

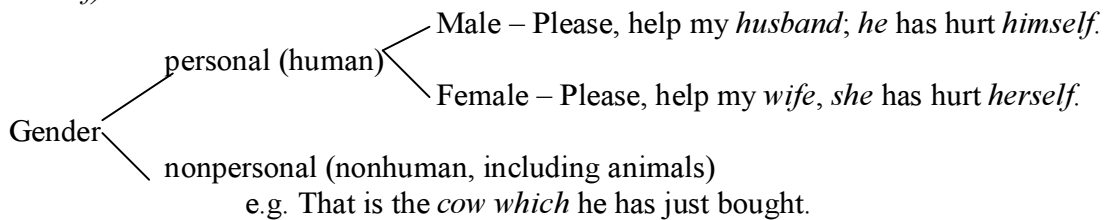
SEMINAR 6B – NOUNS – GENDER and CASE

Gender: nouns with personal reference (male, female, dual, common gender, collective nouns), nouns referring to animals and inanimates

Case: genitive v. the of-construction, genitive meanings

GENDER

In English gender is not a feature of nouns themselves, it rather relates directly to the meanings of nouns with particular reference to biological sex. Unlike many other languages in English nouns, determiners and adjectives have no inflectionally-marked gender. Gender in English may be described as ‘notional’ or ‘covert’ whereas in other languages gender is ‘grammatical’ or ‘overt’. Gender is important for selection of reference pronouns – relative (*who, which*), personal (*he, she, it*) and reflexive (*himself, herself*)



There is a rather complex pattern of gender classes in English (see the table below)

	gender	example	pronouns	
animate	male	boy	who, he	
	female	girl	who, she	
	dual	doctor	who, he / she	
	common		baby	who, he / she / it
				which, it
	collective		family	which, it
				who, they
	nonpersonal (animals)	familiar animal: (= higher)	bull	which, he / it
				(who), he
		female	cow	which, she / it
dual		cat	(who), she	
inanimate	(lower)	less familiar animal	weasel	
			window	which, he / she / it
			which, it / he (she)	
			which, it	

I. NOUNS WITH PERSONAL REFERENCE

1) Personal male / female nouns

- male nouns have pronoun coreference with *who – he*
- female nouns have pronoun coreference with *who – she*

they are:

a) morphologically unmarked for gender

e.g. <i>bachelor – spinster</i>	<i>king - queen</i>
<i>father – mother</i>	<i>monk - nun</i>
<i>uncle – aunt</i>	<i>nephew - niece</i>
<i>boy – girl</i>	<i>brother - sister</i>
<i>lad - lass</i>	

b) morphologically marked for gender (the male noun takes an ending to form a female noun; except widower and bridegroom – the base is female and the male noun is marked)

e.g. <i>host – hostess</i>	<i>hero - heroine</i>
<i>prince – princess</i>	<i>waiter - waitress</i>
<i>steward – stewardess</i>	<i>duke - duchess</i>
<i>god – goddess</i>	<i>usher - usherette</i>
<i>count – countess</i>	<i>emperor - empress</i>
<i>heir - heiress</i>	

Some male / female pairs denoting family relationship have dual gender terms:

e.g. *parent – father, mother* *sibling – brother, sister*

In order to avoid sexual bias in language, there have been attempts (esp. in AmE) to introduce sex-neutral forms:

e.g. **s / he** for both he and she
wo / man for both man and woman = these are only written forms

or: *firefighter* for fireman
chairperson for chairman
spokesperson for spokesman
mail carrier for mailman
flight attendant for air hostess

2) Personal dual gender

- they can be male or female in reference as required (*he* or *she* coreference)

e.g. *librarian* *friend* *typist*
teacher *doctor* *writer*
student *guest* *professor*
cook *singer*

- if it is felt desirable to give information on the sex of the person, a gender marker may be added:

e.g. *male student* / *female student*
male readers / *female readers*

a nurse (typically woman) – *a male nurse*
an engineer (typically man) – *a woman engineer*

3) Common gender

- nouns such as *baby*, *infant*, *child* – refer to male (*he*) or female (*she*), but they can also be used as nonpersonal
- when the gender is irrelevant we can use the neuter pronoun *it*

e.g. *A child* learns to speak the language of *its* environment.
The baby lost *its* parents when *it* was three weeks old.

