

Forming Swedish Plurals *an analysis of the first and second noun declensions*

Swedish nouns have five declensions and within these declensions there are various allomorphic ways of forming the plural. In this analysis, I provide a careful examination of the first and second declensions.

1.1 - First Declension (primary group)

The first declension has one primary group ruling most of the nouns in the declension and a smaller secondary group with only a few members. All nouns in the first declension are of common gender, indicated by the indefinite article “*en*.” Further, the main group of nouns all end in the unstressed vowel: ‘*a*’. To form most of the first declension’s plurals, the base ‘*X*’ takes a suffix “*-or*.” According to Granberry (1991), 10% of all Swedish nouns belong to the first declension.

Figure 1.1 First Declension (primary group) WBM



Table 1.1

<u>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</u>	<u>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</u>	<u>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</u>	<u>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</u>
<i>en flicka > flickor</i>	a girl > girls	<i>en matta > mattor</i>	a mat > mats
<i>en gata > gator</i>	a street > streets	<i>en skola > skolor</i>	a school > schools
<i>en hylla > hyllor</i>	a shelf > shelves	<i>en soffa > soffor</i>	a sofa > sofas

1.2 First Declension (secondary group)

There are a few first declension nouns that end in a consonant that still take the *-or* suffix for the plural. Some may think of these as exceptions, but they are really just part of a declension subgroup.

Figure 1.2. First Declension (secondary group) WBM

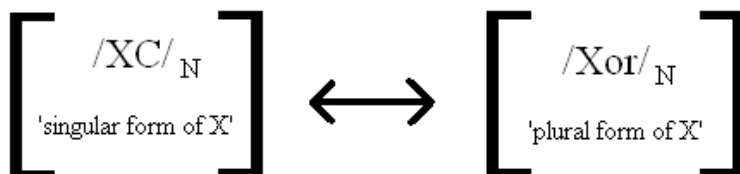
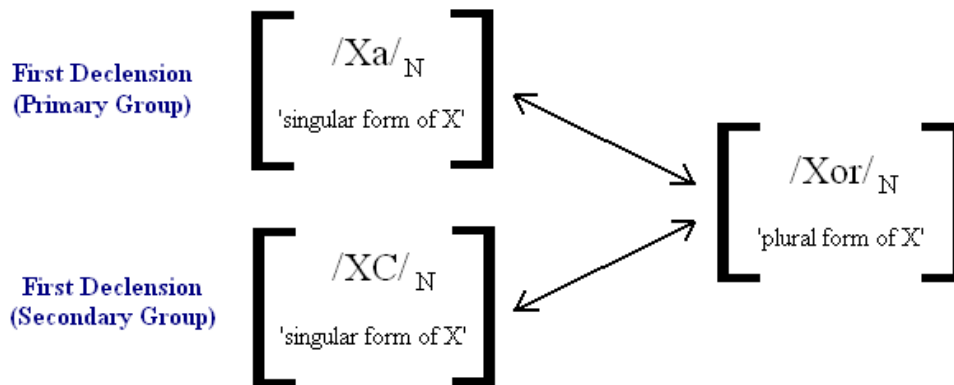


Table 1.2

<u>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</u>	<u>Eng. sg. > Eng. pl.</u>
<i>en ros > rosor</i>	a rose > roses
<i>en våg > vågor</i>	a wave > waves
<i>en svan > svanor</i>	a swan > swans

Figure 1.3. First Declension Paradigm Schema



2.1 Second Declension (primary group)

The second declension has five subdivisions. All nouns in the second declension are of common gender, indicated by the indefinite article “en.” To form most of the second declension’s plurals, the base ‘X’ takes a suffix “-ar.” According to Granberry (1991), 40% of all Swedish nouns belong to the first declension. Most monosyllabic common nouns that end in a consonant fall into this second declension’s primary group.

Figure 2.1. Second Declension (primary group) WBM



Table 2.1

<i>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</i>	<i>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</i>	<i>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</i>	<i>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</i>
<i>en arm > armar</i>	an arm > arms	<i>en hund > hundar</i>	a dog > dogs
<i>en bil > bilar</i>	a car > cars	<i>en häst > hästar</i>	a horse > horses
<i>en dag > dagar</i>	a day > days	<i>en kväll > kvällar</i>	a night > nights

2.2 Second Declension (secondary group)

Some monosyllabic common nouns ending in a vowel fall into this second declension’s secondary group.

Figure 2.2. Second Declension (secondary group) WBM

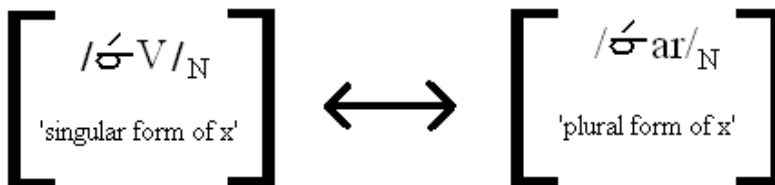


Table 2.2

<i>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</i>	<i>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</i>
<i>en fru > fruar</i>	a wife > wives
<i>en ö > öar</i>	an island > islands
<i>en sjö > sjöar</i>	a lake > lakes

2.3 Second Declension (tertiary group)

The root for most common nouns that have more than one syllable and end in an unstressed *-e*, *-el*, *-en*, or *-er* take the plural suffix *-ar* sometimes infixing an ‘*r*’ between the “root” and the base.

