

Hybrid nouns and their complexity
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Hybrid nouns are those whose agreement specification varies according to the agreement target; examples are German *Mädchen* 'girl', English *committee* and Serbo-Croat *gazde* 'bosses, landlords'. They are important for the insight they give into agreement systems more generally, and for their varying role in linguistic change.

- **assignment**

In the normal situation, semantic factors override formal characteristics in assignment of feature values. Thus Latin *nauta* 'sailor' is masculine, despite its inflectional morphology. Hybrids are more complex, since the semantic factor does not fully override the formal.

- **featural restrictions**

Hybrid nouns are often hybrids only in a part of their paradigm. Thus *Mädchen* and *committee* have varying agreement in the singular only; this is determined by the feature system of German and English. However, *gazde* 'bosses, landlords' is a hybrid only in the plural, though the feature system would not prevent it being a hybrid in both numbers.

- **factors influencing the choice of agreement**

The mere fact of alternative agreements could be seen as a problem for theories of morphosyntactic features. However, recent research on Dutch and on German suggests that variation can be tied to the specific lexical semantics of the given items. This permits a constrained account of morphosyntactic features; we can handle hybrid nouns by a combination of conditions on agreement and the Agreement Hierarchy.

- **the role of hybrids in diachrony**

Hybrids may remain isolated on the fringe of the system, or they may be catalysts for substantial change.