Chapter 2
Nouns

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2.i. Chapter Overview

2.i.i. Preview

The goal of this chapter is to introduce nouns as a word class, specify their linguistic properties, and identify various kinds of nouns according to their unique properties. Spelling rules for pluralized count nouns are covered at the end of the chapter.
2.1. Nouns

A noun is traditionally defined as the name of a person, place, thing, or idea. A noun can also be identified easily according to its inflectional and syntactic properties.

2.1.1. Noun Tests

1. The inflectional properties of a noun are the following:
   a. A noun can be pluralized by adding a plural morpheme {-s}, or
   b. It can be pluralized by adding a possessive morpheme {’s}
      - professor (singular) → professors (plural)
      - professor’s (possessive) → professors’ (plural possessive)
        - The professor is in her office.
        - Professors are absentminded people.
        - The professor’s cats are very cute.
2. Syntactically, the presence of an article (a, an, the) signals that a noun will follow:
   - There is a cat in the garden.
   - An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
3. Another syntactic position that is possible for nouns is after prepositions (in, on, at, for, etc), and on both sides of the possessive preposition of:
   - I live in Chicago, and I like to go for a walk by the lake every day.
   - Parts of the house need painting.
   - The skyscrapers of Chicago are very famous.

   Zifir says 2.1.1.:
   Note that other words that modify a noun, such as an adjective, may come between the article and the noun:
   - Eat an organic apple every day.
   Nouns may appear without an article:
   - Knowledge is power.
   - Cats and goats are among my favorite animals.
   - Coffee smells good.
The possessive of may be replaced by a possessive /'s/ (preferably with animate nouns, i.e., nouns that refer to living things):

- The cars of the businessman occupied too much space. → The businessman’s cars occupied too much space.

### Exercises 2.1.1. Noun Identification

**Directions:** Underline each noun in the following sentences. Test your answer by applying linguistic tests (inflectional and syntactic). Note that some sentences have multiple nouns.

**Example:** The dog is running.
- **Inflectional:** we can pluralize it: dogs or we can have it in the possessive: the dog's collar
- **Syntactic:** the word dog follows an article the

1. The marketplace of Istanbul is 550 years old.
- **Inflectional:**
- **Syntactic:**
2. The tail of the cat seemed too long.
- **Inflectional:**
- **Syntactic:**
3. The solutions to the problem were given at the end of the book.
- **Inflectional:**
- **Syntactic:**
4. I live in Chicago, but I go abroad for research in the summer.
- **Inflectional:**
- **Syntactic:**
5. Efficient fieldwork is the basis for good research.
- **Inflectional:**
- **Syntactic:**

### 2.1.2. Kinds of Nouns

**Nouns** are classified according to their unique properties. They may be *common* or *proper*, *concrete* or *abstract*, *count* or *noncount*, or *collective*. *Count nouns* are pluralized according to specific rules, or they may have special forms.

### 2.1.2.1. Common vs. Proper Nouns

- **Common nouns** refer to ordinary entities: carpet, soda, wolves. **Proper nouns** refer to individual or unique entities: Northern Illinois University, Kurt Vonnegut, Noam Chomsky

The initial letter of a proper noun is always capitalized. The initial letter of a common noun is capitalized only when it appears at the beginning of a sentence.

- Oya, the dog, happily chewed on her toy antler.
A common noun may appear with an article, *a* or *the*: It is grammatical to say *a cat* or *the book* because *cat* and *book* are common nouns. It is not grammatical to say *a John* or *the London*. However, there are some contexts in which this use may be correct. For instance, one may say “*a Mr. Jones*” to disparage Mr. Jones:

- *A Mr. Jones* wanted to see you without an appointment.

