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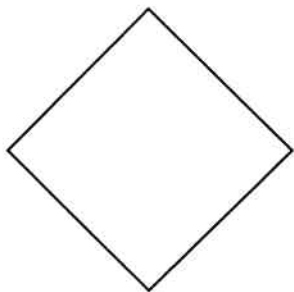
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A Practical English Grammar

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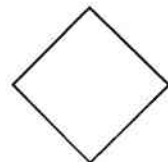
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I. A THEORETICAL GUIDE

A General Survey of the Modern English Parts of Speech

The problem of parts of speech is a controversial one both in general linguistic theory and in the particular case of many languages. The very term *parts of speech* implying the idea of something divided into different smaller parts seems to oversimplify the rather complex relationships which, by necessity, link the same parts of speech to form meaningful utterances. What is usually meant by a *part of speech* is a type of word differing from other types in some grammatical point or points of view. For example, the verb is a type of word differing from all other types in that it alone has the grammatical category of tense. Thus, one can reasonably ask “what is the past tense of the word *like*?” (that is *liked*) but it would seem stupid to ask “what is the past tense of the word *interesting*” or “what is the past tense of the word *nook*?”. These words do not have any past, present or future tense since the notion of tense cannot be applied to them. Tense is one of the grammatical distinctive features characterizing the verb as against every other type of word. However, the question is much less simple with reference to some other types of words such as adjectives turned nouns or nouns turned verbs by conversion or verbal nouns for that matter and this is why we will consider a general definition of the principles on which the classification of the English parts of speech should be based in order to facilitate their recognition as individual entities.

The principles on which such a classification can be made are three in number:

meaning • form • function

By *meaning* we do not mean the individual meaning of each separate word (its lexical meaning) but the meaning common to all the words of the given class and constituting its essence. Thus, the meaning of the noun is *thingness* (implying everything that is presented as a thing, or object such as gold, beauty, book, etc.). It is to be noted that while the criterion of meaning can be very easily applied to denominate a noun, an adjective (which is said to express property or characteristic) or a verb (said to express a process), things get more complicated when it comes to articles, pronouns or adverbs. There are pronouns, for example, which share essential peculiarities of nouns (e.g. *he*), while others have much in common with adjectives (e.g. *which*).

By *form* we mean the morphological characteristics of a type of word. Thus, the noun is characterized by the category of number (singular and plural), the verb by tense, mood, etc. On the other hand, several types of words (prepositions, conjunctions, and others) are characterized by invariability.

By *function* we mean the syntactical properties of a type of word. These properties of a word fall into:

- a. its possibility to combine with other words in order to form phrases;
- b. its function in the sentence, which property is connected to sentence structure.

Two final remarks are to be made in connection with the above mentioned criteria.

In the first place, one should, from the very beginning, be aware of the fact that there are cases when one of the criteria is not applicable to a certain part of speech and, then, one has to attach greater value to one or two of them. The general rule, however, is that they should be considered in the order we have enumerated: *meaning, form, function*.

Secondly, although traditional grammar restricts itself to considering the theory of parts of speech to be a part of morphology, we will by necessity touch upon some syntactical problems as well such as the syntactical function of words.

THE NOUN

Generally speaking, the noun represents in English a very important category of words which define “something”, an “object” which can be perceived by the senses, represented in one’s mind, imagined or thought of such as: beings (*man, people, writer, lamb*), as well as everything that belongs to (pertains of) the organic world (*plant, tree, rose*), everything that belongs to the inorganic world (*rock, coal, water*), things (*table, road, train, ink-pot*), abstract notions (*idea, kindness*) etc. (cf. Levitchi, 2003, 10)

