

Contemporary Grammar of English

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First Semester

Week 2:

Lecture 4:

- Parts of Speech
- Open and Closed Class items
 - Pro-forms



Parts of Speech

Parts of speech refer to the units or the elements that the sentence is composed of. They are usually grouped into two categories: the major and the minor word classes. The major word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) are termed “major” because they carry most of the content or meaning of a sentence. The other category, the minor word classes, plays a more structural role in a sentence. Classes in this category include (auxiliary verbs, prepositions, pronouns, determiners and conjunctions. These words are sometimes also called “structure” words or “function” words.



Open Class Items

The major word classes (nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) are described as “open class items”, in that they are indefinitely extendable. New items are constantly being coined, and no one could make an inventory of all the nouns (for example) in English, and be confident that it was complete.

Describing the major word classes as being “open” can’t be true all the times because not all the major word classes are truly open. Only certain adverbs can be added to the adverb class (namely, the “manner” adverbs, which usually end in -ly); however other types of adverbs are usually closed to new members.



Closed Class Items

The minor word classes (auxiliary verbs, prepositions, pronouns, determiners and conjunctions) are described as “Closed Class Items” in the sense that their membership is limited in number, and they can be listed. They can not easily be extended by new additions. Members of the minor word classes are said to constitute a system in being:

1. Reciprocally exclusive: One’s decision to use one item in a given structure excludes the possibility of using any other. For example, we can say either (the book) or (a book) but not (the a book).
2. Reciprocally defining: It isn’t easy to tell the meaning of any individual item separately. It is best defined in relation to the rest of the system.



Open VS Closed Class Classification

Grammatical descriptions, classifications and definitions are often not so airtight. Therefore, the distinction between open and closed parts of speech must be treated cautiously.

1. The traditional category of verb, on the other hand, has been divided into three categories, two closed (primary and modal verbs) and one open (full verbs).
2. The class of adverbs is notoriously heterogeneous, and may be separated into an open class consisting of adverbs with an adjectival base (especially those, like *completely*, which have an -ly suffix), and a closed class including adverbs such as *here*, *there*, *now*, etc.
3. Many words appear to belong to more than one word-class:
 - Few (Det.): There were few objections.
 - Few (pron.): There were few.



Open VS Closed Class Classification

3. Many words appear to belong to more than one word-class:

Few (Det.): There were few objections.

(pron.): There were few.

Sound (adj.): A sound mind in a sound body.

(N.): We heard strange sounds last night.

(V.): His explanation sounds alright.

Round (adj.): We bought a round table.

(N.): He was knocked out in the second round.

(V.): We rounded the bend at high speed.

(adv.): He turned round and ran back to the house.

(prep.): We travelled round the country.



Stative and Dynamic

The previous characterization of the parts of speech we provided depended on their grammatical form or function. Here, we shall see that they can be characterized in terms of their semantic properties as “stative and dynamic”.

Broadly speaking, nouns can be characterized naturally as “stative” in that they typically refer to entities that are regarded as stable, whether these are concrete (physical) like house , table, paper, or abstract (of the mind) like hope, warmth and length.

Verbs can be more naturally characterized as 'dynamic': they are fitted (by their capacity to show tense and aspect, for example) to indicate action, activity, and temporary or changing conditions. However, many verbs are characterized as “stative” because they don't admit the progressive aspect.

Adjectives are characteristically stative but many can be seen as dynamic. All adjectives that can be used with the progressive or with the imperative are dynamic, and all that cannot be used with the progressive or the imperative are stative. Consider the following examples:

- He is being frank. VS *He is being short.



Pro-forms

Pro-form is a word or phrase that can take the place of another word (or word group) in a sentence. The process of substituting pro-forms for other words is called proformation.

1. The most common pro-forms in English are pronouns.
 - The poor girl didn't complain, although she was badly hurt.
2. There are pro-forms for place.
 - Mary is in London and John is there too.
3. There are pro-forms for time.
 - Mary arrived on Tuesday and John arrived then too.
4. There are pro-forms for other adverbials.
 - John searched the big room carefully, but the small room less so.
5. There are pro-forms for noun phrases.
 - Give me the pen or the pencil. Either will do.
6. There are pro-forms for verb phrases.
 - I never watch TV but they do.
 - She took a holiday in France and her brother did in Spain.

