

## The declension of ethnonyms in English

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**1. Introduction.** The morphology of the English language has undergone a tremendous erosion in the course of the past millenium. In Anglo-Saxon, as is well known, nominals were partitioned into numerous classes and subclasses according to gender and declensional characteristics. Very few traces of this formal diversity remain in the modern language, and what does remain is stored in the lexicon as morphological irregularity. Yet it cannot be said that declensional diversity of a systematic sort has disappeared from English. In this paper I will discuss one class of English nouns which presents an interesting variety in terms of its inflection for number; moreover, the morphological properties are correlated with certain other characteristics, some formal and some semantic. The nouns to be analyzed here are ethnonyms, that is, designations of persons in terms of their ethnicity or place of residence. Contemporary English ethnonyms can be divided into four principal groups in terms of their declensional properties:

**2.1. Type I (e.g. ‘German’).** The first group comprises those ethnonyms with the same declensional properties as most common nouns. Many of these are derived by the suffix *-an* or *-ian* (*Mayan, Italian, Russian, Acadian*), but a large number are morphologically unanalyzable in English (*Czech, Finn, Arab, Gypsy*). Type I ethnonyms have these characteristics:

- (a) A regular singular/plural opposition:  
*A German is ... / The Germans are ... / Five Germans are ...*
- (b) The /-’s/ genitive is used:  
*A German’s sense of humor / The Germans’ sense of humor*

**2.2. Type II (e.g. ‘Irish’).** The ethnonyms of the second group are usually considered to be adjectives utilized in some sense as nouns.<sup>2</sup> Type II comprises the following nine ethnonyms formed with the suffix of Germanic origin variously expressed as *-ish/-sh/-ch* [cp. Evans & Evans 1957: 14]: *British, Cornish, English, Dutch, French, Irish, Scotch/Scottish, Spanish, Welsh*.

Type II ethnonyms are characterized by these properties:

- (a) Only plural-collective usage; no formal singular:<sup>3</sup>  
*\*An Irish is ... / ?Five Irish are ... / The Irish are ...*
- (b) The /-’s/ genitive is not possible:  
*\*The Irish’s sense of humor* [cp. adjective: *The Irish sense of humor.* ]

The formal class of Type II ethnonyms does not include those adjectives in *-ish* formed from Type I ethnonyms, which cannot function as nouns, except when referring to a language: e.g. *Polish, Danish, Finnish* (cp. *Pole, Dane, Finn*, etc.)<sup>4</sup>

**2.3. Type III.** The third group comprises those ethnonyms with formally identical singular and plural forms.<sup>5</sup> I have further divided it into two subgroups:

**2.3.1. Type IIIa (e.g. ‘Japanese’).** This group is formed exclusively of ethnonyms formed by the suffix *-ese* of Romance origin. According to the OED, “*-ese* forms derivatives from names of countries (chiefly after Romanic prototypes), and from some foreign (never English) towns, as *Milanese, Viennese, Pekinese, Cantonese*.” For Type III ethnonyms:

- (a) Singular and plural are formally identical:  
*A Japanese is ... / The Japanese are ... / Five Japanese are ...*

(b)The /-’s/ genitive is not possible:

\**The Japanese’s sense of humor* [cp.: *The Japanese sense of humor.* ]

**2.3.2. Type IIIb (e.g. ‘Kirghiz’).** Certain ethnonyms ending in sibilants have the same formal characteristics as the ‘Japanese’ type above: *Cheremis, Chuvash, Laz, Manx, Swiss, Talysh, Tungus*. Some dictionaries do allow regular plurals for certain of these words, but they seem awkward to this writer (e.g. the American Heritage Dictionary [1971] and Webster’s New Riverside University Dictionary [1984] give these alternate plural forms: *Kirghiz, Kirghizes; Tungus, Tunguses; Chuvash, Chuvashes* ). Examples of -es plurals can be found here and there, e.g.:

*When amongst the **Abchases** the shepherds in spring ...*  
[J. Frazer Golden Bough (abridged version); p. 618]

Most contemporary writers I have consulted, however, avoid the marked plural forms of Type IIIb ethnonyms:

*Delegates of the Chechens, **Ingush** and Balkars ...*  
[Walter Kolarz Russia and her colonies Archon Books, 1967; p. 189]

**2.4. Type IV (e.g. ‘Dyirbal’).** The last group to be distinguished is composed of ethnonyms which can be declined according to either the Type I or Type III model, i.e. with or without an overt plural suffix. The dictionaries list dozens of ethnic designations allowing this alternation, e.g. *Ainu, Arawak, Baluchi, Chickasaw, Fox, Mandingo, Zulu*.<sup>6</sup>