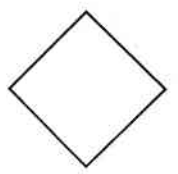
As a part of speech, however, the noun cannot be characterized and defined only on account of its meaning or “semantic value”. We have already mentioned the fact that the criterion of the semantic content alone is not enough to distinguish a noun from other parts of speech. For example, according to semantic content nouns have an association of substance: *brick, stone, iron*, while adjectives have an association of quality: *good, ill, resistant*. But such a distinction excludes many nouns such as *sweetness* and *kindness* which are nouns (abstract) expressing quality themselves. More than that, we may also give a description of nouns according to their content and define a noun as a word which denotes an object, or objects + a descriptive element: *man, brick, water* (man = biped being endowed with reason and the faculty of speech). But, we readily realize the fact that some nouns do not represent any concept of “an object”, such as those denoting abstractions: *sweetness, beauty, sadness*. Finally, there are nouns with very little descriptive content, e.g. *fact, thing*, which then approach pronouns in content although they are by necessity classified as nouns on grounds of their form which allows for the singular and plural distinction, as well as for their distinction according to the category of case alongside with their classification as nouns on grounds of their syntactical functions.

In conclusion to all this, any grammatical analysis of this part of speech has to take into account the following:

- a. its form;
- b. the way it associates itself with other words or parts of speech;
- c. the syntactical functions it has in the sentence.

Form of Nouns

For practical reasons, by the form of a noun one is to understand the way they appear in dictionaries, which may be denominated as their basic form. In connection to this, mention should be made of the fact that because in Modern English nouns have lost their original endings to a large extent, there are very few formal markers to clearly identify nouns as such. Thus, besides the category of number which does not characterize all nouns (e.g. some individual nouns may lack either a singular or a plural form) and the category of case, there are a number of suffixes which can be considered specific to nouns, although a few of them will also contribute to the formation of other parts of speech, such as:



a. Suffixes specific to proper names

- son*: Jacobson, Watson, Johnston;
- town*: Capetown, Jamestown;
- burg(h)*: Edinburgh;*
- chester* (military company): Manchester, Rochester;
- shire* (district): Yorkshire, Lancashire;
- land* (country, district): England, Finland, Cumberland.

b. Suffixes specific to common nouns

- acy* (having the quality of): democracy, diplomacy;
- age* (which refers to, belongs to): marriage, passage;
- ance*, -*ancy*, -*ence*, -*ency* (which produces / is produced): utterance, flippancy, preference, tendency;
- ard*, -*art* (that which is too much of): sluggard, drunkard, braggart;
- ation* (the fact of): examination;
- dom* (the quality of being): wisdom;
- ee* (he who is in a certain state): refugee, employee;
- eer* (he who has to deal with): mountaineer, pamphleteer;
- ery* (the place where or the state in which): bakery, slavery;
- ess* (for feminine gender): tigress, hostess;
- hood* (the state of): neighbourhood, childhood;
- ism* (the state or quality of): realism, capitalism, patriotism;
- ist* (which has the occupation of): violinist, satirist;
- ity* (the state of, the quality of): adversity, probability;
- let* (thing small): hamlet, rivulet, booklet;
- man* (of he who belongs to, deals with): Englishman, Frenchman;
- ment* (the result of, a state of): improvement, movement;
- ness* (the state of, quality of): greatness, sadness, kindness;
- ship* (the state of, the quality of): marksmanship, friendship, leadership;
- ure* (the state of, the occupation of): agriculture, departure.

Conversion of Nouns

Apart from abstract nouns which express “state”, “quality” or “situation”, there are quite a few nouns which do not contain a suffix and which can be turned into other parts of speech:

e.g. *content* (*n.* everything inside a container)

con^tent (*adj.* satisfied with)

book (*n.*)

to book (*vb.* to book tickets/buy tickets in advance by telephone etc.)

advance (*n.* forward movement)

to advance (*vb.* to go forward)

advance (*adj.* prior, in front)

The Grammatical Form of Nouns

The grammatical forms of nouns as such are not always enough to distinguish them from other parts of speech. For example, a number of nouns, namely some of those which can be counted take the *s* or *es* ending in the plural: *book-books*, *industry-industries*. This *s* or *es* distinction, however, is not a clear marker of the noun in English since most verbs take either *s* or *es* in their third person present: e.g. *He tries* as compared to *He made several tries*. Even the synthetic 's genitive of nouns can be taken for the contracted form of *is* in certain contexts, such as in: *Jerry's fine*; *Jerry's nuts*, etc.

