

Chapter 8, Problem 3: -s

As we have formulated the morphological functions, they take only the form (presumably the phonology) as their input. This predicts that two homonyms that undergo the same morphological rule should have the same output.

Now consider words like *man* and *knife*, which can be either nouns or verbs, and whose noun forms take irregular plurals. If F_{3SG} and F_{NPL} were the same function, then the third-person singular verb and the plural noun would have to have the same form. But $F_{NPL}(man)=men$ and $F_{3SG}(man)=mans$, and $F_{NPL}(knife)=knives$ and $F_{3SG}(knife)=knifes$.

Similarly, the forms *can* and *will*, which can be either nouns with regular plurals or verbs with irregular third-person singular forms indicate that F_{NPL} and F_{3SG} are not the same function.

We hasten to add that the assumption that homonyms undergoing a single rule must yield identical outputs is too strong, because of pairs like *The batter flied out to the left fielder* and *The team flew out to the coast*. In fact, speakers who find both *octupi* and *octupuses* acceptable cast doubt on the assumption that what we are calling the morphological functions actually are functions, in the mathematical sense. Thus, the argument in the preceding paragraphs is open to question.