

## Parts of speech

The structures realizing sentence elements are composed of units which can be referred to as *parts of speech*. These can be exemplified for English as follows:

(a) *noun* — John, room, answer, play

*adjective* — happy, steady, new, large, round

*adverb* — steadily, completely, really, very, then

*verb* — search, grow, play, be, have, do

(b) *article* — the, a(n)

*demonstrative* — that, this

*pronoun* — he, they, anybody, one, which

*preposition* — of, at, in, without, in spite of

*conjunction* — and, that, when, although

*interjection* — oh, ah, ugh, phew

## Closed-system items

Set (b) comprises what are called ‘closed-system’ items. That is, the sets of items are *closed* in the sense that they cannot normally be extended by the creation of additional members. The items are said to constitute a *system* in being (i) reciprocally exclusive: the decision to use one item in a given structure excludes the possibility of using any other (thus one can have *the book* or *a book* but not *the book*), and (ii) reciprocally defining: it is less easy to state the meaning of any individual item than to define it in relation to the rest of the system.

## Open-class items

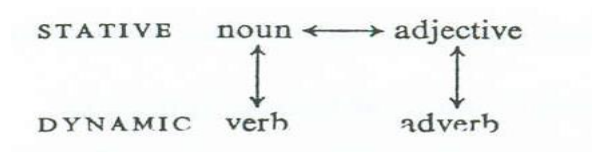
By contrast, set (a) comprises ‘open classes’. Items belong to a class in that they have the same grammatical properties and structural possibilities as other members of the class (that is, as other nouns or verbs or adjectives or adverbs respectively), but the class is ‘open’ in the sense that it is indefinitely extendable. New items are constantly being created and no one could make an inventory of all the nouns in English (for example) and be confident that it was complete.

Classify the underlined words as parts of speech. If a word is underlined more than once, eg right, refer to the first occurrence as right (1), the second as right (2), and so on.

- 1 Is it right to say that right wrongs no man?
- 2 One cannot right all the wrongs in the world.
- 3 Cure that cold with a drink of hot lemon before you go to bed.
- 4 Drink this quick! Don't let it get cold.
- 5 Before the Fire, there had been a plague, the like of which had not been known before and has not been seen since.
- 6 It is a common failing to suppose we are not like other men, that we are not as other people are.
- 7 As your doctor, I must warn you that the results of taking this drug may be very serious.
- 8 Growth in weight results in the development of muscles and fat.
- 9 Warm pan, sift dry ingredients and stir well.
- 10 Dry hair thoroughly with warm towel and comb.

## Stative and dynamic

There are regular word-formation processes giving a comparable one-for-one relation between nouns and adjectives, and between nouns and verbs. For the rest, it is useful to see nouns, adjectives, and verbs in connection with the opposition of stative and dynamic. Broadly speaking, nouns and adjectives can be characterized naturally as 'stative'; thus, nouns refer to entities that are regarded as stable, whether these are concrete (physical) like *house*, *table*, *paper*, or abstract (of the mind) like *hope*, *botany*, *length*. On the other hand, verbs and adverbs can be equally naturally characterized as 'dynamic': most obviously, verbs, which are fitted (by their capacity to show tense and aspect, for example) to indicate action, activity, and temporary or changing conditions. These relations between the open classes can be summarized thus:



There were some verbs such as *know* which could not normally be used with the progressive, that is, which could not be seen as referring to something that was in progress. Verbs so used we called 'stative', and they should be seen as exceptions within the class of verbs. There are exceptions in the other direction among the nouns, not all of which need be stative. For example, a child may be well-behaved one minute and *a nuisance* the next. The situation is similar when we turn to the remaining open word-class, adjectives. Although they are predominantly stative (*tall*, *red*, *old*), some adjectives can resemble verbs in referring on occasion to transitory conditions of behaviour or activity such as *naughty* or *insolent*. And since

*be* must be used to make predications having any noun or adjective as complement, we must qualify the statement made in 2.8 that this is a stative verb: it can also be used dynamically, in the progressive, when the complement is dynamic:

He is being  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{a nuisance} \\ \text{naughty} \end{array} \right\}$  again

Indicate whether the underlined verb phrases are *stative* or *dynamic* in the context given:

- 1 This tank holds precisely 10 litres.
- 2 Hold the handle very firmly.
- 3 Answer the question more precisely.
- 4 He's a fool. <sup>b</sup>Don't listen to him.
- 5 I <sup>a</sup>was a fool. I <sup>b</sup>was driving too fast.
- 6 I'd like three tickets immediately.
- 7 We <sup>a</sup>have only two tickets, I'm <sup>b</sup>afraid.
- 8 I was having my coffee quietly.
- 9 <sup>a</sup>Smell this meat. <sup>b</sup>Does it smell bad?
- 10 I <sup>a</sup>think I <sup>b</sup>hear someone <sup>c</sup>coming.
- 11 I <sup>a</sup>consider you <sup>b</sup>acted very wisely.
- 12 We shall consider your application.