

## UNIT 2 Inflection

- See the section *What is inflection?* (Aronoff & Fudeman 2011: 159-70)
- Inflections are a subset of the functional categories, which govern syntactic relations in sentences. Functional categories are expressed as syntactic features, e.g. definiteness.

the cat	[+definite]
a cat	[-definite]
Semantics:	[CAT]

- We shall briefly outline some of the main functional categories needed for English. Some (but not all) of these are expressed via inflection.

## FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

- Some functional categories express grammatical relations:
  - SUBJECT (or Nominative Case)
  - OBJECT (or Accusative / Objective Case)
  - ADJUNCT (or Adverbial)
  - POSSESSOR
  - MODIFIER
- Others express nominal features:
  - DEFINITENESS
  - NUMBER
  - PRONOUN

## FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

- Pronominal Features:

PERSON

NUMBER

GENDER

- Adjectival features:

COMPARATIVE

SUPERLATIVE

## FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

- Verb Features:

TENSE {Past, Present, Future}

ASPECT {Simple, Perfect, Progressive}

VOICE {Active, Passive}

MOOD {Indicative, Imperative, Interrogative}

MODALITY {various modal auxiliary verbs}

POLARITY {positive, negative}

- Agreement:

SUBJAGR {3sg}

## FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

- Some of these functional categories are expressed by inflections:

NUMBER {Singular, Plural}

TENSE {Past, Present}

SUBJECT AGREEMENT {Person: 3, Number: Singular}

- Other functional categories are expressed in four main ways:

1. Word Order: 'Tom saw Harriet', SUBJ [Tom] OBJ [Harriet].

2. Function Words: +definite → *the*, OBJECT PRONOUN NUMBER SG., PERSON 3, GENDER FEM → *her*.

3. Combination of Function Word and Specially Inflected Word Form: PASSIVE → Appropriate form of auxiliary (to be) + [VerbForm: Participle: Past] of lexical verb.

## FUNCTIONAL CATEGORIES

4. Inflections: e.g. number plural expressed by [Number: Plural], *cats*.

- Where functional categories are expressed by function words (2) or a combination of function words and specially inflected forms (3) we have analytic or periphrastic constructions.
- Where functional categories are expressed by inflection only (4), we would have synthetic constructions.

## NOUNS: PLURALS

- We customarily distinguish two types of noun on the basis of semantics: count and mass.
- Count nouns denote individuated objects, whereas mass nouns denote stuff, substances or aggregates that cannot be individuated.

Count: *chair, idea, computer, cat*

Mass: *milk, justice, juice, butter*

- Only count nouns can take a plural form. However, many nouns seem to be in both categories:

*Your proposal faces several difficulties*

*Harriet ate several chocolates*

*The level of difficulty of the exercise was too high*

*Harriet's fingers were covered in chocolate*

## NOUNS: PLURALS

- This is a common behaviour for other nouns, where a count or mass interpretation is forced on a mass/count noun, a process known as coercion.

*You've got egg on your tie* [count → mass]

*She ordered a milk and two coffees* [mass → count]

## NOUNS: POSSESSOR

- Possession can be expressed analytically (by means of the preposition *of*) or synthetically by means of the phrasal affix 's.

- A peculiarity of the phrasal affix is that it cannot occur with a plural suffix:

a. my friend's book           (singular)

b. my friends' book           (plural)

- In other words, a sequence of two 's' is simplified to a single –s.

- Two adjacent homophonous affixes or clitics, usually with different 'meaning' are simplified to just one token. This is quite common cross-linguistically and it is called haplology.

## NOUNS: NOMINAL FUNCTION WORDS

- Pronouns have special forms for SUBJECT or OBJECT, often referred to as nominative and accusative case forms, respectively.

- This designation is misleading, since the subject form is only used for certain subjects, when the pronoun is the sole exponent of the SUBJECT feature/function.

a. *Tom went for a walk*

b. *Tom and I went for a walk*           (literary)

c. *Tom and me went for a walk*       (colloquial)

d. *\*I and Tom went for a walk*       (wrong)

e. *Me and Tom went for a walk*       (right)

- However, prescriptive grammarians usually classify (c) and (e) as wrong, favouring the (b) the type of construction.

