

# Grammar Basics: Nouns

What you may have forgotten since grade 4

A lesson for the *Paideia* web-app  
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# What Is A Noun?

- Something we may have learned in elementary school
  - But are afraid to admit we've forgotten!
- "a person, place or thing"
  - But "thing" has to be taken broadly



# Examples of English Nouns

- house, keyboard, coffee
- fire, thought, rule
- woman, fire-fighter
- city, galaxy, corner



# Proper Nouns vs. Common Nouns

- Most nouns are “common” nouns
- “Proper nouns” name a specific object in the world
  - Mary (vs. woman)
  - Toronto (vs. city)
  - Earth vs. planet
- Proper nouns often capitalized in English
  - We do the same in Greek
  - But this is anachronistic
    - no lower-case letters in the first century!



# Nouns and “Nominals”

- Nominals
  - Nouns + other words that act like nouns
- What other words can act like nouns?
  - Pronouns (I, you, we, it)
  - Adjectives (sometimes)
- These often behave the same way
  - Play the same roles in a clause: subject, direct object, etc.
  - Cases with different case endings
  - Declensions
  - Gender and number



# Nominals and Number

- Nominals are either “singular” or “plural”
  - One person/place/thing
  - More than one person/place/thing
- Their form reflects their number
  - House / houses
  - Planet / planets
  - Girl / girls
- Early Greek also had a “dual” number
  - No longer used in Hellenistic Greek



# Nouns and Gender

- In many languages, nouns have "gender"
  - A chair might be "he"
  - The sun might be "she"
  - French
    - **le** chat (always **il**)
    - **la** bibliotheque (always **elle**)
- Unfamiliar to many English speakers
  - Usually only people and animals are "he" or "she"
  - Everything else is "it" (neuter)
    - calling a ship "she"?



# How Many Genders?

- Some languages have 2 genders
  - Masculine & Feminine
    - French, Spanish, Hebrew
- Others have 3 genders
  - Masculine, Feminine, & Neuter
    - English, German, Latin, Greek





# Grammatical Gender vs. Real Gender

- No connection with real gender
  - In French every cat is *le chat* (masc.)
    - even though some are male and some female
  - Every library is *la bibliotheque* (fem.)
    - buildings aren't really thought to be male or female



# Gender in Words for People

- Words for human beings sometimes fit real gender
  - *La femme* (fem.)
  - *L'homme* (masc.)
- Often still doesn't fit real gender
  - *L'humain* ("human being"), masc.
  - *Les gens* ("people"), masc. pl.
  - *Das Kind* ("child"), neuter



# What is Grammatical Gender Good For?

- Usually just a grammatical category
- Helps us to connects related words in a sentence
  - Which nominal an adjective modifies
  - Which nominal is the antecedent of a pronoun
  - Which definite article goes with a nominal
  - Etc.

# Keep Learning

- You can find more about nouns in general in:
  - Mounce, Basics of Biblical Greek
    - Dividing words into syllables, 4.3-4.4
    - Basic grammar of nouns, 5.1-5.7 (pp. 22-24), 6.3-6.7 (pp. 29-30)
    - Parts of speech, 5.8-5.13 (p. 25)