Furthermore, with some geographical proper nouns, it is possible to use articles:

- *The Brooklyn Bridge, the Appalachians, the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Alps*

### Table 2.1.2.1. Common vs. Proper Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Nouns</th>
<th>Proper Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ordinary entities</td>
<td>individual unique entities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initial letter not usually capitalized</td>
<td>initial letter always capitalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can appear with an article</td>
<td>doesn’t generally appear with an article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rug</td>
<td>Troy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cheese</td>
<td>Reed College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mice</td>
<td>Jan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exercises 2.1.2.1. Common/Proper Noun Identification

**Directions**: Circle the proper nouns and underline the common nouns in the sentences below.

**Example**: Some people prefer to drink carbonated drinks, but Serdar drinks only water.

1. The summer before she got her degree, Mary started swimming.
2. They claim that a successful man is one who makes more money than his family can spend.
3. Buddha recommends that everyone concentrate the mind on the present moment.
4. Mark Twain suggested that one should go to heaven for climate, hell for company.
5. According to Milton Berle, a committee is a group that keeps minutes and loses hours.

### 2.1.2.2. Concrete vs. Abstract Nouns

*Nouns* that refer to tangible entities that can be observed by the use of the senses are called **concrete nouns**.

- books, dogs, food, bicycle

Those that refer to entities that cannot be observed by the senses, and which are not tangible are called **abstract nouns**:

- hatred, desire, knowledge, power
Table 2.1.2.2. Concrete vs. Abstract Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concrete Nouns</th>
<th>Abstract Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• entities that can be observed with the senses</td>
<td>• entities which are not tangible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ candles</td>
<td>○ linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ box</td>
<td>○ love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ platypus</td>
<td>○ irony</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Exercises 2.1.2.2. Concrete/Abstract Noun Identification

Directions: Circle the concrete nouns and underline the abstract nouns in the sentences below.

Example: Fans of Pink Floyd love its music and ideas.

1. Pessimism is more common among older generations.  
2. Woody Allen says that he is not afraid of death, but he just doesn’t want to be there when it happens.  
3. Nobody supported him in his quest for perfection.  
4. The pursuit of happiness is a human right.  
5. I have had three cupcakes for breakfast, and I feel guilty but happy.

2.1.2.3. Count vs. Noncount Nouns

We have already noted that nouns can be pluralized, and we used pluralizing as one of the tests to identify nouns. Nouns that can be pluralized are called count nouns. Count nouns refer to things that can be divided into smaller units and counted.

- cat, hand, coat, iguana, course, president

Singular count nouns can be preceded by:

- this, that
- every, each, either, neither
- a(n), the

Plural count nouns can be preceded by:

- these, those
- some, any, enough
- No article (Ø = zero article)

Some nouns cannot be pluralized because they are noncount, i.e., uncountable. Noncount nouns refer to things that are regarded as wholes that cannot be divided into parts. They usually refer to abstract and mass or collective nouns. Mass nouns are nouns that cannot be quantified; therefore, they cannot be pluralized.

- Liquids, gases
  ○ water, oxygen, oil
- Names of languages
  ○ English, Turkish, Albanian

Zifir says 2.1.2.3.:

- Proper nouns may or may not be pluralized depending on what the proper noun refers to:
  - Some geographical proper nouns may be pluralized because they refer to multiple entities:
    ○ The Appalachians
  - Some proper nouns refer to a single individual or entity and may not be pluralized:
    ○ The Grant Park
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- **Abstract nouns**
  - courage, love, pride, pleasure, weather

**Noncount nouns** are considered singular because they cannot be pluralized. They can be preceded by:

- some, any, enough, this, that, much as in much harm; a little harm; little harm and the definite article the:
  - the experience, the courage (of someone)

They cannot be preceded by:

- these, those, ever, each, either, or neither

Following are some examples of mass nouns:

- wood, milk, dancing, significance, love, flour, hair, cooking, air, steel

### Table 2.1.2.3. Count vs. Noncount Nouns

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count Nouns</th>
<th>Noncount Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• can be divided into smaller parts</td>
<td>• cannot be divided into smaller parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• can be preceded by words like this, that, every, each, either, neither, or no article at all</td>
<td>• can be preceded by words like some, any, enough, this, that, much, a/an, the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• rug</td>
<td>• work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• cheese</td>
<td>• abstraction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• mice</td>
<td>• Chinese</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Exercises 2.1.2.3. Count/Noncount Noun Identification

