Greville G. Corbett

*Trousers* and *pantalon*: pluralia tantum and the typology of non-canonical nouns

Many languages have an interesting class of nouns, the pluralia tantum, which lack a singular when, in some sense, they should not. The fact that English *trousers* has no singular is worth noting (that is, it is not predictable). True there are other nouns denoting items consisting of two significant parts which behave similarly (*spectacles, binoculars* ...); indeed they are subject to ‘middle-size generalizations’, (Koenig 1999). But there are two reasons to look more closely at *trousers, binoculars* and similar nouns. First there are many English nouns equally denoting items consisting of two significant parts which are unremarkable in this respect: *bicycle, bigraph, Bactrian camel, couple, duo* ... And second, there are languages with number systems roughly comparable to that of English in which the equivalents of *trousers* and *binoculars* are normal count nouns: French *pantalon*, Russian *binokl*. Conversely, Russian *sani* ‘sledge’is a pluralium tantum noun. How then do we talk of ‘one sleigh’ in Russian? These items are the entry point to a collection of items, some with much stranger behaviour, lurking between the unexpectedly defective and the semi-predictable. Moreover, while pluralia tantum nouns are of continued interest in the general linguistic literature and beyond (see, for instance, Wisniewski 2009), it is typically only the English/French type which is considered. The aim, therefore, is to set out a fuller typology of these fascinating nouns, so that their significance can be more fully appreciated and analyses can be based on a better data set. I start from the notion of canonical noun, and demonstrate the different non-canonical properties according to a set of orthogonal criteria.