

# The Noun

Introduction

The noun **is** a class of words denoting entity (a separate unit that is complete and has its own characteristics).

- The noun is the central nominative word class.
- A typical noun has **sense** → the inherent meaning of the noun.
- Ex. the sense of **girl** → 'young female human being'

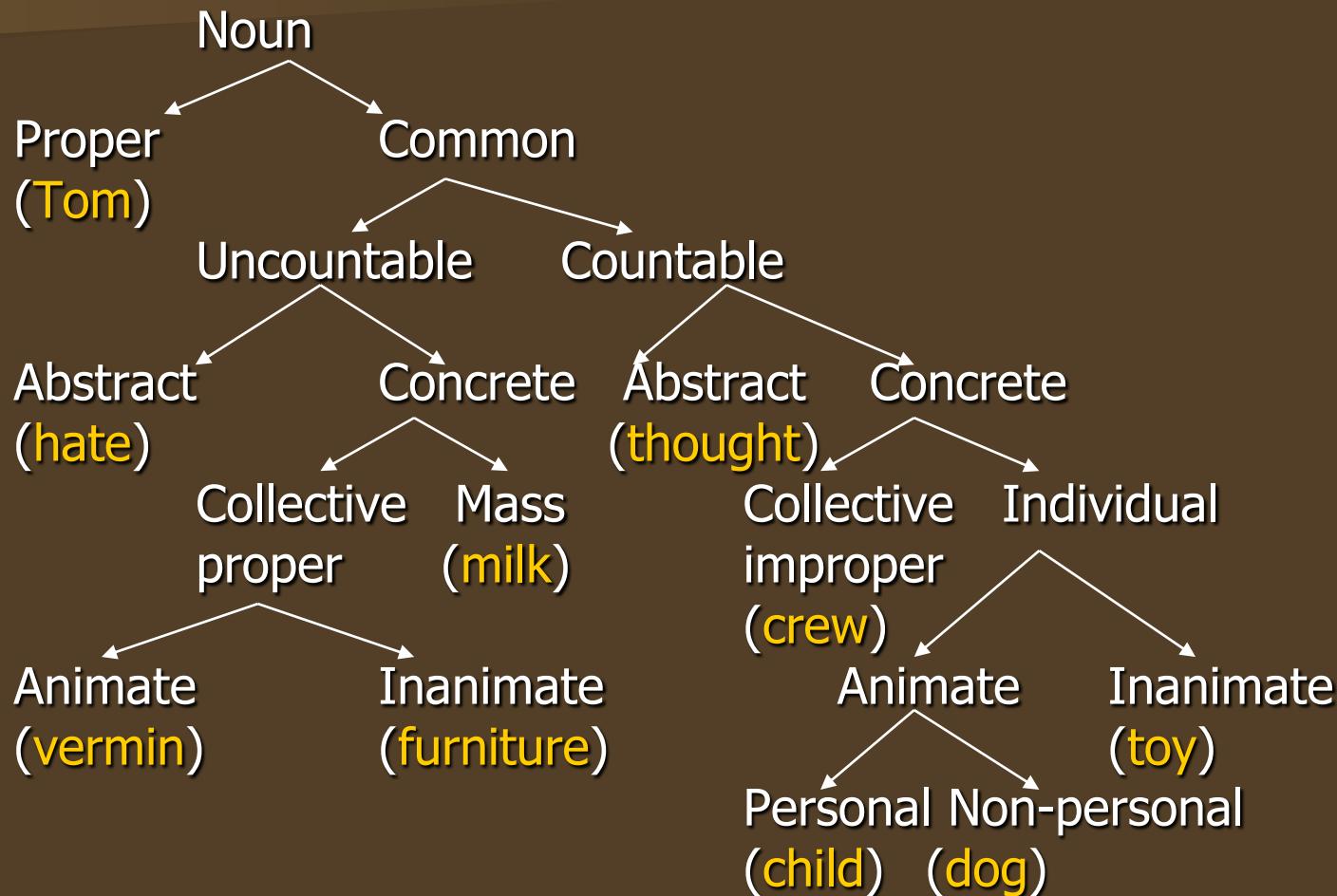
Nouns are commonly thought of as "naming" words, and specifically as the names of "people, places, or things".

- Nouns such as John, London, and computer certainly fit this description, but the class of nouns is much broader than this.
- Nouns also denote abstract and intangible concepts such as birth, happiness, evolution, technology, management, imagination, revenge, politics, hope, cookery, sport, literacy....

# Characteristics of Nouns

Semantic characteristics of a noun	Syntactic characteristics of a noun	Morphological characteristics of a noun
Denotes concrete entity (e.g. <b>dog</b> ) or abstract notion (e.g. <b>idea</b> )	Functions as head of NP (e.g. <b>the girl</b> ); can in some cases function as a premodifier in a NP (e.g. <b>an oak table</b> )	Inflected for <b>number</b> (plural) and <b>case</b> (genitive)

# The noun class can be subdivided into the following semantic subclasses:



# Common and Proper Nouns

- The basic division of the noun class is into common nouns and PROPER NOUNS.
- Nouns which name specific people or places are known as proper nouns.
- They are used to denote individuals, places, oceans, institutions, etc.
- For example, John, Mary, London, France.

