

THE MAJOR PARTS OF SPEECH

BY

Dr. Martina C. Uche

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Department of English Language and Literature

Faculty of Arts

Introduction

To be grammatically complete, a group of words must belong to one or more grammatical categories called parts of speech. These parts of speech are nouns, verbs, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, and conjunction. The above mentioned parts of speech are divided into two: the major and minor parts of speech. In this course, we are going to be concentrating on the major parts of speech which are only four in number: nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives. The major parts of speech are open-ended which means, they have unlimited membership. The membership of this class can easily be extended as the vocabulary of the language expands to accommodate new objects, ideas and experiences. Many English words regularly function as more than one part of speech. Let us take the word bank for example: when you put your money in a bank, bank here serves as a noun used to refer to a place where people deposit money. The rain banked the soil. Bank here serves as a verb used to bounce off of something. From the example given, we can infer that a word may be said to belong to a particular category depending on the grammatical function of that word.

Nouns: When you choose exact nouns, you make your writing clear and precise.

Definition

Nouns name persons (Victor, Susan), animals (dog, sheep), places (market, schools), things (book, bag), and concepts (Wisdom, happiness), days of the week (Monday, Wednesday), Months of the year (June, May).

Types of Nouns

We have different types of nouns. They are Proper nouns, common nouns, concrete nouns, abstract nouns, collective nouns, countable and uncountable nouns.

Proper Nouns and Examples

Proper nouns name specific persons, (Charity, Peter), animals, (Tiger, Lion) places, (Lagos, Abuja) titles, (Deacon, Archbishop) days of the week, (Tuesday, Friday), months of the year, (May, July), festivals, (Christmas, Easter), cities, (Enugu, Lokoja), countries, (Nigeria, Togo), Lakes, (lake Victoria, Lake Chad), Mountains, (Mount Everest, Mount Horeb), institutions (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Nigeria Airways). They have their initial letters written in capital letters anywhere they appear in a sentence.

Common Nouns and Examples

These are general names for persons, (boy, lady), animals, (bird, cat), places, (town, school) and things (ruler, table) that share the same characteristics. They can only start with capital letter when they begin a sentence. Example: Dogs are domestic animals. I saw a dog barking at the uncompleted building. This is just the opposite of the proper noun because anywhere a proper noun occurs in a sentence, it begins with a capital letter but common nouns begin with a capital letter only when it starts a sentence.

Concrete Nouns and Examples

Concrete nouns are nouns that refer to objects that can be seen physically. Examples: stone, hall, house, wall, building.

Abstract Nouns and Examples

The nouns here stand for ideas and concepts which cannot be seen. Examples are happiness, strength, joy, sadness, pain, fear.

Collective Nouns and Examples

A collective noun is a name that is used to refer to a group of things. It names groups of individuals as if they were one individual. Examples are: class of pupils, an army of soldiers, a team of players, a herd of cattle, a convoy, a Board of directors.

Countable Nouns and Examples

Countable nouns name anything that can be counted. It constitutes notions of singular and plural. Examples are: books, ruler, pencil, oranges, and apples.

Uncountable nouns and Examples

An uncountable noun is the direct opposite of countable noun, they are those nouns that cannot be counted. Examples are: water, oil, kerosene, air and sand. They always take a singular verb in a sentence.

Formation of Plural Nouns

In nouns, we have singular and plural

A singular noun names one person, place, thing, or idea. A plural noun names more than one. The chart below shows how to form plural nouns.

Singular Noun	To Form Plural	Examples
Most singular nouns	Add s	Book books
Nouns ending in s, ss, x, ch, sh	Add es	Bus buses dress dresses
Nouns ending in a consonant and y	Change y to i and add es	Lorry lorries, sky skies
Nouns ending in a vowel and y	Add s	Day days turkey turkeys
Nouns ending in f or fe	Most add s; some change f to v and add es	Chief chiefs, leaf leaves
Nouns ending in vowel and o	Add s	Rodeo rodeos, studio studios
Nouns ending in a consonant and o	Most add es; some add s	Echo echoes banjo banjos
Some irregular nouns	Change their spelling	Man men, tooth teeth
A few irregular nouns	Keep the same spelling	Sheep, deer,