Figure 2.3. Second Declension (tertiary group) WBM

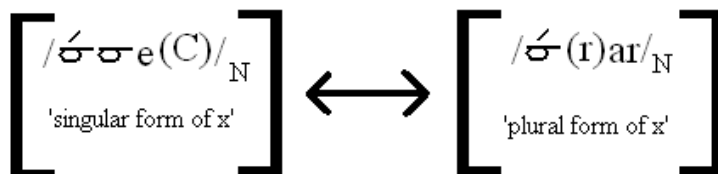


Table 2.3

<i>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</i>	<i>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</i>	<i>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</i>	<i>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</i>
<i>en bulle > bullar</i>	a bun > buns	<i>en påse > påsar</i>	a bag > bags
<i>en fågel > fåglar</i>	a bird > birds	<i>en pojke > pojkar</i>	a boy > boys
<i>en gosse > gossar</i>	a boy > boys	<i>en syster > systrar</i>	a sister > sisters

2.4 Second Declension (quaternary group)

Common nouns end in the suffix *-dom* or *-ing*. These nouns will also take the *-ar* suffix.

Figure 2.4. Second Declension (quaternary group) WBM

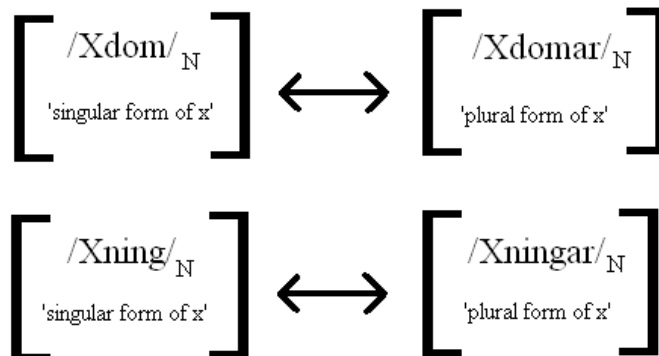


Table 2.4

<i>Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.</i>	<i>Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.</i>
<i>en sjukdom > sjukdomar</i>	an illness > illnesses
<i>en barndom > barndomar</i>	a childhood > childhoods?
<i>en drottning > drottningar</i>	a queen > queens
<i>en övning > övningar</i>	an exercise > exercises
<i>en räkning > räkningar</i>	a bill > bills
<i>en hälsning > hälsningar</i>	a greeting > greetings

2.5 Second Declension (quinary group)

The second declensions quinary group hold words that are often called irregular. These words

are likely words with preserved (historical) spellings that require a special suffix ending as shown below. Sometimes there is umlauting, as with *dotter* and *moder*, but I have left this out of figure 2.5.

Figure 2.5. Second Declension (quinary group) WBM

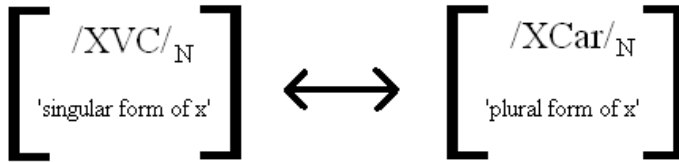
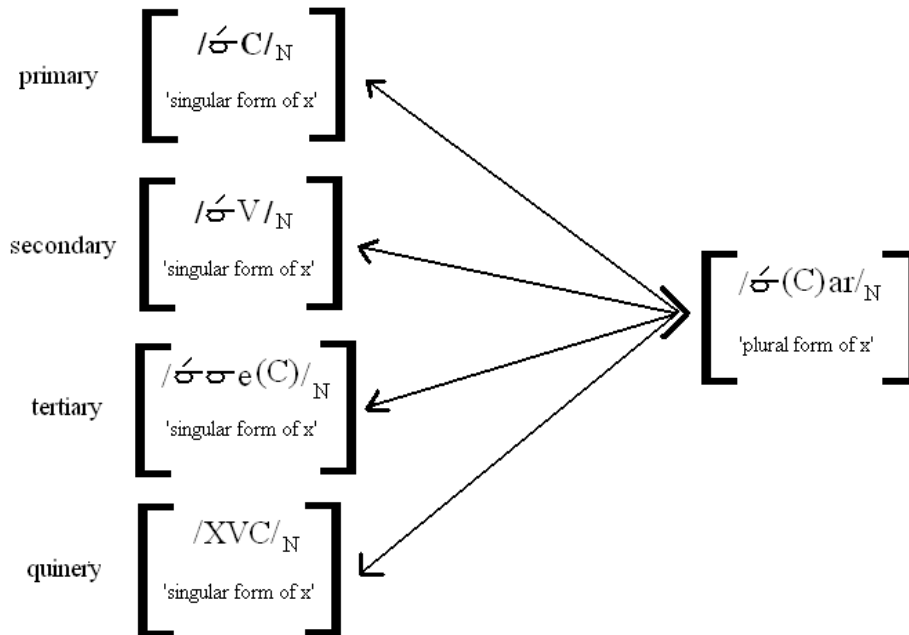


Table 2.5

Sw. sg. > Sw. pl.	Eng. Sg. > Eng. pl.
<i>en afton</i> > <i>aftnar</i>	an evening > evenings
<i>en morgon</i> > <i>morgnar</i>	a morning > mornings
<i>en sommar</i> > <i>somrar</i>	a summer > summers
<i>en dotter</i> > <i>döttrar</i>	a daughter > daughters
<i>en moder</i> > <i>mödrar</i>	a mother > mothers

Figure 2.6. Second Declension Paradigm Schema



Four out of five second declension word based models can be combined into a general second declension paradigm schema as shown above.

3. Conclusion

Swedish is a very rule based language that allows for linguistics to produce word-based models to describe patterns such as singular plural combinations. Pluralization has a large amount of allomorphy meaning that there are multiple roots that represent the same idea (singular) within a single declension. The first declension shows two singular allomorphs and the second declension shows five.

References

Granberry, J. (1991). *Essential Swedish grammar*. New York: Dover Publications.

Haspelmath, M. (2002). *Understanding morphology*. Understanding language series. London:
Arnold.