4) Collective nouns

- they can take singular or plural pronouns and both relatives (*who* or *which*)
- the sex of the persons is irrelevant:

e.g. The *committee*, *which* met soon after *it* was appointed, had difficulty in agreeing *its* method of procedure.

- the verb may be singular or plural:

e.g. The *committee has* met and *it has* rejected the proposal.
The *committee have* met and *they have* rejected the proposal.

→ *sg* stresses the nonpersonal collectivity of the group
pl stressed the personal individuality within the group

Other collective nouns: *army, board, class, commission, corporation, crew, enemy, federation, gang, group, jury, opposition, staff, association, cast, club, community, council, crowd, generation, majority, team, audience, college, company, department, family, government, institute, university*

Some occur in the singular only with 'the':

<i>e.g. the aristocracy</i>	<i>the public</i>
<i>the clergy</i>	<i>the press</i>
<i>the elite</i>	<i>the laity</i>
<i>the church</i>	<i>the intelligentsia</i>
<i>the gentry</i>	

Some are proper names: *the Congress, Parliament, the United Nations*

II. NOUNS REFERRING TO ANIMALS AND INANIMATES

- familiar ('higher animals') – those in which human society takes a special interest, domestic pets, etc. – coreference *which, he / she / it*

<i>e.g. buck – doe</i>	<i>tiger – tigress</i>
<i>bull – cow</i>	<i>lion - lioness</i>
<i>gander – goose</i>	<i>stallion - mare</i>

This is the *bull which* has a brand mark on *his /its* back.

- unfamiliar ('lower animals') - majority of creatures in the animate world

e.g. beetle, butterfly, snake, toad, etc. - it

- inanimate nouns – *box, idea, car – it, which*


- 'he' and 'she' are likely to be used for animals with which man has the closest connections (esp. domestic animals)

CASE

In English we distinguish only two cases of nouns:

- a) common – boy, boys
- b) genitive – boy's, boys' (sometimes called 'possessive' because of its main function)

In spoken form the genitive inflection – 's / s ' is identical with the regular plural, the written forms differ:

e.g. /spaɪz/ 

The **spies** were arrested.
The **spy's** companion was a woman.
The **spies'** companions were women.

!But not with irregular nouns – they preserve a number distinction:

e.g. compare: *boy's or boys'* = /boɪz/ but! *child's v. children's*

Note:

- in postmodified noun phrases, there is a difference between the plural and genitive endings – the genitive ending is added to the end of the phrase (not the head noun):

e.g. The palace was *the King of Denmark's*.
They praised *the Kings of Denmark*.

Also: e.g. *Paul and Mary's* dog
Henry the Eighth's wives

- zero genitive = identical with the regular plural; it is used with names ending in /z/ - especially foreign names, e.g. *Socrates'*

Using zero genitive we avoid repetitive or awkward combinations of sounds:

- a) with Greek names of more than one syllable which end in –s: *Euripides'* plays, *Socrates'* wife
- b) with many other names ending in /z/, pronunciation is /ɪz/: *Dickens'*, *Burns'*, *Jones'* (but also *Dickens's*, *Burns's*, *Jones's*)
- c) with fixed expressions of the form 'for sake' as in: *for goodness' sake*, *for conscience' sake*

The genitive and the of-construction

- sometimes both forms are possible with a similarity in meaning and function”

e.g. There were strong objections from *the island's inhabitants.*
- // - *the inhabitants of the island.*

- often we have to select one form, only one of the two is ‘preferred’ – appropriate:

e.g. These are *father's trousers.* (not ~~the trousers of father~~)

Let's go to *the front of the house.* (not ~~the house's front~~)

John's school (not ~~the school of John~~)