**Directions:** Circle the noncount nouns and underline the count nouns.

**Example:** The student drank water and ate dates.

1. Oscar Wilde once said that we should always forgive our enemies because nothing annoys them so much.
2. When you do not want to work, start thinking about the benefits of relaxation.
3. My hair looks better when I do not comb it.
4. In scientific research, reliability of sources is very important.
5. The best pets are those you can take care of without help.

### 2.1.2.3.1. Pluralization Rules

Only **count nouns** can be pluralized. The pluralization of **nouns** is more complicated than simply adding the plural form [-s]. There are several ways to **pluralize nouns** in English.

1. The most common form of pluralization consists of adding [-s] to the noun:
   - cat → cats
   - dog → dogs
   - goat → goats

**Zifir says 2.1.2.3.1.a.:**
- If there is another vowel before o, we simply add [-s]:
  - Stereo → stereos
2. A variation of the most common form: **Add [-es]:**
   - The reason we add [-es] **instead of [-s]** to some nouns is that the last letter/sound of these words are too similar to [-s], and we make it easier to distinguish the **plural form** from the **singular** by adding [-es]. For instance, if we simply **add an [-s]** to pluralize the noun bus and come up with buss, nobody who hears this word would understand that it is plural.
   - box → boxes
   - glass → glasses
   - church → churches
   - We add [-es] to nouns that end in an o:
     - Tomato → tomatoes
   - If the word ends in f or fe, change the f to /v/ and add [-es]:
     - knife → knives
     - elf → elves
   - If the word ends in y and there is another consonant preceding it, then we change the y to i and add [-es]
     - baby → babies
   - **Irregular nouns**: some nouns *either have a different form in the plural* or do not change in their plural form:
     - man → men
     - child → children
     - goose → geese
     - sheep → sheep
   - Words borrowed from Latin or Greek keep their original plural forms:
     - alumnus → alumni
     - medium → media
     - focus → foci
     - index → indices
   - Some nouns look plural but they are singular:
     - news
     - measles
     - linguistics
   - Some nouns are always used in the plural:
     - pants
     - eye-glasses
     - clothes
     - thanks
     - species
     - series
   - In compound nouns, the first noun is pluralized:
     - mother-in-law → mothers-in-law
     - brother-in-arms → brothers-in-arms

**Exercises 2.1.2.3.1. Pluralization Rules**

**Directions:** Write the plural form of the noun in parentheses ( ).

**Example:** Some women were burned in Salem because people thought they were *(witch) _ witches________.*
1. He eats (potato) ________________ every day and claims to have eaten vegetables.
2. Those who sacrifice their dreams for their children are true (hero) ________________
3. (Donkey) ________________ are well-known for their beautiful eyes and velvet-like ears.
4. There are more (woman) ________________ in the sciences now than a decade ago.
5. Some people consider (mouse) ________________ clean because they clean themselves at least five times a day.
6. The author forgot to include the (appendix) ________________ at the end of the book.
7. You should make clear what (criterion) ________________ you use in the classification of parts of speech.
8. I would like to know where my (eye-glasses) ________________ are. Do not tell me I am wearing them.
9. What (system) ________________ has the researcher used to identify the writing system as cuneiform?
10. They are used to living with (ox) ________________ in their yards.

2.1.2.4. Collective Nouns

Collective nouns refer to a number of entities (things or people) spoken of as one whole.

- team, committee, or family

We consider collective nouns singular unless we specifically refer to the members of that collective noun:

- Your team is lazy! vs. The members of your team are lazy!

