THE NOUN

- The noun is one of the most important parts of speech: its arrangement with the verb helps to express a predication, the core of the sentence.
- The noun as a part of speech is characterized by the following:
- 1. The general implicit lexico-grammatical meaning of “substance” in the wide sense of the word: it denotes things, objects and abstract notions presented as substance.

- 2. Form : The noun is characterized by the grammatical forms of case and number which are signalled correspondingly by the inflexions - ’s and -s. The category of indefiniteness/definitness is expressed by the articles «a(an)» and «the». Formally, many English nouns are also characterized by specific noun-building suffixes: -er, -hood, -dom, -ness, - ity.

- 3. Function: The chief functions of the noun in the sentence are those of the subject and object, but nouns may also function as attributes or adverbial modifiers (when used with a preposition), e.g.: They saw a stone wall; In the evening I met him in the park.
- **adverbial**

Grammar A word or phrase functioning as a major clause constituent and typically expressing place (in the garden), time (in May), or manner (in a strange way).

- **modifier**

Grammar A word, especially an adjective or noun used attributively, that restricts or adds to the sense of a head noun (e.g. good and family in a good family house).

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- 4. Combinability (= distribution in the sentence): nouns may combine with adjectives (left- and right-hand combinability); with verbs (also left- and right-hand combinability); with the articles (left-hand combinability). The noun is characterized by zero combinability with the adverb and the interjection.

- The noun is also characterized by some special types of combinability.

- Typical of the noun is the prepositional combinability with another noun, a verb, an adjective, an adverb.

E.g.: an entrance to the house; to turn round the corner; red in the face; far from its destination.

- The possessive combinability characterizes the noun alongside its prepositional combinability with another noun.

E.g.: the speech of the President - the President's speech; the cover of the book - the book's cover.

- English nouns can also easily combine with one another by sheer contact, unmediated by any special lexemic or morphemic means. In the contact group the noun in preposition plays the role of a semantic qualifier to the noun in postposition.
- *E.g.:* a cannon ball; a sports event; film festivals.

- The lexico-grammatical status of such combinations has presented a big problem for many scholars, who were uncertain as to the linguistic heading under which to treat them: either as one separate word, or a word-group. In the history of linguistics the controversy about the lexico-grammatical status of the constructions in question has received the name "The cannon ball problem".

- To solve the problem, M. Blokh suggests applying the so-called isolability test which is performed for the contact noun combinations by an easy, productive type of transformation. *Cf:.* a cannon ball → a ball for cannon; the court regulation → the regulation of the court; progress report → report about progress; the funds distribution → the distribution of the funds.

- The corresponding compound nouns (formed from substantive stems), as a rule, cannot undergo the isolability test with an equal ease. The transformations with the nounal compounds are in fact reduced to sheer explanations of their etymological motivation. The comparatively closer connection between the stems in compound nouns is reflected by the spelling (contact or hyphenated presentation). *E.g.:* fireplace → place where fire is made; starlight → light coming from stars.

- Another test is the addition of a modifier: as the most essential feature of the compound is its indivisibility, the added modifier restricts the structure as a whole not one or the other part.
- E.g. a big department store, not a big department store.

The Semantic Classification of Nouns

- We can distinguish two grammatically relevant classes of nouns: countable (discrete), and uncountable or mass (indiscrete).

- Countables are subdivided into proper and common nouns.
- A proper noun is the name of a particular member of a class or of a set of particular members. Cf. Smith and the Smiths. The function of a proper noun, or name, is similar to the definite article – both are particularizers: Smith means the man Smith/the Smith man.

- However, there is a difference between the man Smith / the Smith man and the man: it concerns the mode of naming. In the first case, man is particularized through the use of another name (i.e. Smith) while in the second case man is particularized through the use of a grammatical word-morpheme, i.e. the definite article or determiner.

- Proper names are not always ‘proper’, i.e. they may refer to more than one individual. Proper names may function as common names.

  Consider:
- There’s an Alice on the phone.
- B. Is that the Alice you told me about?
- A. There’s a Broadway in almost every city.
- B. The Broadway I’m referring to is in New York City.

- A common noun is a common name, i.e. it is the name common to the class as a whole.

Animate and inanimate.

- Similar to proper nouns, common nouns form two grammatically relevant groups: animate and inanimate.

- This subdivision of nouns constitutes the basis for the category of gender in English.

- **The category of gender in English**

- Gender is closely tied to the sex of the referent and is chiefly reflected in co-occurrence patterns with respect to singular personal pronouns (and corresponding possessive and reflexive forms). The main gender classes are:
- Personal/human
- masculine - Tom, a boy, the man - he
- feminine - Sue, a girl, the woman - she
- dual - a journalist, the doctor - he, she
- non-personal/neuter: a house, the bird -it

- Although there is nothing in the grammatical form of a noun which reveals its gender, there are lexical means of making gender explicit, and reference with a third person singular pronoun may make it apparent.