Nouns have special forms to show “ownership, or possession” (McCALLUM, et al., 78). Possessive nouns are nouns that name who or what has or owns something. See the chart below

Noun	To form possessive	Examples
Most singular nouns	Add an apostrophe (‘) and s (‘s)	Jean has a new Igbo book Jean’s new Igbo book, John also has a new shirt. John’s shirt.
Plural nouns ending in s	Add only an apostrophe (‘)	The boys have a guidebook. The boys’ guidebook.
Plural nouns not ending in s	Add an apostrophe (‘) and add s (‘s)	The men own cameras. Two men’s.

Remember that possessive nouns have apostrophes. Plural nouns do not.

Functions of Nouns

Generally, nouns perform some functions. The functions are:

1. As a subject of a sentence

Maria likes fish. Soldiers patrol the top road.

2. As object of a verb

She gave her an umbrella. Maria likes fish.

3. Noun as complement of a subject

David is a goalkeeper. Schools are goldmines.

4. Noun as complement of an object

We call the bad boy Ogidi. They crowned him king.

5. Noun as complement of a preposition

I take great delight in sports. Naturally, all human beings sleep at night.

6. Noun in Apposition

An appositive is a word or group of words that follows a noun. It identifies or explains the noun it follows. Examples:

China’s first ruler, an emperor, is worried. Their leader, a great warrior, conquers China.

Gender

Some nouns are gender neutral. E.g. table, fruit, stone, house while other nouns are gender specific. E.g. mother, father, bachelor, spinster.

Verbs: You can use verbs in your writing to make it lively and vivid. Choosing the correct verb is very important.

Definition

An action verb is a word that expresses action. It tells what the subject of the sentence does. Verbs express many of the actions people perform every day. Example: He unwrapped his new computer. The word unwrapped is the verb in the sentence which tells us what the subject 'He' does. Mary corrects her errors immediately. In this sentence, Mary is the subject while corrects is the verb which tells us about what Mary did.

Types of Verbs

1. Transitive and Intransitive Verbs

A verb that takes a direct object is called a transitive verb. Example: Kate bought a car. Frank accepted the invitation. An intransitive verb has no direct object. Example: Victor paints well. We work tirelessly.

2. Finite and Non-Finite Verbs

A finite verb is so called because it is limited to a subject with which it agrees in tense and number. E.g. I cook rice often. We cooked rice yesterday. The verbs in the sentences above are all finite. A Non-finite verb is that which does not have a full verb stature, and so cannot convey a meaning in a sentence. E.g. to steal, stolen, stealing, we cannot say "I to steal or I stealing". To convey the right meaning, the verb must be in a particular tense. However, two of these – "stealing and stolen can be helped by auxiliary verbs to become finite". Example: she is stealing your pen. He has stolen my pen.

3. Regular and Irregular Verbs

Regular verbs form the past and the past participle by adding 'd' and 'ed'. E.g. cook cooked, look looked and so on. When a regular verb ends with a consonant preceded by 'y' the y will be changed i before adding ed. When a one-syllable verb ends with a consonant preceded by a vowel, double the consonant before adding ed. E. g. try tried, drop dropped. Irregular verbs on the other hand have various forms other than 'd' and 'ed'. In fact, they are called irregular verbs because there is no regular pattern of the formation of their past tense and past participle. Examples: come came come, swim, swam swum, grind, ground, ground, cut cut cut and so on.

4. Phrasal verbs

Verbs are sometimes made up of several words. For example: Our class will report on the Old West. A verb that contains more than one word is called a phrasal verb. A phrasal verb is a combination of a simple verb with an adverb or a preposition (or sometimes both) to form a meaning that is different from that of the simple verb. The last word in a verb

phrase is the main verb, all the other words are helping verbs. Here are some common helping verbs.

Common Helping Verbs					
have	am	be	do	will	can
has	are	being	does	would	could
had	is	been	did	shall	may
	was			should	might
	were				must

Note: some verbs can be used as both main verbs and helping verbs. The following are main verbs if they stand alone or if they come last in a verb phrase.

Main Verb: Buffalo Bill had many skills as a scout.