(a) Plural either formally identical to singular, or formed regularly:

*A Dyirbal is ... / The Dyirbal are ... / The Dyirbals are ...*

*Five Dyirbal are ... / Five Dyirbals are ...*

(b) The /-’s/ genitive is used:

*The Dyirbal’s sense of humor.* (refers to one Dyirbal or the whole group)

The formal properties of Type IV ethnonyms resemble those of nouns denoting certain wild animals, which — especially when one is referring to them as the prey of hunters or fishers — allow the use of the Ø-plural (*eel, elk, partridge, pheasant, rabbit, quail*, etc.): “We ‘bagged’ two brindled gnu, four water-boc ...” [<sup>†</sup>Speke Discov. Nile 36 (1863)]. Not infrequently we come across both regular and unmarked plurals of these nouns within the same text, as in the following:

*Praying, among **the Havasupai**, is much like speech-making ... A formal speech has never been recorded and analyzed among **the Havasupais** or Hualapais.*

[Leanne Hinton Havasupai song (Tubingen: Gunter Narr, 1981), pp 8-9]

In almost all cases Type IV ethnonyms refer to autochthonous peoples of Africa, Asia, Australia and the Americas, a fact which has not gone unnoticed by the grammarians:

The uninflected plural is especially common with the names of uncivilized or less civilized peoples: *the Iroquois, Navaho, Ojibwa, Omaha, Blackfoot, Duala, Bantu, Swahili*, etc. [George Curme A grammar of the English language, vol II §43.3 (NY: Heath & Co 1935)]

Names of uncivilized peoples are often used unchanged in the plural: *the Eskimo, Bateke, Batungo* ... [O. Jespersen A modern English grammar on historical principles, vol II, §11.58 (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1922)]

In this paper I will discuss the history of this last class of English ethnonyms, and offer some hypotheses concerning the course of their evolution. The declension of Type IV ethnonyms reflects a complicated mix of factors, not all of which I can claim to have understood. What I will argue is that in order to account for the sharp increase in the usage of uninflected plurals of the “names of uncivilized or less civilized peoples” in the last century, we must examine both (1) the writer’s conception of the Object of ethnographic study, and of his or her role as trained observer of this Object; and (2) how writers position their texts within a valued discursive tradition through the (conscious or unconscious) appropriation of textual surface features indexing that tradition.

**3. The declension of the names of non-Western peoples.** The remainder of the paper will be given over to an examination of the declension of the ethnonyms of non-Western peoples, in particular the indigenous nations of North America. The general conclusions I draw appear to apply equally well to the ethnonyms of African, Asian, Oceanic and South American peoples.

**3.1. The early accounts of aboriginal North Americans [16th-19th cc.].** Ethnonyms of indigenous American peoples begin to appear in English-language texts in the 16th century. Up to the end of the 19th century these nouns, with rare and scattered exceptions, are declined like Type I ethnonyms:

... *the lande amonge the Esquimawes of the Grande Bay*  
[†Hakluyt Disc. Western Planting xiii.88 (1584)]

... *with the Wunnashowatuckoogs and Wusquowhananawkits, who are the further most Neeonet men* [Roger Williams Correspondence (Aug 1636)]

The few examples of non-declined plural ethnonyms are most often accompanied by others which are overtly pluralized. (It may be the case that the writers were using native forms known by them to have plural reference). The examples below are the sole exceptions in each text to a consistent use of -s plural ethnonyms.

... *the Senecas 163, Shawonese [= Shawnees — KT] 162, Owendaets 100, Tisagechroanu [= Neutral Hurons? — KT] 40, Mohawks 74* ...

[The journal of Conrad Weiser, 9 Sept 1748; in Reuben G. Thwaites (series ed.) Early Western Travels, 1748-1846, Vol. 1 (Cleveland: A. H. Clarke Co., 1904)]

*The Indians of the south of this territory, they call Edu, Eduu or Edues; the general name for themselves is Monqui, or Monquis* ...