Noun Determiners

A safer way to identify nouns is that of identifying them on the basis of their determiners, which are represented by different parts of speech accompanying nouns in order to determine or specify (explain) their meaning in a certain linguistic context.

As a general observation, one can say that most noun determiners precede the respective nouns. One possible classification of these noun determiners is as follows:

1. Definite numerical determiners (represented by *numerals* and *the indefinite article* functioning as a numeral)

e.g. *one boy and three girls*
a boy and three girls

2. Indefinite numerical determiners (represented by a number of *indefinite adjectives*)

e.g. *many/most/some/few/ a few Romanians*

3. Quantitative determiners (represented by *some indefinite adjectives*)

e.g. *little/much/a lot of/a great deal of/some/any energy*

4. Demonstrative determiners (*demonstrative adjectives* and *the definite article*)

e.g. *that/this/the (same) boy*
those/these/the (same) boys

5. Possessive determiners (possessive adjectives, nouns and some pronouns in the genitive case when it expresses possession)

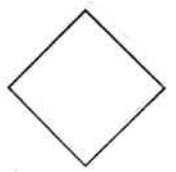
e.g. *my/your/my own/our/George's friends*;
friends of mine/yours/of my own/of his own/ ours/ George's

6. Generic determiners (*the articles* and *adjectives* with generic function)

e.g. *The dog is man's best friend.* (definite article)
Dogs can be dangerous to strangers. (zero article)
All mountains can be dangerous in bad weather. (adjective)

7. There is the special case of the definite article used before adjectives to form plural nouns or before rivers, mountains and plural family names:

e.g. *the poor*; *the Danube*; *the Moldoveanu*; *the Smiths*.



Noun Modifiers

These modifiers “change” or “modify” to a certain extent the meaning of the respective noun in the sense that they show a quality or characteristic of it. Like determiners, they may act as markers (identifying elements) of the noun they modify both by meaning and by their position in front of it:

e.g. <i>these</i>	<i>magnificent mountains</i>
determiner	modifier

The Syntactical Functions of Nouns

Nouns as a part of speech can also be identified by means of their syntactical functions which, in their turn, are closely connected to the grammatical case of the noun in question.

These syntactical functions are eight in number:

1. subject or part of a subject (or “subject group”)

John is Mary's husband.

A school of dolphins was playfully swimming in front of their boat.

2. predicative determining the subject (“subjective complement”)

They are my friends.

3. part of an attribute

A friend in need is a friend indeed.

4. part of an apposition

Helen, Peter's ex-wife, is getting married next week.

5. a direct object or a part of a direct object

George picked up the receiver and dialed the number.

It gives me a great pleasure to remember those days.

6. an indirect object or part of an indirect object

I gave the packet to the man you had told me about.

7. a prepositional object or part of a prepositional object

The boy was playing with the ball.

8. an adverbial modifier or part of an adverbial modifier

They walked for an hour and then, stopped. (adverbial modifier of time)

Classification of Nouns

English nouns can be classified in accordance with their content and grammatical regimen. Such a classification, however, presupposes the careful distinction of the differences existing between the form and the content of numerous English nouns as existent, for example, in *These (pl.) people (sgl.)* or in *Informatics is a relatively new science*, etc.

There are also many difficulties posed by the invariable character of most determiners and of all modifiers especially for a Romanian speaker of the language who deals with a lot of singular-plural or masculine-feminine and neuter different forms in similar cases. Thus, a classification of English nouns based on their content and form “makes it a semantic-morphological-syntactical classification” (Levițchi, 17), that is a classification based on their content (or meaning), on their forms and also on the agreement they establish with other parts of speech.

Function of all this, English nouns fall into:

1. **Individual Nouns:**

- a. Proper
- b. Defective-individual

2. **Unique Nouns:**

- a. Equivalent to proper names
- b. Names of matter
- c. Unique abstract nouns

3. **Collective Nouns**

1. **Individual Nouns**

a. Individual nouns proper – hav the following characteristics:

- These nouns have both the singular and the plural number, which also classifies them as count-able nouns.

book – books; a/the/this book
the/these books; man – men

- They agree in number with both their determiners which have singular and plural distinct forms, and with the predicative verb:

This boy is
These boys are ...