Helping Verb: Buffalo Bill had gained fame as a scout.

Note: A verb phrase consists of a main verb and all of its helping verbs. The main verb is the last in a verb phrase. A helping verb helps the main verb to show an action or make a statement.

5. Auxiliary Verbs

Auxiliary verbs are helping verbs. They help the lexical verbs to complete their tenses. Auxiliary verbs precede the lexical/main verbs. There are two types of auxiliary verbs: primary and modal.

Primary auxiliaries are only three: be, do and have, although they have variants.

Be and its variants

Singular of the verb "to be" I, you, he, she, it	Present Tense	Past Tense
	Am	was
	Are	were
	Is	was

Plural of the verb "to be" we, you, they	are	were
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Do and its variants

Singular of the Verb "do" I, you, he, she, it,	do	did
	do	did

	does	did
Plural of the verb “do” we, you, they	do	did
Have and its variants		
Singular of the verb “have” I, you, he, she, it	have	had
	have	had
	has	had
Plural of the verb “have” we, you, they	have	had

Some examples are:

“be”

He is dancing.

They are sitting.

We are moving.

“do”

I do sweep regularly.

She does come here often.

We did see him beating the girl.

“have”

I have seen the man.

He has done it.

They had seen him before you.

Modal auxiliaries, on the other hand, “are numerous in number” (Akano et al., 17) Examples are: can, could, may, might, shall, should, will, would, must, ought to, used to, need, dare. These modal auxiliaries depict ability, requests for permission, possibility, probability, willingness, intention, insistence, obligation, expectation, polite request, condition and so on.

Subject-verb agreement

Verbs must agree with their subjects.

A singular subject takes a singular verb. E.g. Prisca plays soccer. Dora skates well.

A plural subject takes a plural verb. E.g. The girls play soccer. Her friends skate well.

Adjectives add flavor and detail to your writing.

Adjectives: Definition, Types, Degrees and Order

Definition

Adjective modifies, qualifies, or describes, a noun or a pronoun. They can be formed from other words by adding suffixes “able”, “ish” and so on. Examples: read readable, devil devilish, gold golden. Adjectives are also used for comparison. E.g. Maria is taller than Janet.

Types of Adjectives

Descriptive Adjectives: This kind of adjective is used to describe nouns or pronouns. They give us more information about the nouns and pronouns under discussion. E.g. She is a good girl. The short boy is very shy. The underlined words are adjectives that are used to describe the kind of girl and boy.

Possessive Adjectives: These adjectives show ownership. E.g. my, his, her, their and so on. Their house is painted green. The house is hers. The underlined words are adjectives.

Numerical Adjectives: These adjectives specify number. E.g. Three, four, fifth, sixth. Three girls came to school. The sixth position is taken.

Interrogative Adjectives: This type of adjective is used to ask questions. E.g. which, what, whose and so on. Which cow was killed yesterday? What story did you read?

Demonstrative Adjectives: Adjectives that tell which one are called demonstrative adjectives. They point out specific persons or things. They are only four in number: this, these, that, those. E.g. This planet is nearer to the sun than that star. These telescopes are more powerful than those telescopes. This and these point out nearby people or things. That and those point out people or things that are more distant.

Comparison of Adjectives

Comparison of adjectives shows the various forms an adjective can assume to show degree of quality, superiority or quantity. Adjectives have three degrees of comparisons: positive, comparative and superlative degrees. The positive degree is used when the adjective concerns one object only. In this case, the idea of comparison does not come in. E.g. a kind woman, a foolish plan, a red car.

In comparative degree, we compare two things. The comparative is formed by adding “er” to most one-syllabled and some two-syllabled adjectives. E.g. thin, thinner long, longer, short shorter, heavy heavier E.g. The lion is heavier than the zebra.

We also use the superlative form of the adjective to compare more than two things. The superlative is usually formed by adding “est” tall, taller, tallest, hot, hotter hottest, big, bigger, biggest. E.g. The elephant is the heaviest animal in the jungle. When you add “er” and “est” to form the comparative and superlative, the spelling of an adjective may change. However, some adjectives have different forms for the comparative and superlative forms. E.g. little, less, least, many, more, most, bad, worse, worst, good, better, best, Far, further, farthest.

