Handout 2. Nouns

You know you are looking at a noun (or a nominal form of a verb) if one or more of the following conditions applies:

a) it can be modified by the demonstratives ere (“this”) or tere (“that”) or by a quantifying adjective such as geren or gemu
b) it has a plural form (see below)
c) it can be modified by a case marker:
   a. nominative (blank, be)
   b. genitive (i, nî)
   c. accusative (be)
   d. locative (de)
   e. dative (de)
   f. instrumental (de, î)
   g. ablative (ci)

On plural forms

Most Manchu nouns can be pluralized by adding an adjective such as geren (“many”), eiten (“all”); by adding an adverb such as gemu (“all”); or by directly indicating number (juwe, ilan, minggan, tumen, and so forth). Plural can also be shown by a postposition such as gubci (“entire, all”), tome (“each”), and jergi (“etc.”). Reduplication of nouns (as in Chinese and Japanese) is another way of marking the plural, e.g., hacin hacin (“all sorts of,” lit. “sort-sort”), but usually not by the substantive itself.

In addition, many Manchu nouns – mostly personal nouns (i.e., names for people, esp. family relationships; the best known exception is the plural form of morin “horse,” which is morisa) – have distinctive plural form endings. These are: -ri, -si, -ta/-te, -sa/-se/-so. Final -n is usually dropped before adding the plural suffix.

Only two words end in –ri:
mafâ “grandfather” mafari
mama “grandmother” mamari

A few end in –si:
aha "slave, servant" ahasi
haha "man" hahasi
hehe "woman" hehesi
omolo "grandchild" omosi
hojihon "son-in-law" hojihosi

Others end in –ta/-te:
(back vocalic) (front vocalic)
ahûn "elder brother" ahûta deo "younger brother" deote
sargan “wife” sargata eigen “husband” eigete
ama “father” amata eme “mother” emete
ejen "lord" ejete

But the most common plural ending (accounting for about 85% of all nouns) is –sa/-se/-so:
(back vocalic) (front vocalic)
amban “official” ambasa jui "child" juse
faksi “craftsman” faksisa gucu “friend” gucuse
hafan "official" hafasa beile "prince" beise
Note the effects of vowel harmony:

monggo "Mongol"    monggoso
solho "Korean"     solhosu

Sometimes pluralizing –sa or –se gets used independently (that is, it is not attached as a suffix to the noun it modifies), as in wang "prince," pl. wang sa. This usage is also seen in the use of se (never sa) in the beginning of a memorial as a pluralizing form after an individual's name (e.g., Fuk'anggan se) to indicate that more than one person is submitting the memorial (the full list of memorialists can usually be found at the end of the document).