- When individual nouns proper are used generically (i.e. to express the whole class of a particular noun), they either take the definite article *the* or the indefinite article *a/an* in the singular or, in the plural they take the so-called “o” article:

A friend in need is a friend indeed.
The dog/a dog is a faithful animal.
Boys will be boys.

Note: Such nouns as *man, woman*, the names of seasons – *spring, summer, autumn, winter*, as well as the names of daily meals take the zero article when used generically.

b. Defective Individual Nouns

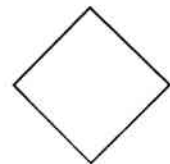
These nouns are represented by nouns which only will have either the singular or the plural number. But, irrespective of this, they are countable in that they can be counted with the help of the so-called *numeratives* such as: *a pair of, two pair(s) of, a piece of, two pieces of*, etc.

e.g. *a pair of compasses/glasses/spectacles/trousers/binoculars*
three pair(s) of:
compasses/glasses/spectacles/trousers/binoculars
a suit/two suits of clothes
a pair/two pair(s) of shorts
a piece of/pieces of:
luggage/information/intelligence/news/baggage/ furniture

2. **Unique Nouns**

Unique nouns denote either strongly individualized nouns or quantities. As a consequence to this they cannot be counted.

These nouns fall into:



a. Proper-Noun Equivalents

The nouns in this class resemble proper nouns in that they are considered names because the name corresponds to the denomination of the respective object. Such nouns have no plural and they agree with their determiners and their predicative verb in the singular:

the sun, the moon, the world, the present, paradise, hell, eternity, nature

b. Nouns of Material

These nouns denominate matter or substances which cannot be counted since they are viewed as quantity. They have only the singular number:

iron, gold, silver, salt, water, rain, earth (the substance) etc.

When these nouns are used generically, they are preceded by the zero article:

Gold is more precious than silver.

Obs. There are cases when nouns of material are stylistically used in the plural (stylistic plurals):

*"The Snows of Kilimanjaro" was written by Ernest Hemingway.
Still waters run deep.*

On the other hand, there are some nouns of material which are only used in the plural, e.g. *victuals, dregs*.

c. Unique Abstract Nouns and Abstractions

Unique abstract nouns are nouns which are thought of as a single notion e.g. *literature, architecture*.

These nouns also include the larger category of abstractions, that is of nouns which denominate a quality, an action or a state in its highest and most general degree, e.g. *whiteness* (the quality of being white), *listening* (the action of listening), *resting* (the state of rest), etc. Such nouns are used in the singular and take the zero article when used in their general sense, e.g.

Speech is silver, silence is gold.

3. Collective Nouns

The main characteristic of collective nouns is the possibility for one to consider them either as a totality of component elements or as many separate components. On account of this, collective nouns express either the idea of plurality and take a plural verb,

e.g. *The crew were on general alert. (members of ..)
The family were having dinner. (members of ...)*

or they can refer to the totality of the constituent elements and take a singular verb.