[Miguel Venegas A natural and civil history of California (orig. in Spanish; Eng. trans. published in 1759; reprint: Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1966), p 55]

Native American ethnonyms took regular plurals in the *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers of the Colony of Plymouth from 1602 to 1625* [ed. by Alexander Young, Boston: Little & Brown, 1841]; *The correspondence of Roger Williams (vol 1: 1629-1653)* [ed. G. W. LaFantasie, Providence: Brown U Press, 1988]; and the series of journals published in the series Early Western Travels, 1748-1846 [series ed. Reuben G. Thwaites, Cleveland: A. H. Clarke Co., 1904]. The vast majority of

the ethnonyms recorded in the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition (1804-1806) take plurals in *-(e)s* (e.g. *the employments used by the Chinooks Clatsops Cath-lah-mahs Kil-a-mox &c in hunting* {Jan 15, 1806}). The exceptions are *Assinniboin*, *Osage* and *Saukee*, which alternate between Type I and Type IV declensions; and *Cataka*, *Staetan* and *Kanenavich*, which always take the *-Ø* plural. The almost exclusive use of *-(e)s* plurals for native American ethnonyms continues right up through the writings of John Wesley Powell in the last third of the 19th century (the only variation noted being in the declension of *Ute*):

*They call themselves Nu-mes, Nu-intz, Nu-mas, Nu-mos ... We will call them Numas* [p 37]; *...they are known as Sho-sho-nees, Bannocks, Ute, Pai-Utes, Mo-quis, Chem-a-hue-vas ...*

[J. W. Powell *Anthropology of the Numa*,<sup>8</sup> D.D. Fowler & C.S. Fowler, eds. (Washington DC: Smithsonian Press, 1971), pp 37-39]

### 3.2. Ethnonyms of non-Western peoples in encyclopedias [19th-20th cc.].

The pre-20th-century works I examined for the declension of ethnonyms represent a variety of styles: diaries, letters, official reports. In order to keep the variable of genre constant, a sample of encyclopedia articles from the 19th and early 20th centuries was selected. What emerged was an increase with the passage of time in the proportion of *-Ø* plurals for the designations of African, Asian and American peoples. Note in particular the pattern of usage in the three editions of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* which were sampled: the (merely orthographically?) overt plural *Esquimaux* in the 8th edition gives way to the *-Ø* plural *Eskimo* in the 10th; *the Zulus-Xosas* of the 10th edition are replaced by *the Zulu-Xosa* in the 11th.

(1833) *The Penny Cyclopædia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* [London: Charles Knight]; entries 'AFRICA' and 'AMERICA':

***-(e)s plurals are used throughout, with only one exception.***

Examples: *the country of the Wanketzens or Wanketchies; the King of the Foulahs; the Tuaricks* [pluralized even though the root itself is plural in Arabic]; *the territories of the Ashantees; &c.* But: (p 182) *the Mackoua ... are described...*

(1853) *Encyclopædia Britannica* 8th edition [Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black]; entries 'AFRICA', 'AMERICA' and 'INDIAN TERRITORY':

***-(e)s plurals used throughout, with occasional exceptions.***

Examples: *Esquimaux; the Tschutskoi* <maybe a Russianism?>, *the Samoiedes and the Laplanders; the Osages, Missouris, Kanses; the Natches; the Tuarick; the Kabyles, or Kabaily, of Algeria; the Feloops ... and the Ashanti*

(1877) *The Condensed American Cyclopædia* [NY: D. Appleton]; entry 'AMERICAN INDIANS'

***-(e)s plurals used throughout, without exceptions.***

*the Mandans and Chinooks; the Pequots and Narragansetts; the Foxes and Miamis*

(1902) *Encyclopædia Britannica* 10th edition; entries 'AFRICA' and 'AMERICA':

***Both -(e)s and -Ø plurals used throughout.***

*The eastern Eskimo are dolichocephalic ... and the Aleuts brachycephalic; Christianity has made some progress among the Waganda ... and the Zulus-Xosas, Basutos and Bechuanas; Songhay, Hausas, Baghirmi, Kanuri, Mabas*

(1910-11) *Encyclopædia Britannica* 11th edition; entry 'AFRICA' (The 'AMERICA' article is mostly unchanged from the 10th edition):

***Almost exclusively -Ø plurals.***

*Beehive huts are found among the Zulu-Xosa and Herero; the Tuareg, Tibbu, Bedouins and Bushmen*

**3.3. Ethnonyms of non-Western peoples in the writings of professional ethnographers [late 19th-20th cc.].** It is the opinion of many that the field of anthropology as we now know it in North America began to form around the turn of the century, and the individual frequently credited with being the ‘shaper of American professional anthropology’ [D. Hymes Language in culture & society, p 7] was Franz Boas (1858-1942). The German-born and educated Boas played a crucial role in furthering the collection and scholarly study of indigenous American languages, and trained many of the major figures in American anthropology. Boas wrote in both German and English, and in his published works in both languages he overwhelmingly preferred Ø-plurals for Type IV ethnonyms (and even for the name of at least one European ethnic group); e.g.:

*The Eskimo inhabit ... [The Central Eskimo (Smithsonian Inst, 1884-5)]*

*... the Magyar of Europe, who have retained their old language ...*

[Introduction Handbook of American Indian languages (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911); Vol 1, p 9.]