Lexical expression of gender –

- gender-specific premodification:

I'm not in the market for a male nurse.

- compounding with a gender-specific element:

It was ironic that during an Irish debate an Englishman had demonstrated such affection for a Scotsman.

- use of a gender-specific derivational ending: Actor John Thaw was in a defiant mood yesterday.
- Actress Vanessa Redgrave has arrived in Macedonia.

- Note that while -ess is unambiguously a feminine marker, -or/-er is not always clearly a masculine-only marker, especially when there is no corresponding -ess form in common use (e.g. sailor, teacher).

Personal v. non-personal reference with pronouns

- baby, child, infant

One three-month-old [baby] managed to talk its parents into sending Santa a letter asking for some clothes. (NEWS)

The [baby] was lying on his back in his crib. (FICT)

In the following examples the choice is between feminine and non-personal only:

- countries
- [Italy] announced it had recalled its ambassador to Romania for consultations. (NEWS)
- …series of deeds by which [Italy] proceeds towards her goal. (NEWS)

- ships
- The bow of the [ship] was punctured, and its forward speed was so great that a gash eighty-two feet long was made down the port side. (FICT)
- A derelict [ship] turns over on her keel and lies gracefully at rest… (FICT)

THE CATEGORY OF NUMBER

- Countable nouns have both singular and plural forms, referring to one or more than one entity, respectively. Both singular and plural forms can also refer to a whole class of entities.

- Number is marked not only by inflection, but also by concord between subject and verb and co-occurrence patterns between determiner and noun.

- Regular plurals
- Irregular plurals

man-men foot-feet tooth-teeth

- Latin and Greek plurals

maximum-maxima

- Zero plurals

Words for some animals

Nouns which consistently take zero plurals include: cod, deer, grouse, salmon, sheep.

- The zero plural is also regularly used for dozen, hundred, thousand, million preceded by numerals: two dozen people, two hundred kids, fifty thousand dollars, 40 million new shares but: dozens of people, millions of shares.

- Plural-only nouns and nouns in -s

Plural-only nouns do not have a singular-plural contrast, e.g. we have scissors but not *scissor, except premodifying another noun where a bare form is regular, e.g. scissor kick.

- Cattle, clergy, people, police, staff

Though not visibly plural in form, these take plural concord:

Police are appealing for help from anyone who witnessed the incident. (NEWS)

- Occasionally police combines with a singular verb; in these cases, the reference is collective: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police was searching the airliner. (NEWS)

collective noun

NOUN

Grammar

A count noun that denotes a group of individuals (e.g. assembly, family, crew).

Usage

A collective noun can be used with either a singular verb (my family was always hard-working) or a plural verb (his family were disappointed in him). Generally speaking, in Britain it is more usual for collective nouns to be followed by a plural verb, while in the US the opposite is true. Notice that, if the verb is singular, any following pronouns must be too: the government is prepared to act, but not until it knows the outcome of the latest talks (not … until they know the outcome …)

The Category of Case

The category of case shows the relation of the thing(s) denoted by the noun to other thing(s) or objects, and it should be manifested in the form of the noun itself. The noun in Modern English is presumably characterized by two cases: the Common case and the Genitive (Possessive) case (while the personal pronouns have the Nominative case and the Objective case).

- The Common case of the noun is characterized by a zero inflexion; the Genitive case form is signaled by the inflexion - ’s.

- The category of case reflects the objectively existing relations (e.g., those of possession) in the broad sense of the word. As the inflexion - ‘s is «detachable», i.e., does not merge with the noun to which it refers, it can be added not only to nouns but also to adverbs (e.g.: somebody else's book), to word-combinations (the king of France's arrival) and even to whole sentences (e.g.: the man I saw yesterday's son).

- As a result of such peculiarities of the marker the opinions of grammarians differ as to the number of cases and even the very existence of the morphological category of case in Modern English. There are three main approaches to the problem nowadays: 1. There are two morphological cases in Modern English; 2. There are more than two cases in Modern English. The adherents of this approach hold it that the category of case may be also expressed by prepositions: of the boy (the Genitive case); to the boy (the Dative case); by the boy (the Instrumental case), etc. 3. There are no morphological cases at all in Modern English.

- The inflexion - ‘s can be attached not only to nouns but to other parts of speech and even to phrases and sentences. Besides, the - ’s may denote not only the relation of possession but also some other relations, e.g.: the relations of locality (Kyiv's inhabitants); the relations of distance (to have a mile's walk); the relations of time (to have an hour's sleep), etc.