## NOUNS: NOMINAL FUNCTION WORDS

A. *Who's going for a walk?*

*Me* (Not \*I)

*I am* (Not \*Me am)

B. *It's me* (Not \*It's I)

- The object form is used with prepositions:

A. *between you and me*

- The expression *between you and I* is becoming current. It started out as a straightforward grammatical error (an example of hypercorrection).

## NOUNS: POSSESSIVES, REFLEXIVES AND DEMONSTRATIVES

- Possessives have an adjectival and a pronominal use.

*This is my book*

*This book is mine*

- Reflexives are formed by suffixing *-self/selves* to a possessive adjective (1st/2nd person) or to the object pronoun (3rd person).

*my-self, your-self, our-selves, your-selves*

*him-self, her-self, it-self, one-self, them-selves*

- Demonstratives are the only modifiers which have a special plural agreement form *this/these, that/those*. They can be used as either a modifier or as the head of a nominal phrase (like possessives):

*I want that (book)*

*I bought these (flowers)*

## VERB INFLECTION: TENSE

- There is a long standing controversy over the number of tenses in English. We may wish to distinguish present, past, future

*Harriet runs / ran / will run*

- However, verbs only have two tense inflections. We have to recognize the difference between morphological (inflectional) features and syntactic functional categories.
- The syntactic functional feature TENSE has three values, {PRESENT, PAST, FUTURE}
- The morphological, inflectional feature just has two [TENSE: {Past, Present}]. Thus one of the TENSE features has to be expressed analytically, whereas the other two are expressed synthetically.

## VERB INFLECTION: ASPECT

- Aspect is expressed analytically:

(will) have / had + participle      Perfect

be + ing      Progressive

- In addition, it makes sense to distinguish a Past Habitual aspect:

*Tom used to play the flute*

- This past habitual aspect can co-occur with the progressive:

*Tom used to be making a nuisance of himself all the time*

- Considering that the past habitual is an aspect of English depends on the extent to which we think it has become grammaticalized.

## VERB INFLECTION: AGREEMENT

- Agreement is only found in 3rd person singular for present tense forms (but even then, not for modal auxiliaries).

*He walks*                      3rd person singular, present.

*He can*                         3rd person singular, present, modal

- The exception is the verb *to be*, which is said to have supernumerary agreement in past and present

*am, are, is, was, were*

## VERB INFLECTION: PARTICIPLES

- Traditionally, there has been a distinction between the present participle and the past participle
- This distinction follows the tradition of Latin, where we find a present participle (*amantis*) and a past participle (*amatus*).
- English facts are slightly more complicated.
- The present participle (-ing) has uses that are not strictly those of a participle (e.g. formation of continuous forms, continuous aspect marker).
- The past participle also has uses that are not necessarily typical of a participle or expressing past (e.g. present tense, passive voice)

*The children are looked after all the time*

- We shall look at each one of these in turn.

## VERB INFLECTION: -ING FORMS

- -ing forms have four main uses:
  1. Progressive aspect formation (with auxiliary BE).
  2. Gerund: Adverbial constructions.
  3. Verbal Noun: noun-like verbal nouns; verb-like verbal nouns.
  4. Participle formation.
- The progressive aspect is not found with verbs which denote states –as opposed to ‘dynamic’ events which evolve through time such as activities, processes and so on.

*X Tom is knowing the answer to these questions*

*X Tom is being tall nowadays*

## VERB INFLECTION: -ING FORMS

- You can sometimes COERCE a special reading:
  - Tom is being stupid again
  - Tom is being tall nowadays
- The term ‘gerund’ is used just for the adverbial use:

*He ran downstairs, running like a madman.*

*Walking home one night, I bumped into an old friend.*
- The verbal noun (VN) is a nominalized form of the verb, which, however, still keeps its argument structure (SUBJ, OBJ, complements).
- The VN may function as a clausal subject (SUBJ). Very often it is interchangeable with the infinitive:

*Taking / to take candy from a baby isn't always that easy*

## VERB INFLECTION: -ING FORMS VERBAL NOUNS

- The VN also functions as a complement to the verb or to a preposition:

*Tom remembered/advised closing the door quietly*

*The trick of closing the door quickly*

- Noun-like verbal nouns can be identified by:

1. SUBJ function realized by a possessive phrase:

*Tom's buying that book to Harriet was surprising*

2. OBJ function realized as an of-phrase. Often the VN is modified by the definite article:

*The playing of loud music late at night is forbidden.*

3. The VN is modified by adjectives, not by adverbs:

*The continual [\*continually] playing of loud music*

## VERB INFLECTION: -ING FORMS VERBAL NOUNS

- Verb-like verbal nouns are characterized by the following facts:

1. When the OBJ is realized in a verbal manner, the VN is modified by adverbs (like verbs), not by adjectives:

*Continually (\*continual) playing loud music is forbidden*

2. No definite article is possible in purely verbal constructions:

*\*The continually playing loud music is forbidden*

3. The VN can have a perfect aspectual form:

*Having said that, ...*

*Tom remembered having closed the door*

*Tom having left, we started discussing Harriet's new book*

## VERB INFLECTION: -ING FORMS PRESENT PARTICIPLE

- The present participle functions as an adjective.

Crying children are separated from the rest of the class

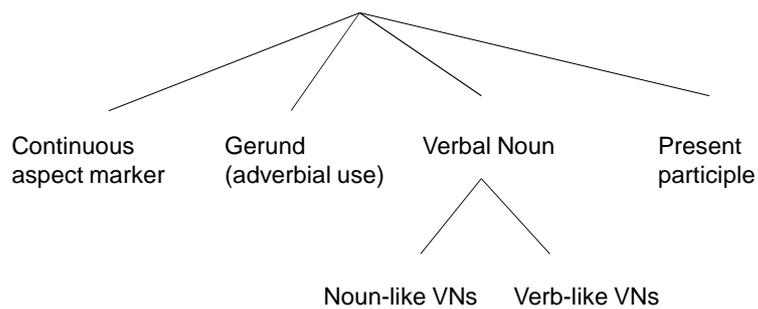
*Dancing boys were uncommon in the past*

- Strictly speaking, present participles express the meaning 'who/which does ACTION':

*Crying children* = children who cry

*Dancing boys* = boys who dance

## -ING FORMS: SUMMARY



## VERB INFLECTION: -ED FORMS

- What traditionally has been called 'past participle' includes the past participle proper, the passive and the perfect participle.
- The past participle is often syncretic to the past tense, e.g. one word, two grammatical meanings.

<i>walk</i>	<i>walked</i>	<i>walked</i>
<i>bring</i>	<i>brought</i>	<i>brought</i>
<i>cut</i>	<i>cut</i>	<i>cut</i>

BUT

<i>write</i>	<i>wrote</i>	<i>written</i>
<i>ring</i>	<i>rang</i>	<i>rung</i>

## VERB INFLECTION: -ED FORMS

- The passive is always syncretic to the perfect participle, e.g. one word, two grammatical meanings.

*Tom has bought a book*  
*The book was bought by Tom*

*Dick has rung the bell*  
*The bell was rung by Dick*

*Everyone had had a good time*  
*A good time was had by all*

## VERB INFLECTION: -ED FORMS

- The past participle can also function as an adjective.
- Participles are much more common as post-modifiers than as pre-modifiers:

*The rung bell (?)*

*The bell rung by the church warden (OK)*

- If the participle itself is modified to form a kind of compound adjective, pre-modification is more common:

*the recently-rung bell*

*freshly-mown hay*

*a seldom bought book*

*an oft-cited remark*

## VERB INFLECTION: DEFECTIVE FORMS AND UNUSUAL FORMS

- We normally call defective those verbs that lack some of their forms.

- Modal auxiliaries lack –ing forms and past/perfect participles:

*\*Tom is musting open the door with his credit card*

*Tom is having to open the door with his credit card*

- Modals also lack a special 3 person singular form:

*Tom can(\*s) speak Russian*

- Although there is a base form for all auxiliaries, there is no to-infinitive.

*\*To must leave early is annoying*

- Expressions like 'to be able to', 'to have to', 'to be obliged to', 'to be about to' are often used to fill in the lacunae in the analytic paradigms.

## ADJECTIVES

- Adjectival inflectional morphology basically consists of comparatives and superlatives.

- These are formed by adding –er/-est to monosyllabic adjectives or adjectives ending up in an unstressed, not super-heavy syllable:

happy – happier                      frequent – more/most

common – commoner                curious – more/most

- There are also irregular (suppletive) cases, such as:

good    better    best

bad     worse    worst

little    less    least

- There is some controversy about whether comparatives and superlatives are the result of inflection or derivation.