to naming groups, rather than classes, of items, which makes them very close to collective nouns; but (12) above, or the example *movies, music, and other odds and ends* shows that they denote a superordinate *class*, not a group. Further evidence is that they identify the nature of the items (the test *X and other Ys* applies), which is not the case for collective nouns (*\*a cow and other herds, \*cows and other herds*). Consequently, these nouns are not collective nouns.

## Conclusion

This study has brought semantic arguments against including any lexical plurals among the category of collective nouns. Some lexical plurals, especially *people* (as in *a hundred people*) and *cattle*, have been regarded by some as “collective” because being lexical plurals, they denote a plurality and in context, head NPs that exhibit cohesion. But these two arguments are not sufficient to establish a noun (or a sense of a noun) as collective. Lexical plurals denoting pluralities of entities ought to be clearly excluded from the class of collective nouns, on the basis of two converging criteria: the distinction between *group* and *class* (crucial to that between meronymy and hyponymy) in lexical semantics, and the indisputable contrast among *crew*-type nouns between aggregative senses (lexical plurals) and collective senses (*(a) crew*, plural *crews*). Lexical plurals that denote pluralities of units are “aggregate nouns”, or (e.g. *people*) correspond to an “aggregate *sense*” of the noun; more specifically, they denote aggregates of units.

Among these nouns, two rather different sets were made out. For humans, the aggregate sense appears to be typically (e.g. *people, crew*) the result of a type coercion carried out on a collective sense. A hypothesis as to the coercion mechanism was proposed, based on the fact that humans rank at the top of the hierarchy of individuation; this hypothesis would have to be further explored with a diachronic

study. This coercion was found to be motivated by the need to find a common name for the units that compose the collective wholes. The second set of aggregative lexical plurals, which mainly denotes inanimates, does not originate in a collective sense. Rather, the coining of the nouns is the result of an operation of abstraction: a noun is needed to name entities which, though of different kinds, have to be considered together in a number of contexts. Most of them are morphologically transparent nouns, specifying which feature (era, quality, function, etc.) brings the entities together. In addition to these specificities, some of the lexical plurals are hyperonyms of plural classes; but this is not found to be a requirement.

These findings lead us to reconsider Wierzbicka (1988)'s concept of "collective supercategory" for *furniture*-nouns, mentioned in the introduction. The label ought to be considered specifically in the light of *singular* non-count nouns, but it can be clearly said that it would not apply to the lexical plurals under study. The idea of grouping by contiguity rather than similarity would not be convincing: *cattle*, or even *belongings*, specifies a class for the units, not a group, and assignment to the class is based on shared features, and thus on some minimal form of similarity, even though the entities are viewed as being of different kinds. More generally, further research is needed for *furniture* nouns in the light of the present study. They, too, denote pluralities of entities, and they are closely related to lexical plurals, with pairs such as *clothes / clothing*, or *furniture / furnishings*, as well as cases of reanalysis of plurals as singulars (e.g. *memorabilia*, more rarely *cattle*) or vice versa (e.g. *kitchenware(s)*) (Gardelle 2016b: 359).

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