

Contemporary Grammar of English

Third Year 2020-2021

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Lecture 18:

- Nouns

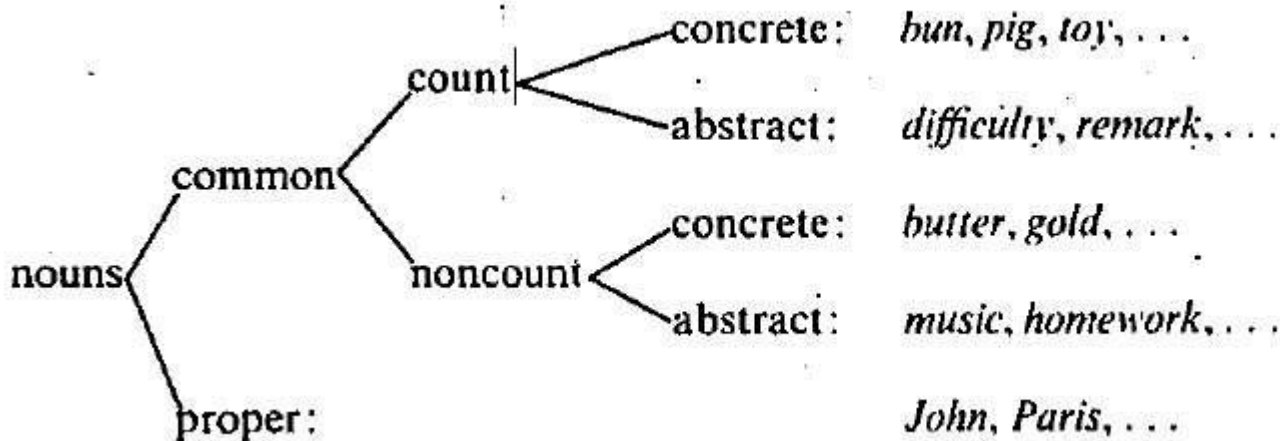




Classification of Nouns



A noun is the name of anything: *man, country, city, Henry, Spain, Paris, happiness, crowd, whiteness*. All these are names of people, places or things: all are nouns. The figure below introduces the most important noun classes:



Classification of Nouns



You may have noticed from the previous figure that English nouns fall into two main classes; proper nouns and common nouns. Common nouns are either count or noncount. Both count and noncount nouns are further divided into concrete and abstract nouns.

1. A proper noun is a name of a particular person, place, or thing. Nouns like; **Henry, Iraq, and Chicago** are not names that can be applied to any man, any country, any city. They are names of a particular man, a particular country, and a particular city. Proper nouns are usually singular, but they are count and may at times be plural. e.g, **the Himalayas, the West Indies, the Smiths**; or in such a sentence as. 'There are sixteen Zainabs [i.e. sixteen girls with this name) in my class.'
2. A common noun is a name common to all objects of the same kind. The names **man, country, city** can be applied to any man, any country, any city ; they are names that all men, countries, cities share in common. Some common nouns are count and others are noncount.



Count and Noncount Nouns



An important grammatical distinction may be made between nouns which are count and nouns which are noncount.

A count noun has both a singular and a plural form (*picture ~ pictures, boy ~ boys, child ~ children, attack ~ attacks*). Count nouns can be preceded by the indefinite article *a/an* (*a child, an attack*) or, in the plural, by words such as *many, few, these* or *the cardinal numbers two, three, four, . . .* (*many pictures, these children, three attacks*).

(Note that words like *sheep* and *deer*, which are unchanged in the plural, are nevertheless count nouns, because they combine with such 'counting words' as in *many/three/these sheep*.)

A noncount noun does not have a plural and does not combine with these 'counting words' such as (*one, two, three, a few* and *many*). Concrete nouns like (*blood, milk, silver, leather, money, furniture*) which refer to substances and materials are examples of noncount nouns. But also many abstract nouns are noncount: (*advice, health, music, sanity*).



Nouns with dual class membership



The division of nouns according to countability into count nouns and noncount nouns is basic in English. Yet the language makes it possible to look upon some objects from the point of view of both count and noncount, as in:

- A glass (count) is made of glass (noncount).
- You can throw a stone (count) at a wall made of stone (noncount)
- I have an evening paper (count). There is paper (noncount) on the wall.
- The kettle is made of copper (noncount). I gave the boy a few coppers (count).
- A: Would you like a cake (count)? B: No, I don't like cake (noncount).

The lambs were eating quietly.	There is lamb on the menu today.
That's foolish talk.	She will give a talk on Chinese art.
There were bright lights and harsh sounds.	Light travels faster than sound.
He hasn't had much experience.	He's had several odd experiences.
She's had many difficulties	She's not had much difficulty.
I like cheese.	What cheeses have you got today?



Concrete and abstract nouns



Cutting across the grammatical and semantic count/noncount distinction, there is a semantic division into nouns like *pig* which are CONCRETE and nouns like *difficulty* which are ABSTRACT.

An abstract noun is the one which refers to an abstraction which does not refer to anything physical or concrete. An abstract noun is typically nonobservable and nonmeasurable. Common types of abstract noun are:

- (a) nouns referring to events, actions or states, such as *arrival, invitation, hope*;
- (b) nouns referring to qualities, such as *happiness, size, absurdity*;
- (c) nouns referring to mental or perceptual phenomena, such as *idea, music, vision*.

A concrete noun refers to physical phenomena, whether persons, animals, things or substances, for example *student, rabbit, bus, grease*. A concrete noun is accessible to the senses, observable, measurable, etc.).