*Der Einfluss der sozialen Gliederung der Kwakiutl auf deren Kultur*

[Paper presented at the Internationaler Amerikanisten-Kongress (Vierzehnte Tagung, Stuttgart 1904; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1906), pp 141-8]<sup>9</sup>

In cases of tribal names derived from English words, Boas’s tendency was to avoid the nominal use altogether and use the ethnonym as an adjective:

*... from the Hare Indians and from the Chippewayan*

*... among the Chilcotin, who live northwest of the Thompson Indians*

[Race, language and culture (NY: Free Press, 1940); p. 417]

The usage preferred by Boas continued — and continues — to predominate in scholarly writing, as well as in works intended for a wider readership. Among the other ethnographers who contributed to the first and second volumes of the Handbook of American Indian languages edited by Boas, the majority (P. E. Goddard, J. R. Swanton, R. B. Dixon, L. Frachtenberg and W. Bogoras) used Ø-plurals without exception for Type IV ethnonyms. The twenty-volume series The North American Indian by Edward S. Curtis [1907-1930; reprint: NY: Johnson Reprint, 1970] employs Ø-plurals exclusively. Of the 44 titles in the series Indians of North America [series editor F. W. Porter III; NY: Chelsea House] in which plural tribal names appear, only four have -(e)s plurals.<sup>10</sup>

As the author Bernard de Voto complained in the preface to his book Across the wide Missouri (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1947), this linguistic practice has become a stereotypical feature of the writing style of professional ethnologists:

*If anyone reads this book who has read earlier works of mine in which Indians figure, he will observe that herein I have emancipated myself from a pedantry of my betters. I was brought up to respect learned men and few scholars impress me so profoundly as the ethnologists. So heretofore, mutely enduring the discomfort natural to a literary man, I have used the spellings of Indian plurals that their guild oaths impose. It seems that when you bring Indian tribal names into English from the mother tongue, the plural has the same form as the singular. The ethnologist’s*

*medicine has commanded him in a vision to stand on those plurals, even when they are clearly English words, and neither logic nor a decent sensitiveness of style will move him to violate the sacred teaching. Up to now I have followed his precept, forcing myself to write not only “twenty-one Arapaho” but also “thirty-eight Crow” and even, God help us, “one hundred and two Blackfoot” ...*

#### **4. Further observations concerning the declension of Type IV ethnonyms.**

The widespread use of Ø-plurals with Type IV ethnonyms finds no parallel in the declension of common nouns borrowed in recent times from non-Western languages. Words such as *fez*, *dhow*, *quetzal*, *coypu*, *wallaby*, *cacique* and *sachem* are regularly declined with plurals in *-(e)s*. Except in the case of ‘hunting/fishing’ Ø-plurals (*moose*, *caribou*, *muskellunge*), nouns borrowed from aboriginal languages take regular plurals. In this section I will consider two factors, associated with the appropriation of a scholarly writing style by professional ethnologists, to account for the special treatment of the ethnonyms of “uncivilized peoples.”

**4.1. Ø-plurals and collectivity.** In his study of grammatical number in English, W. Hirtle [1982:20] sees the use of Ø-plurals with nouns designating both ethnic groups and animal species as a linguistic means of representing individuals as “partaking of the collectivity.” He writes, “according to some grammarians, an example like *these Micmacs* evokes a number of individuals, whereas *these Micmac* emphasizes more strongly the notion of tribe member, of the collectivity. In the case of animals something similar can be observed: where most people would speak of, say, *two bears* to characterize two animals, hunters, naturalists, conservationists, etc. — “cognoscenti”, as one writer terms such speakers — would be more likely to use a zero plural ... This use of the zero plural is characteristic of precisely those speakers who are most cognizant of the species as an entity with its own characteristic traits of behavior” [loc. cit.]. Further on in the same monograph Hirtle again speaks “of words naming members of tribes and other ethnic groups: *2000 Eskimo* or *these western Carrier*, but *an Eskimo* or *a western Carrier* ... One interesting question concerning these nouns is what distinguishes them from nouns of nationality (e.g. *Canadian*, *Dane*, *Brazilian*), which are not found in the internal plural [= Ø-plural — KT]. The distinction would seem to involve the impression expressed by *Eskimo*, etc. of an inherent, innate characteristic linking one individual with others in an ethnic group. Nationality words, on the other hand, suggest a more accidental relation of a geographical or a political character. However the problem requires further investigation before even a tentative explanation can be offered” [1982:68].

