



## PROBLEMS IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH NOUNS

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### Abstract

The present study attempts to analyze the problems faced by students in the acquisition of English nouns. The Classification of English nouns is as diverse and varied as English Grammar. The researcher in the present study examines how nouns are a source of confusion for students of English as second language learners. This study investigates the errors and also classifies the types of errors made by second language learners.

**Keywords:** nouns, semantic anomaly, syntactic plurality, question tags, grammatical categories.

### Introduction

The present study focuses on the analysis of the problems in learning English nouns. A noun is traditionally regarded as one of the eight parts of speech. Under this categorization of part of speech, a pronoun is considered a subpart of the noun. The importance of nouns/pronouns in the English language is self-evident. Communication in the English language is not possible without the acquisition/learning of English nouns [1.1]. That is why the study specifically focuses on analyzing morphological, semantic, syntactic and functional issues in learning English nouns. English Grammatical Categories Learning grammar empowers the learners to be conscious of the structure of a language, like its grammatical categories. If the learners study the grammar, they will comprehend and use the grammatical ideas and concepts very much easily and in a better way. The grammatical concepts are based on grammatical categories like nouns and verbs etc. Those learners who know these concepts will always have a distinct advantage over the others who do not know the accurate use of the language. Every word belongs to a class of words, and that class is called grammatical category [1.2]. There are two or more two possible values within each category. A grammatical category is also known as a grammatical feature. The different kinds of groups are covered by the term grammatical category. According to Huddleston, there are eight grammatical categories in modern English grammar [2.1]. The items are categorized on the basis of some properties; these are morphological, semantic, syntactic or functional. In numerous cases, the items of





these common categories are split into subclasses and carry partial grammatical properties. The following are the eight grammatical categories.

- 1) Noun
- 2) Verb
- 3) Adjective
- 4) Adverb
- 5) Preposition
- 6) Determinative
- 7) Coordinator
- 8) Subordinator [3.1]

For learners, it is very important to know a word's grammatical category before its meaning [3.2]. For the correct use of the word in a language, it is necessary to know the word's grammatical category. This grammatical category decides different things about the word (i) the placement of the word in the clause, e.g., in the German language, the final position in the subordinate clause is for verb while in the main clause, the verb position is second, (ii) the range of syntactic function – a clause may have a noun as a subject, but it cannot be an adjective or a preposition, (iii) that kind of word that occurs with it, like determiners with nouns, not with a preposition, (iv) that kind of morpheme which the word accept like verb inflect for tense and so on. The missing word in example (1) is a noun; the reason is that every grammatical category has its unique position in a sentence, and a noun is preceded by a determiner and also modified by an adjective. We say it is a noun just because of the grammatical properties it carries. Similarly, from the grammatical categories, we know that the word 'water' is a verb, not a noun or any other thing.

- (1) The black \_\_\_\_\_ is yours.
- (2) He waters the plant.

Nouns are words used to refer to people (boy), objects (backpack), creatures (dog), places (school), qualities (roughness), phenomena (earthquake), and abstract ideas (love) as if they were all "things". A noun is a part of speech that indicates phenomena and objects, abstract ideas, concepts, and things. In the English language, nouns can be differentiated as:

- a) Common noun- it has a group of referents:
- b) Proper noun- noun of a unique entity and has one referent:
- c) Countable- these are the common nouns that have a plural form and can be used with the numerals or quantifiers (three, four, many), and these nouns can take the indefinite article. Such nouns may be divided into: Individual – a pen – pens And collective – a team – teams (The team is present. / The teams are present.)





d) Uncountable- these nouns always take a plural or combine with quantifiers e.g. Concrete- stone, honey Abstract- illness, hate (abstract nouns refers to concept or ideas) [4.1]

In a noun phrase, the head word is always a noun or pronoun. The characteristics of the noun phrase are always defined by the head word of the phrase like case (Nominative, Accusative and possessive), gender (masculine and feminine or neuter), and number (singular and plural) (Huddleston, 1984) . The following are the examples of the noun as a head word.

[The valuable paintings] were brought by Ahmad.

[He] tried to bring it.

[The red car] that is parked in the parking.

On the basis of grammatical features, nouns can be classified into different subclasses, e.g. common nouns, proper nouns and pronouns. The subclass common noun is identified as the unmarked (default) one, while the proper nouns always act as the head word in the noun phrase.