Groups of animals are given special names when used as collectives:

- herd of antelopes
- flight of bees
- army of ants
- culture of bacteria
- pack of hounds
- sloth of bears
- clan of hyenas
- flock of birds
- colony of badgers
- murder of crows

Exercises 2.1.2.a. Noun Type Identification

Directions: In the following sentences, underline the nouns and identify their types. If the type is common, write C above the noun; if the type is proper, write P above the noun; if the type is concrete, write Cn above the noun; if the type is abstract, write A above the noun; if the type is count, write + above the noun; if the type is noncount, write - above the noun. Write none if there are no nouns. Note: Nouns can fall into multiple categories.

Example: When the crowd went to see Fiddler on the Roof, they sang along with the songs.

1. Very few students prefer to study linguistics these days because it is not easy to find jobs in this field.

2. You have to follow your heart in making a career decision.
3. I could have been a veterinarian, but I studied statistics instead.

4. My older cat, Kibo, loves his garlic pills, which I give him to control his blood pressure.

5. There is a pet waiting for you in some shelter.

6. Everyone has to understand the significance of preventing global warming.

7. Sustainable farming is a viable goal.

8. Administrators spend too much time on committee work.

9. Everyone has his/her own way of cooking rice.

10. Stray dogs prefer to hunt at night and sleep during the day.

**Exercises 2.1.2.b. Noun Type Identification**

**Directions:** Identify the underlined nouns according to their type.

**Example:** Yoda is my favorite hero of *The Star Wars*.

**Kind of noun:** proper, concrete, noncount noun

- My students work very hard.
  **Kind of noun:**

- Enthusiasm is what the employers are looking for in the candidate.
  **Kind of noun:**

- The documentary is about a pack of mules in the wild.
  **Kind of noun:**

- You hair looks different today.
  **Kind of noun:**

- All of my beliefs come from years of thought.
  **Kind of noun:**

- I have an eighty-nine year old neighbor who exercises every day.
  **Kind of noun:**

- Classical music enthusiasts fill Grant Park in the summer.
  **Kind of noun:**

- I was surprised to see Audrey at one of the Grant Park concerts this summer.
Chapter 2: Nouns

Kind of noun:

- The Alps are famous for their ski resorts.

Kind of noun:

- Wealth may not be important to those who have everything.

Kind of noun:

2.1.3. Syntactic Properties of Nouns

Nouns are found in specific locations in a sentence. The syntactic function of a noun is determined by its location(s). We will look into these locations and functions more closely in Chapter 7 on noun phrases. For the time being, let us quickly go over some of the locations and functions of nouns in a sentence.

A noun can appear:

- at the beginning of a sentence, functioning as the subject of the sentence.
  - Rats clean themselves at least five times a day.
- after the verb, functioning as the direct object of the verb.
  - Some people love mice, although most do not.
- after the verb, functioning as the indirect object of the verb.
  - The company gave its representatives samples of their products.
- after a preposition, functioning as the object of the preposition.
  - Everyone expects to receive a gift for Christmas.
- after a linking verb, functioning as a subject complement or predicate nominal.
  - After she ate and rested, she became an angel.
- after a direct object, functioning as an object complement.
  - We call it kismet.

Chapter 2 Cumulative Application

Directions: Underline the nouns in the following paragraph and specify the noun type involved. If the type is common, write C above the noun; if the type is proper, write P above the noun; if the type is concrete, write Cn above the noun; if the type is abstract, write A above the noun; if the type is count, write + above the noun; if the type is noncount, write - above the noun; and if the type is collective, write Co above the noun. Note: Nouns can fall into multiple categories.

C, A, + C, Cn, + C, A, +

Example: Nouns are found in specific locations in a sentence.

The syntactic function of a noun is determined by its location(s). We will look into these locations and functions more closely in Chapter 7 on phrases. Most people have difficulty in learning the syntactic criteria used in identifying nouns; therefore, it is important to review the relevant section of the chapter before taking a quiz.
on nouns. Another challenge in studying nouns is remembering that collective nouns are actually singular. For instance, in the sentence “A colony of badgers is here,” the subject is actually singular because the basic subject, *colony*, is a collective noun and it is singular.