The key points to take note of in Hirtle’s observations are, first, the linking of the declensions of Type IV ethnonyms and game animals as reflecting the same underlying semantics (emphasis on collectivity or species), and, second, the claim that the use of Ø-plurals is characteristic of “cognoscenti” in particular.

**4.2. Ø-plurals and the cognoscenti.** In a discussion of the declension of animal names in English, Allan [1976: 102] observes that the ‘hunting/fishing’ Ø-plurals are also frequent “in reports of animals observed in nature reserves particularly by game rangers and cognoscenti.” He illustrates the contrast between the usage of experts and non-experts with the following sentences (his acceptability judgments):

*We bagged three elephant that day.*

*We observed three elephant in the game park.*

?*We saw three elephant in the game park.*

?\**We saw three elephant at the zoo.*

Commenting on Allan's data, Hirtle [1982: 57] adds that "the third sentence would sound pretentious if spoken by the average tourist, simply because he would not have the knowledge of the species permitting him to see the individuals as animated by it. By the same token, the second sentence is quite acceptable because the use of *observed* implies a more cognizant speaker."

The conclusion one would draw from Allan's and Hirtle's work is that the Ø-plurals of Type IV ethnonyms would be favored by those whose relation to non-Western ethnic groups corresponds to that of "game rangers and cognoscenti" to animals. This prediction is borne out by the data presented here — and more explicitly in the remarks by de Voto cited above. I do not think it a coincidence that a sharp increase in the use of Ø-plurals occurred at the same time as the professionalization of American anthropology. It appears, nonetheless, that there is more than the perception of an "innate characteristic linking one individual with others in an ethnic group" behind the linguistic behavior of social scientists; one should consider the possible influence of certain non-English plurals used by writers of an earlier era.

**4.3. Ø-plurals and Latinate plurals.** Until relatively recently, familiarity with the classical languages was widespread, almost universal, among those Europeans who had access to the medium of writing. Latin and Greek sources provided not only the informational background for many works written in the vernacular languages, but also many surface features of these texts. The presence of the classical languages could range from scattered quotations or borrowings within a clearly vernacular matrix to something approaching the opposite extreme (e.g. the Lindisfarne gospels, in Latin with Old English interlinear glosses).

In most cases proper names of Latin and Greek origin were assimilated to English morphological patterns in texts of the 16th to 18th centuries (e.g. *the writings of Plato* [and not 'of Platonis']; *Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's* [Mt. 22:21 (AV); rather than 'Cæsari ... Cæsaros/Cæsaris']. The exceptions are varied. In some instances an author has simply lifted a name or phrase from a source and left it in its original form, perhaps because of the assumption that a reader of that period would be more likely to know it from classical rather than vernacular texts. Here are two examples:

*the Pope's Belvedere in Rome, as pleasing as those horti pensiles in Babylon ...*  
[Robert Burton *Anatomy of melancholy* Pt 2, Sec 2, Mem 4 (1621)]

*The two Apollinariii* [= Apollinarius and his son — KT] *were fain, as a man may say, to coin all the seven liberal sciences out of the Bible ...*  
[John Milton *Areopagitica* (1644)]

The majority of ethnonyms taken from classical-language sources are likewise assimilated into English, sometimes through derivational suffixation (*Etrusci* □ *Etruscans*, *Sarmatæ* □ *Sarmatians*, &c.), sometimes without (*Gothi* □ *Goths*). In many instances, however, the ethnonym is taken unchanged from Latin, even though the ethnonyms in its immediate context may have English *-(e)s* plurals:

*those cantons of Switzers, Rheti* [cp Latin *R(h)æti* — KT], *Grisons, Walloons ...*  
[R. Burton *Anatomy of melancholy* 'Democritus to the reader' (1621)]

*The Goths, the Vandals, the Gepidæ, the Burgundians, the Alemanni, wasted each other's strength by destructive hostilities ... They granted a settlement to several colonies of the Carpi, the Bastarnæ, and the Sarmatians*

[E. Gibbon Decline and fall of the Roman Empire §13 (1776)]

In some cases the nonassimilated declension may have been resorted to because the author had no assimilated ethnonym ready to hand. At the same time, could it have been the case that at least some writers employed Latinate declensions to add an aura of prestige to a text primarily written in the vulgar tongue?