Genitive meanings

a) possessive g. e.g. *Mr Johnson's coat* (=Mr Johnson has / owns this coat)
the earth's gravity / the gravity of the earth

b) subjective g. e.g. *the boy's application* (= the boy applied for ...)
her parents' consent (=her parents consented)

but: *the decline of trade*

c) objective g. e.g. *the boy's release* (= released the boy)
the family's support (.... supports the family)

but: *a statement of the facts*

d) genitive of origin e.g. *the girl's story* (= the girl told a story)
the general's letter (= the general wrote a letter)

e) descriptive g. e.g. *children's shoes* (=the shoes are designed for children)
a women's college (= college for women)
a doctor's degree of the degree of doctor

f) genitive of measure e.g. *ten days' absence*

g) genitive of attribute e.g. *the victim's courage* (=the victim was courageous)
the party's policy or the policy of the party

h) partitive g. e.g. *the baby's eyes*
the earth's surface

Gender and the genitive

- the genitive is not used with all nouns equally
- it tends to be associated with those of animate gender (personal nouns, those referring to human beings, higher animals and collective nouns)
- geographical names take the genitive inflection when they imply human collectivity:

e.g. *China's* policy ! but not really *China's* mountains

- also: the *hotel's* occupants! but not really the *hotel's* furniture

These nouns classes frequently take the genitive:

a) personal names e.g. *Washington's* statue / *Carol's* children

b) personal nouns e.g. *the boy's* bicycle

c) animal nouns (higher animals) e.g. *the horse's* head, *the dog's* name

d) collective nouns e.g. *the nation's* resources
the company's director
the committee's decision

+ certain kinds of **inanimate** nouns (see: e, f, g below)

e) geographical names: continents – *Europe's* future
countries – *China's* people
states – *Maryland's* Senator
cities / towns – *London's* water supply
universities – *Harvard's* Department of Linguistics

f) locative nouns = denote regions, institutions, ...

e.g. *the world's* economy *the world's* best universities
the city's atmosphere *the country's* only university

g) temporal nouns

e.g. *the decade's* events *a day's* work
yesterday's paper *an hour's* delay
this year's sales *a month's* salary
today's paper *ten minutes'* walk (also: a *ten-minute* walk)
tomorrow's programme *two days'* journey (also: a *two-day* journey)
three months' salary (also: a *three-month* salary)

The grammatical status of the genitive

1) As determiner

- mostly genitives function exactly like central definite determiners:

e.g. *John's* new briefcase
my *cousin's* new house
that old *gentleman's* son

2) As modifier

- there are occasional cases where the genitive acts as a modifier
- where the genitive is used descriptively (e.g. *children's shoes* = shoes designed for ch.) – genitive functions as a modifier with a classifying role

determiner
↑
e.g. They attend a *women's* university in Kyoto.
↓
modifier

3) The independent genitive

- we omit the noun following the genitive if the reference is contextually clear

e.g. *Jennifer's* is the only face I recognize here. (=Jennifer's face)
My car is faster than *John's*.
Mary's was the prettiest dress.

- with the *of-construction* that or those usually replaces the corresponding item:

e.g. The wines of France are more expensive than *those of California*.

- when the unexpressed item refers to homes or businesses:

e.g. When I arrived at *Fred's*, I found...
My *butcher's* stays open till late on Fridays.
She's staying at my *aunt's*.

Also: for institutions: St *Paul's* (Cathedral)

4) the 'post-genitive' = double genitive

- e.g. some friends of Jim's (also: some of Jim's friends)
- that irritating habit of her father's
- several pupils of his
- a neighbour of his (also: one of his neighbours)
- a good idea of Tom's
- a friend of my sister's (also: one of my sister's friends)

Compare:

- e.g. *George's sister* is coming to stay with us. (= implies definiteness, he has 1 sister)

If it needs to be understood that George has more than one sister:

One of George's sisters... ..

A sister of George's

A play of Shakespeare's (=one of Shakespeare's plays)

Further notes:

- two genitives are also possible

e.g. *My brother's neighbour's* sister is a nurse.

- with compounds

e.g. *My sister-in-law's* father is a pilot.