Adjective Positions

When there are more than one adjectives in a sentence, they must follow a certain order.

First position (Determiner): the, a, some, my, his

Second position (Adjectives of size): big, huge, small, large

Third position (Adjectives of weight): heavy, light

Fourth position (General adjectives): happy, hope, honest

Fifth position (Adjectives of age): young, new, old

Sixth position (Adjectives of shape): curved, circle, round

Seventh position (Adjectives of colour): white, red, green

Eighth position (Adjectives of description): Nigerian, achaic, Arabian

Ninth position (Adjectives ending with ing or ed) e.g reading, kicked. It is not usual to use more than three or four adjectives at a time.

Adverbs add detail to your writing by telling how, where, when, and to what extent something is done.

Adverb: Definition and Types

Definition

An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb in a sentence. Adverbs that modify verbs may tell how, where, when, or to what extent about the verb. Many adverbs end in “ly”. An adverb that modifies a verb may be placed before the verb, after the verb, or at the very beginning of a sentence. How: Maria spoke slowly. Where: She stood there. When: Then she sat in a chair. To what extent: She completely convinced us. Many adverbs modify verbs. Adverbs can tell how, where, when or to what extent about a verb.

Adverbs can also modify adjectives or other adverbs. Adverbs that modify adjectives answer the questions how and to what extent. Adverb modifying an adjective: Highway safety is a very serious problem, This article states the facts very strongly. Adverb modifying an adverb: We should think about it extremely carefully. We don't drive too fast

Types of Adverbs

There are different types of adverbs.

1. Adverbs of Time (these answer the question – when?) E.g. He came here yesterday. She called last night.
2. Adverbs of Place (they answer the question – where?) E.g. The instruction was given at the market. He was caught in the church.
3. Adverbs of Frequency (answer the question – How often?) E.g. Victor visits them often. He goes to school everyday.
4. Adverbs of Manner (answer the question – How?) E.g. She hurriedly washed the plates. Ade writes neatly.
5. Adverb of reason (answer the question - why? an action took place) E.g. She visited the woman in order to pray for her. The man kicked the bucket because of illness.
6. Adverb of purpose tells us the purpose of an action E.g. He left his home early to be the first to be attended to. The pastor called him to find out the truth.

Adverbs that Compare

The comparative form of an adverb compares two actions. The superlative form compares more than two actions. For example: In the debate, Julie spoke longer than Carla. Tanya spoke the longest of all. Add er or est to all adverbs with one syllable and to some adverbs with two syllables. Use more, or most with most adverbs with two syllables and with all adverbs with more than two syllables. Example:

Adverb	Comparative	Superlative
Long	Longer	Longest
Early	Earlier	Earliest
Well	Better	Best
Badly	Worse	Worst
Much	More	Most

Exercises

1. Define Noun. List and explain types of nouns. Give the plural forms of the following words: luggage, information, church, stone, lorry, city, ox, knife, chief, axis. List and explain three functions of noun.
2. Differentiate between transitive and intransitive verbs, finite and non-finite verbs, phrasal verbs. Write out five phrasal verbs and use them in sentences. Verbs must agree with their subjects. If this is true, give two examples of sentences with singular subjects and singular verbs and two sentences with plural subjects and plural verbs.
3. Comparison of adjectives shows the various forms an adjective can assume to show degree of quality, superiority or quantity. Adjectives have three degrees of comparisons: positive, comparative and superlative degrees. The positive degree is used when the ----- . In this when we compare two things, we add ____ . Give examples in words and use the words to form sentences. Explain the following adjectives and give examples. Descriptive adjectives, interrogative adjectives, Demonstrative adjectives.
4. write on the following types of adverbs and give examples: adverb of manner, adverb of time, adverb of place. Give the comparative and superlative of the following adverbs: soon, fast, often, clearly, slowly, badly, little, much, well, quick. Underline the adverbs in the following sentences and say what types they are:
 - i. Our examination starts tomorrow.
 - ii. We are eating here.
 - iii. She speaks beautifully.
 - iv. She did the work badly.
 - v. They have been working since yesterday.

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