Consider the various German renderings of the New Testament. In Luther's translation of 1522, most proper names are declined as in Latin; e.g. accusative: ... *vnd legten die hende an **Jhesum*** [Mt 26:50; cp Vulgate *et manus injecerunt in Jesum* ]; dative: ... *vnd vberantworten jn dem Landpfleger **Pontio Pilato*** [Mt 27:2; Vulgate ... *et tradiderunt Pontio Pilato praesidi* ]; vocative: *Weissage vns, **Christe*** ... [Mt 26:68; Vulgate *Prophetiza nobis, Christe* ].<sup>11</sup> In some later translations, including the revision of Luther's text in modern orthography, the Latin declensions are preserved only for the names of the central figure (*Jesus, Christus* ). The names of mortals, by contrast, are either undeclined, or morphologically assimilated into German (e.g. masculine genitive in *-s*). Some examples: revised Luther ... *und sprach zu **Petrus*** [Mt 16:23; cp Luther's original ... *vnd sprach zu **Petro*** ]; revised Luther ... *und überantworteten ihn dem Landpfleger **Pontius Pilatus*** [Mt 27:2; cp Luther's original above].<sup>12</sup> One is tempted to see here a shift in the way the prestige believed to be conferred by a classical language was distributed. If Luther used Latin, and occasionally Greek, declensions to highlight the sacredness of the text as a whole, the later editors distributed them more locally, to emphasize the sacredness of a particular figure as against all of the other characters mentioned.

Let us return to English literature. Some of the works cited above, such as Gibbon's Decline and fall, were considered essential reading for members of the privileged classes until this century, and still enjoy high repute (as indicated, for example, by their enshrinement in the Britannica's Great Books of the Western World series). The use of more-or-less unassimilated bits of Latin and Greek can be seen, naturally enough, as a sign of familiarity with a body of knowledge considered prestigious by many in our culture. This practice of appropriating surface features from texts composed in one language, and employing them strategically within the matrix of writings in another language, is not limited to the importation of Latin and Greek lexemes. Words from non-Western languages have also been appropriated in this fashion, for the same purpose. This influence could operate at at least two levels: the morphological and the phonological.

[a] *Morphological*: Just as many 16th-19th century English writers made use of nouns inflected as in Latin or Greek in their vernacular-language works, some later writers have employed the declensional patterns of a non-Western language for proper nouns set in an English text. T. E. Lawrence employs Arabic singulars and plurals for most of the tribal and clan names mentioned in his Seven pillars of wisdom (1926) — e.g. sg. *an Ageyli*, pl. *the Ageyl*; sg. *a Howeiti*, pl. *the Howeitat* — as does the German writer Werner Munzinger in a book on East African tribes (Ostafrikanische Studien [Schaffhausen, 1864; reprint NY: Johnson Reprints, 1967]); e.g. sg. *der Bedui*, pl. *die Beduan* "Bedouins". In using Latinate plurals, of course, Gibbon, Milton, Burton et al. were tacitly indexing the body of classical learning shared by them and their intended audience; Lawrence may have been doing something of the same (with a much smaller circle of intended readers), though I cannot be sure of this. In any event, one would imagine that this type of usage would be resorted to less often with ethnonyms derived directly from non-Western languages (rather than through classical intermediaries, as in Gibbon's

case), except in special contexts (professional journal or conference) where the audience is likely to know something of the language in question.

[b] *Phonological*: Most often it is the case that the declension in English texts of an ethnonym derived from a native word takes no account of its morphological alternations in the language of origin. Thus we have ethnonyms derived from what were originally plurals (e.g. *Bantu* < Swahili *ba-* ‘plural prefix’ + *ntu* ‘man’; cp Swahili singular *mu+ntu* ‘a man’; likewise *Inuit* < absolutive plural of Eskimo *inuk* ‘a man’), which can function as singulars in English (*a Bantu, the Bantu(s); an Inuit, the Inuit(s)*).