e.g. *The crew is on general alert.*

The Plural of Simple Nouns

	Rule of plural formation	The ending added in the plural and its pronunciation	Examples
1.	The usual, regular plural of a simple noun is formed by adding the <i>s</i> ending (or suffix) to its singular form.	-s pronounced [s] after [p], [t], [k], [f], [θ]	<i>cups</i> [kʌps]; <i>nuts</i> [nʌts]; <i>books</i> [bʊks]; <i>roofs</i> [ru:fs]; <i>months</i> [mʌnθs]
		-s pronounced [z] after vowel sounds and after the voiced consonants [b], [d], [g], [l], [m], [n], [ŋ], [v]	<i>boys</i> [bɔɪz]; <i>sobs</i> [sɒbz]; <i>dads</i> [dædz]; <i>logs</i> [lɒgz]; <i>nails</i> [neɪlz]; <i>cams</i> [kæmz]; <i>sons</i> [sʌnz]; <i>lungs</i> [lʌŋz]; <i>caves</i> [keɪvz]
		-s pronounced [ɪz] when preceded by the letter <i>e</i> following the consonant sounds [s], [z], [dʒ]	<i>busses</i> ['bʌsɪz]; <i>buzzes</i> ['bʌzɪz]; <i>judges</i> ['dʒʌdʒɪz]
		-s pronounced [θs] in the group <i>th</i> +s preceded by a short or long vowel	<i>mouths</i> [maʊθs]/[maʊðz]; <i>booths</i> [bu:ðz]/[bu:θs]
2.	Singular nouns ending in: -s, -ss, -x, -ch, -sh, -zz add -es in the plural.	-es pronounced [ɪz]	<i>bus</i> – <i>buses</i> ['bʌsɪz]; <i>boss</i> – <i>bosses</i> ['bɒsɪz] <i>box</i> – <i>boxes</i> ['bɒksɪz]; <i>match</i> – <i>matches</i> ['mætʃɪz]; <i>clash</i> – <i>clashes</i> ['klæʃɪz]
3.	Nouns ending in <i>y</i> preceded by a consonant change <i>y</i> into <i>i</i> plus the linking <i>e</i> before the <i>s</i> ending.	y>i + linking <i>e</i> + -s pronounced [ɪz]	<i>country</i> – <i>countries</i> ['kʌntrɪz] <i>cry</i> – <i>cries</i> [kraɪz]
4.	Nouns ending in <i>f</i> or <i>fe</i> usually turn <i>f</i> into <i>v</i> plus <i>s</i> or <i>es</i> and the pronunciation is [z]	f>v + -s/-es pronounced [z]	<i>calf</i> – <i>calves</i> [kɑ:vz]; <i>elf</i> – <i>elves</i> [elvz] <i>half</i> – <i>halves</i> [hɑ:vz]; <i>knife</i> – <i>knives</i> [naɪvz] <i>leaf</i> – <i>leaves</i> [li:vz]; <i>life</i> – <i>lives</i> [laɪvz] <i>loaf</i> – <i>loaves</i> [ləʊvz]; <i>scarf</i> – <i>scarves</i> [skɑ:vz]; <i>sheaf</i> – <i>sheaves</i> [ʃi:vz] <i>shelf</i> – <i>shelves</i> [ʃelvz]; <i>thief</i> – <i>thieves</i> [θi:vz] <i>turf</i> – <i>turves</i> [tɜ:vz]; <i>wharf</i> – <i>wharves</i> [wɔ:vz]; <i>wife</i> – <i>wives</i> [waɪvz]; <i>wolf</i> – <i>wolves</i> [wʊlvz]
	Obs. ¹ The nouns <i>scarf</i> and <i>turf</i> also have a regular plural.		<i>scarf</i> – <i>scarfs</i> [skɑ:fs] <i>turf</i> – <i>turfs</i> [tɜ:fs]
	Obs. ² The nouns <i>roof</i> , <i>handkerchief</i> and <i>gulf</i> only add <i>s</i> .	-s pronounced [s]	<i>handkerchiefs</i> ['hæŋkətʃi:fs] (but also <i>handkerchieves</i> ['hæŋkətʃi:vz]) <i>roofs</i> [ru:fs]; <i>gulfs</i> [gʌlfs]
5.	Nouns ending in <i>o</i> preceded by a consonant add <i>es</i> .	-es pronounced [ɪz]	<i>domino</i> – <i>dominoes</i> ['dɒmɪnəʊz] <i>echo</i> – <i>echoes</i> ['ekəʊz]; <i>embargo</i> – <i>embargoes</i> [ɪm'bɑ:gəʊz]; <i>hero</i> – <i>heroes</i> ['hɪərəʊz]; <i>negro</i> – <i>negroes</i> ['ni:grəʊz] <i>potato</i> – <i>potatoes</i> [pə'teɪtəʊz]; <i>tomato</i> – <i>tomatoes</i> [tə'mɑ:təʊz]; <i>veto</i> – <i>vetoes</i> ['vi:təʊz] Exceptions: <i>photo</i> – <i>photos</i> ['fəʊtəʊz]; <i>piano</i> – <i>pianos</i> ['piænəʊz]; <i>radio</i> – <i>radios</i> ['reɪdɪəʊz] <i>soprano</i> – <i>sopranos</i> [sə'prɑ:nəʊz]