### Appendix – Noun Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nouns</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>common</strong></td>
<td>ordinary entities</td>
<td>Job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>initial letter is not usually <em>capitalized</em></td>
<td>John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>can appear with an <em>article</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>proper</strong></td>
<td>individual unique entities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>initial letter is always <em>capitalized</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>doesn’t generally appear with an <em>article</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>concrete</strong></td>
<td>entities that can be observed with the senses</td>
<td>cupcake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>abstract</strong></td>
<td>entities which are not tangible</td>
<td>perfection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>count</strong></td>
<td>can be divided into smaller parts</td>
<td>dates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>can be preceded by words like <em>this, that, every, each, either, neither,</em> or no <em>article</em> at all</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>noncount</strong></td>
<td>cannot be divided into smaller parts</td>
<td>water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>can be preceded by words like <em>some, any, enough, this, that, much, a/an, the</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cannot be preceded by <em>these, those, ever, each, either,</em> or <em>neither</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>collective</strong></td>
<td>a group of individual entities</td>
<td>flight of bees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summary Points for Chapter 2: Nouns

- Nouns are names of a person, thing, place or idea.
- Nouns can be identified according to the inflection they allow, such as pluralization or possession.
- Nouns can also be identified according to their places in the sentence or in the phrase: following an article or an adjective; at the beginning of a sentence; after the verb; after a preposition.
- Nouns can also be identified according to their functions in the sentence: as the subject of the sentence; as the direct object of the verb; as the object of a preposition.
- Nouns may be common or proper; count or noncount; abstract or concrete; or collective.
- The spelling of the plural form of a noun may change according to the final sound or letter of the noun.
- Count nouns may have special forms in the plural or they may not change their form at all.
- Nouns may occur in various locations in a sentence and function as subjects, direct/indirect objects of verbs, objects of prepositions, subject complements, and object complements.
Chapter 2 Review

Directions: Using the vocabulary from the chapter, fill in the crossword.

Across
1. Nouns that refer to living things
3. Nouns that are a number of entities (things or people) spoken of as one whole
6. The name of a person, place or thing
7. Nouns that cannot be quantified
8. Nouns that are regarded as wholes that cannot be divided into parts
9. Nouns that are individual or unique entities
10. Nouns that can be pluralized and refer to things that can be divided into smaller units and counted

Down
2. Nouns that either have a different plural form or do not change in their plural form
3. Nouns that are ordinary entities
4. Nouns that refer to entities that cannot be observed by the senses, and which are not tangible
5. Nouns that refer to tangible entities that can be observed by the use of the senses

Answer Key for Chapter 2 Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Across</th>
<th>Down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>animate</td>
<td>irregular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>collective</td>
<td>common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun</td>
<td>abstract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mass</td>
<td>concrete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noncount</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>proper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More To Do with Grammar: Chapter 2

**Linguists:**

- **Gerunds** are names of events, and they **function as nouns**. They are categorized as **mass nouns** because they are **always singular** and refer only to a single event.
  - *Walking* is a good exercise.
  - *Cooking* is therapeutic.
- For some grammarians, **collective nouns** may be treated as **plural**. This is one of the differences between British and American English. **Collective nouns** are **personal** when they are treated as **plural**:
  - It is this *committee* who make decisions on those matters.
- They are **non-personal** when they are treated as **singular**:
  - It is this *committee* which makes decisions on these matters.

**Educators:**

- Good exercises in the classroom would be the following:
  - Charades is a word guessing game that students love.
  - Write all types of **nouns** including **gerunds** that **function as nouns** on cards.
  - Divide students into two groups and have them pick cards and act the meanings out or draw their references on the board for the members of their group to identify.
  - They should identify both the **noun** and its type to get points.
  - The group with the highest score wins.