On the other hand, there is evidence that certain authors who may in fact have little knowledge of the source languages inflect ethnonyms in a manner which implies a degree of imitation of Gibbon et al. at the phonological level. In a number of texts from the past century, the authors, in presenting lists of ethnonyms of peoples from the same geographical and cultural regions, specifically avoid adding the -(e)s plural to ethnonyms ending in a final vowel, especially -i, e.g.:

*Songhay, Hausas, Baghirmi, Kanuri, Mabas ...*

*Bejas, Somali, Gallas, Turkanas, Masai ...*

[Encyclopædia Britannica 10th ed., 1902: article ‘AFRICA’ (vol XXV, pp 139ff)]

*The Gilyaks, the Aino and the Goldi are all of the opinion that ...*

[J. Frazer Golden Bough; p. 597 of abridged version (1922)]

*Avars, Andi, Akhvaks, Bagulals, Botlikhs, Chamalals, Godoberi, Karata, Tindi, Dido, Bezhetta, Khunzals, Khvarshi, Archi...*

[list of Daghestanian (Northeast Caucasian) peoples on p. 83 of Ronald Wixman Language Aspects of Ethnic Patterns and Processes in the North Caucasus. Chicago: University of Chicago Geography Dept., Research Paper # 191, 1980.]

One plausible explanation for this behavior is the subliminal influence of vowel-final plurals in much of the learned vocabulary of Greek, Latin or Romance origin — *foci, loci, literati, tempi; varia, strata, flora* — but perhaps more particularly the Latinate plurals in -i or -æ of ethnonyms<sup>13</sup> cited in the widely-read works (widely-read in certain circles, at least) of 16th-19th century historians, philologists and humanists.

If this conjecture is substantially correct, it would follow that these ethnonyms could be considered a special subgroup of Type IIIb: just as the final sibilants of *Chuvash, Cheremis, Abkhaz* &c inhibit the addition of a sibilant English plural suffix, so the final vowels of exotic-sounding ethnonyms recall the Latinate plural forms of ethnonyms in works produced within a prestigious scholarly tradition, and likewise discourage the suffixation of -s. To the *Sprachgefühl* of an initiated reader (but not too initiated!), these words sound plural.

**5. Summary and conclusion.** The professionalisation of American anthropology (associated with Franz Boas in particular) at the turn of the century is accompanied by a marked increase in the use of Ø-plurals of the “names of uncivilized peoples” in ethnographic literature. Why would one seek a link between declensional preference and the professionalization of ethnology?

The linguists Allan and Hirtle have noted an association between the Ø-pluralization of names of animals and ethnic groups, and a certain expertise or connoisseurship claimed by the speaker: *We bagged two brindled gnu and four water-boc; ... five years of fieldwork among the Akhvakh ...* &c.). The non-

availability of a distinct plural form is also linked with collectivity (mass nouns and the like), and, so the explanation goes, it is the “cognoscenti” — ethnologists, zoologists, hunters — who are most prone to use this linguistic device to represent individuals as “partaking of the collectivity” [Hirtle, p. 20].

Without denying that Allan and Hirtle are in fact on to something, I propose here another factor suggested by a historical examination of ethnographic writing: the (largely unconscious) indexing of the learned literature of an earlier era through the avoidance of -(e)s plurals for “exotic” ethnonyms. In previous centuries it was common practice for writers within the humanist tradition to import many surface features of Greek and Latin texts into their vernacular-language writings. In the case of ethnonyms in particular, the names of peoples unfamiliar to the writer save through classical-language sources were frequently taken unchanged from the Latin, even though the ethnonyms in its immediate context might have English -(e)s plurals. My hypothesis is that this usage has become part of the stereotype of the scholarly writings of previous centuries, and thus endowed with a certain aura of erudition and prestige, especially in the eyes of those who adopt a distinctly ‘academic’ style of expression. When de Voto characterized the  $\emptyset$ -plural as a usage imposed by the “guild oaths” of professional ethnology, he was hardly exaggerating. Finally, it is a curious fact that many scholarly writers selectively avoid adding the -(e)s plural to “exotic” ethnonyms ending in a final vowel, a reflection, I suspect, of the subliminal influence of vowel-final plurals in much of the learned vocabulary of Greek, Latin or Romance origin.

#### References and notes.

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<sup>1</sup>The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper offered by Modj-ta-ba Sadria (Tokyo) and Michael Silverstein (Chicago), who are, of course, absolved from responsibility for its contents. Silverstein raised the important question of syntactic context: is there any statistical correlation between  $\emptyset$ -plurals and genericizing contexts, such as [Quant N of N]<sub>NP</sub> : *a band of Cherokee(s)* ? At present I do not have enough facts at my fingertips to respond to this query, but I agree that it is worth looking into. Thanks also to those who commented on the paper after the oral presentation at BLS: Johanna Nichols, Suzanne Romaine, Dan Slobin, Rebecca Wheeler, among others.

<sup>2</sup>The OED states that *Irish, Dutch*, etc. are “elliptical uses of the adjective.” Likewise Allen [1980: 558], who has “accounted for the human reference of such NPs as *the police, the English, the poor*, etc., by, in effect, postulating a head noun with the semantics of ‘person/people’; this does not appear on the surface of these NPs as a lexical item, but remains understood.”