- Since proper nouns usually refer to something or someone unique, they do not normally take plurals.
- However, they may do so, especially when number is being specifically referred to:
- There are three Davids in my class.
- We met two Christmases ago.

- For the same reason, names of people and places are **not** normally preceded by determiners the or a/an
- though they can be in certain circumstances:
  - It's nothing like the America.
  - Remember my brother is an Einstein at maths.

# Changes in the meaning of the noun along the scale proper → common



- + proper
- +/- animate
- +/- human
- +/- female
- +/- countable
- + concrete



- + common
- - sex (neuter)
- + countable
- + concrete

# Common Nouns

- Common nouns denote classes of **similar referents** or **specific representatives** of certain classes:
- The computer is widely used nowadays.
- The computer is on the desk.

# common nouns

## countable nouns & uncountable nouns

- Some can be either count or non-count, depending on the kind of reference they have.
- Ex. I made a cake. (cake is a count noun, singular)
- However, in I like cake, the reference is less specific. It refers to "cake in general", and so cake is non-count in this sentence.

Common nouns are either **count** or  
**non-count**.

- **count nouns** can be "counted": one pen, two pens, three pens, four pens...
- **non-count nouns**: one software, \*two softwares, \*three softwares, \*four softwares...

# non-count nouns do not take a/an

Count	Non-count
a pen	*a software

- Countable nouns have two categorical forms of number – singular and plural.
- Uncountable nouns have only one form – either singular or plural.

Both countable and uncountable nouns fall into two semantic varieties – concrete and abstract.

- Concrete nouns denote material referents.  
Abstract - immaterial referents.

individual nouns

- Countable concrete nouns

collective nouns  
improper

- **Collective nouns** **improper** are treated grammatically as **countable nouns**

The class is in the room.

The classes are in the room.

- **Plurality** can also be marked by a plural pronoun:

The senior class, who had a meeting,  
decided they would have a party.

# Uncountable concrete nouns

mass nouns

collective nouns proper

- Mass nouns denote substances.



Example: Honey is good for you.

- Animate collective nouns proper + plural word forms:

Vermin were crawling all over the place.

- Inanimate collective nouns proper are treated as singular: Fruit is good for you.
- Uncountable abstract nouns are in the singular: Hate is a negative feeling.

# **the semantic and formal feature undergoing change → types of shift:**

- Proper noun → Common noun
- Common noun → Proper noun
- Countable noun → Uncountable noun
- Uncountable noun → Countable noun
- Abstract noun → Concrete noun
- Concrete noun → Abstract noun

# Countable noun → Uncountable noun

- a shift from **individual** to **generalized** or from **concrete** to **abstract (no article)**:
- *Her husband has been sent **to prison** for three years.* (the institution in general)
- *We went **by plane**.* (a form of transport)
- *The kids are still **at school**.* (the period of one's life)

# Uncountable noun → Countable noun

- **Uncountable nouns** do **not** form a plural.
- They do **not** take **the indefinite article**.

However,

- **Cheese** is a solid food made from milk.  
(generalized)
- This shop sells a range of French **cheeses**.  
(individualized)
- He was lying full length on **the grass**.  
(a common plant)
- I could see various tall flowering **grasses**.  
(particular types)

# A mass noun → a countable noun (a portion - individualized quantity):



- **Ice cream** is frozen sweet food.



- Would you like **an ice cream**?  
(one portion)

A mass word can be used by metonymy to refer to an object made from the substance:

- **Nickel** is a hard silver metal.
- **A nickel** is a coin worth five cents.
  
- She likes **cake**. (a sweet food)
- She was making a **cake** for his birthday.  
(a particular product)

Uncountable abstract nouns →  
countable concrete nouns:

- **Beauty** is the quality of being very good to look at.  
(the quality)
- She is a **beauty**. (a beautiful woman)
- I like cars and this one is a **beauty**.  
(an object characterized by the quality)
- The **beauty** of working at home is that you don't have to travel. (advantage)

# Not all uncountable nouns can undergo such semantic shifts.

- There are other means of **individualization** and **concretization of meaning**.
- One of them is the **partitive phrase**.

## Concrete nouns:

a blade of grass	a piece of cheese
a bottle of rum	a bar of chocolate
a glass of milk	a cake of soap
a mug of coffee	a packet of biscuits

## **Abstract nouns:**

a piece of music

a bit of consolation

a word of praise

an item of news

a stroke of good luck

an act of revenge

an article of news

a hint of advice

# Sometimes individualization is achieved through pairs of nouns

- **the uncountable noun** in the pair denotes **the substance**
- **the countable noun** denotes **the article made from that substance:**

wood → tree; bread → loaf