## Materials and Methods

The term "grammatical category" means particular characteristics of a word that can affect that word/phrase [5.1]. Some of these grammatical categories, such as number, gender, and case, apply to English nouns. Grammatical Categories of Number means singular and plural forms of a noun. In number, plural is made of a singular noun by applying inflectional morphemes. There are different lexemes to which inflections are added thus become plural lexemes e.g. a lexeme "boy", by adding an inflection "s" to lexeme boy, we make plural. It is the inflectional expression of number. The functional property in which the morphological process of making plural form is different. The singular form is the lexical stem within the letter, and the plural is formed by adding suffixes. e.g. /iz/, /z/ -churches, garages and roses, /s/ - hates, mints and ropes etc. Another method of making plurals of irregular nouns is the changing of letter(s) e.g. man to men, child to children. Some other nouns have the same singular and plural called syncretism e.g., sheep and fish [6.1]. Gender is a grammatical category applied to English nouns. All the languages of the world have grammatical gender. In the world, half of the present languages, separate nouns into different classes. Most of the classes carry meaning, and some of them are linked with biological sex. That is why most of the languages have the gender categories of "masculine" and "feminine." In daily speech, "gender" is linked with the extroverted (social) differences between males and females and the biological sex. So, it seems that grammatical gender reflects natural gender in grammar. The linguistic exponent of sex has the meaning of





feminine, masculine, and neuter. Someone can't guess that noun is masculine, feminine, or neuter by its form because English noun has no such marks for gender. Semantically, these nouns can be differentiated in terms of number. There is no grammatical mark for nouns in English. Some nouns are not limited to any biological sex, e.g., teacher, friend, classmate, etc. some nouns are lexically marked, e.g., husband-wife, daughter-son, male-female. Some nouns have morphological suffixes for marking the gender, e.g., tiger – tigress, actor – actress. Usually, we add certain words like she, he lady, male, girl and boy, etc., when we want to mark the gender, e.g., a lady doctor, he cat, and a she-cat [6.2]. Pronoun resolution is the process of determining which particular pronoun in the text refers to preceding nouns. Read the example carefully.

i) Glen told Glenda that she was right about Glendale.

The pronoun resolution system explains that pronoun she refers to noun Glenda. If the pronoun she is replaced with he in example (i), then Glen becomes an antecedent. This pronoun resolution is quite challengeable because one should have a lot of word information about the noun gender. The difference between the English language and other French and German languages lie in that gender. In inherent grammatical properties, gender is not one of them rather, it belongs to the real world. Some of the common nouns can have different meanings in different contexts e.g. semantically the word 'lawyer' can be feminine in one context and masculine in another. Case is a grammatical category applied to English nouns. The difference between lexemes and inflectional forms is more complicated to apply to the close class of pronouns than to the open class of ordinary nouns, verbs or adjectives. The clearest example of an inflectional category in pronouns is case, with nominative I and accusative me being forms of a single lexeme. The syntactic rules specify when the pronoun will appear in one or another case, and the morphology specifies the form - though we cannot give any worthwhile rules for deriving the forms [7.1].

### **Research and Discussion**

The current study has adopted a descriptive survey research design to collect the data from the selected participants. This design enables the researcher to grab the students' data on their problems in learning English nouns. The research instrument of the present study was a proficiency test. The focus of the proficiency test was on the applicability of different grammatical categories to English nouns. The test contained 136 different items about different uses of English nouns. Every item in the test was about the particular use of English nouns. The problems in these uses were specifically focused on in the test. These problems were morphological, Semantics, syntactic and







grammatical category in nature. The problems in the application of grammatical categories of number, gender, case, definiteness, sepecificness, genericness and ambiguity to English nouns were investigated in the test.

## **Conclusion**

The present study was concerned with the analysis of the problems in learning English nouns. The study specifically focused on those problems which were hypothesized to be problematic for students. These problems were about different uses of nouns in different semantic and syntactic contexts and the internal and external morphology of English nouns. The problems in the application of grammatical categories were also analyzed. The results revealed that the problems in a morphosyntactic plurality of noun/pronoun were less than the problem in a syntactic plurality of noun/pronoun. The said has made the internal morphology of noun/pronoun comparatively easier than syntactic issues in learning English noun/pronoun. Similarly, the grammatical category of number has posed no significant issue for learners. In contrast, their function as an indirect object was significantly difficult than other functions. The findings also revealed that inherently singular nouns referring to individual members of group because of their confusion with collective nouns were also problematic. Compared to morphological and semantic properties, the complex syntactic structure of noun/pronoun in terms of agreement created significant problems for students. The students took help from all available semantic and syntactic clues while resolving an ambiguity etc. The contextual use of nouns/pronouns created significant problems. The possessive cases were found out difficult than nominative and accusative cases. The indefinite pronouns requiring reference to their lexical meaning were also found out problematic making definiteness/indefiniteness difficult. The recovery of missing/elliptical elements also made constant tags difficult—all those nouns/pronouns requiring semantic knowledge carrying inherent meaning had problems for students. The absence of morphological markers made the position and function of some noun/pronoun indirect object difficult than the dative alternation. The semantic roles of nouns and capitalization of letters in nouns were the most problematic in the data. The lack of semantic consideration made semantic anomaly difficult for students. The study concludes that students have problems in learning English noun. The identified problems should be given special attention and the students should be trained in all grammatical categories. The syntactic aspects in the use of nouns should specifically be focused in English noun teaching and learning. Similarly, the semantic roles of nouns should be explicitly taught to students to help them understand the transformation and derivation of words/phrases and clauses in





the light of the role played by English nouns. The study is highly significant from a pedagogical perspective and recommends teaching English nouns in the light of the problems identified in the study.

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