<sup>3</sup>Not counting the use of the non-articulated singular to denote the language (*Irish is not easy to learn* ). The usage of quantifiers before Type II ethnonyms is considered

awkward in Modern English, but there is some difference among speakers concerning the degree of unacceptability. Thus Jespersen [1922: vol II, §11.54]: “The use of these adjectives after numerals and similar adjectives [i.e. quantifiers — KT] is not quite natural nowadays.” That being said, he provides several counter-examples from texts: *six thousand British, some English that I know* . . . See also Allen [1980: 558]

<sup>4</sup>The status of *Spanish, British* and *Scotch/Scottish* is not so clear. All have Type I counterparts (*Spaniard, Briton, Scot*) and lack derivatives in -man/woman, but are nonetheless frequently employed as plural-collective nouns. For this latter reason they will be classified as Type II ethnonyms.

<sup>5</sup>The sequence of linguistic changes leading to the Modern English treatment of Type II and III ethnonyms cannot be reconstructed with certainty. I suspect that phonology played an important role in the process: all of these ethnonyms end in sibilants (*Irish, Japanese, Kirghiz*), which may have blocked the use of the -(e)s plural suffix. I offer the following three-stage scenario for the reader’s consideration:

(i) Middle English ethnonyms in -(i)sc/sh were pluralized with an unstressed -e (*Saxons and Englisse*), which was lost by the beginning of the Modern English period.

(ii) While some speakers extended the now-dominant -(e)s plural to these nouns as well (*Irishes*), others continued to treat them as elliptical uses of the adjective, with an understood plural head noun meaning ‘people’ (*the Irish [people] are* ...) [Allen 1980:558]. Type III ethnonyms took regular plurals when they first appeared in English in the 16th century (*the Genoeses; Chinesaas and Japanesaas* [OED]), but shifted to Ø-plurals in the 17th and 18th centuries.

(iii) The preference for Ø-plurals with Type III ethnonyms could have been encouraged by the collective plural use of Type II ethnonyms, which are likewise sibilant-final. Note as well that -(e)s plurals were sporadically omitted in other sibilant final nouns in Early Modern English: *Are there **balance** here to weigh the flesh?* [*Merchant of Venice* IV.i.255; cited by Jespersen 1982: 175].

<sup>6</sup>Some Type I ethnonyms have parallel Type IV forms: e.g. *the Mayans / the Maya(s)*.

<sup>7</sup>The symbol [†] indicates a citation from the Oxford English Dictionary (OED).

<sup>8</sup>This title, it must be pointed out, was added by the editors, who use the Type IV declension consistently for American ethnonyms, e.g. *several groups of Southern Paiute ... Shoshoni dialects were spoken by the Western Shoshoni* ... (pp 6-7).

<sup>9</sup>The declension of non-Western ethnonyms in German merits a separate study. The oldest examples I have come across (in a far-from-thorough search) occur in the writings of J. G. Herder from the 1770’s, e.g. *zehn Jahr unter den **Abenakiern**; ... die abstehenden Ohren der **Pevas und Amikuanes***. The earliest undeclined ethnonyms I have noted are in W. von Humboldt’s Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues [1836]; e.g. *Denn **die Samang**, welche einen Theil der Gebirge derselben bewohnen, sind* ...

<sup>10</sup>Among the authors contributing to the series, R.S. Grumet (The Lenapes, 1989) uses the -(e)s plural with an unusual consistency; e.g. (p 25) ... *such diverse peoples as the Cheyennes and **Blackfoots** of the Great Plains*. J.R. Wunder (The Kiowa, 1989) employs the Ø-plural throughout, except when an ethnonym is quantified by a numeral; e.g. (p 54) *a war party of 1500 Kiowas, Comanches, Cheyennes and Arapahos...*

<sup>11</sup>On Luther’s treatment of loanwords and proper names, see Carl Francke Grundzüge der Schriftsprache Luthers [Hildesheim: G. Olms Verlag, 1973]; Pt II, §109.

<sup>12</sup>Correspondingly, the occasional lapsus calami in Luther’s rendering of the oblique cases of the Saviour’s names is changed to fit the new pattern: *Christus Geist* [Romans 8:9] becomes *Christi Geist* in the revised Lutheran Bible.

<sup>13</sup>This latter explanation seems all the more likely in view of the fact that other vowel-final words borrowed from non-Western languages take regular plurals.