

**-2-****Lexical word classes****Lexical Words**

There are four main classes of lexical words: nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. To decide what class a word belongs to, it is useful to apply tests of three kinds:

1. Morphological: what forms does a word have (e.g. in terms of stems and affixes)?
2. Syntactic: what syntactic roles does a word play in phrases or other higher units?
3. Semantic: what type(s) of meaning does a word convey?

**Nouns**

- Words such as book, girl, gold, information are common nouns. Words such as Sarah, Oslo, Microsoft (names) are proper nouns. Nouns have the following characteristics:

**A- Morphological:**

Nouns have inflectional suffixes for plural numbers, and for genitive case: one book----- two books; Sarah's book. Many nouns, however, are uncountable, and cannot have a plural form (e.g. gold, information). Nouns quite often contain more than one morpheme (e.g. compound nouns (clothes+line) – nouns with derivational suffixes (e.g. sing+ er, friend+ship, bright+ness)

**B- Syntactic:**

Nouns can occur as the head of a noun phrase ( a new *book* about the cold war) ( the ugliest *person* you've ever seen). As these examples show, common nouns such as book and person can be modified by many kinds of words both before and after them. Proper nouns like Sarah, on the other hand, rarely have any modifiers.

**C- Semantic:**

Nouns commonly refer to concrete, physical entities ( people, objects, substances) : e.g. book, friend, iron. They can also denote abstract entities, such as qualities and states: e.g. freedom, wish, friendship.

## Lexical Verbs

Words such as admit, build, choose, write are lexical verbs. They are distinct from Auxiliary verbs like can and will, which we treat as function words. The primary verbs be, have and do ( the most common verbs in English) occur as both lexical verbs and auxiliaries. Lexical verbs are identified as follows:

### **A- Morphological:**

Lexical verbs have different forms signaling tense ( present & past), aspect ( perfect & progressive), and voice ( active & passive). Verb lexemes quite often have a complex form with more than one morpheme. The following are examples of multi-word verbs and derived verbs: bring up, rely on, look forward to, itemize, soften.

### **B- Syntactic :**

Lexical verbs most frequently occur on their own, as a single-word verb phrase acting as the central part of the clause ( He *writes* page after page about tiny details). They also occur in the final or main verb position of verb phrase ( has *written* a letter) ( will be *writing* tomorrow).

### **C- Semantic :**

Lexical verbs denote actions, processes, and states of affairs that happen or exist in time. They also define the role of human and non-human participants in such actions, processes, or states ( You ate Chinese food). In this example, *ate* expresses the action performed by *you* on the Chinese food.

## Adjectives

Words such as dark, heavy, eager, and guilty are adjectives. Adjectives are identified as follows:

### **A- Morphological:**

Many adjectives can take inflectional suffixes *-er* ( comparative), and *-est* (superlative): dark ---- darker ---- darkest. Adjectives can be complex in morphology ( derived adjectives e.g. acceptable, forgetful, influential) ( compound adjectives e.g. color-blind, home-made, ice-cold).

### **B- Syntactic:**

Adjectives can occur as the head of an adjective phrase: ( very dark) (eager to help) (guilty of a serious crime). Adjectives and adjective phrases are most commonly used as modifiers preceding the head of a noun phrase or predicative following the verb in clauses ( modifiers e.g. Tomorrow could be a *sunny* day) (predicative e.g. it is *nice* and *warm* in here. It's *sunny*).

### C- Semantic:

Adjectives describe the qualities of people, things, and abstractions: a *heavy* box, he is *guilty*, the situation is *serious*. Many adjectives are gradable. That is, they can be compared and modified for the degree or level of the quality: heavier, very heavy, extremely serious.

### Adverbs

Words such as now, there, usually, and finally are adverbs. Adverbs are identified as follows:

#### A- Morphological:

Many adverbs are formed from adjectives by adding the suffix *-ly*: clearly, eagerly. Others have no such ending: however, just. A few adverbs allow comparative and superlative forms like those for adjectives: soon --- sooner --- soonest; fast --- faster --- fastest.

#### B- Syntactic:

Adverbs occur as head of adverb phrases: ( very *noisily*) ( more *slowly* than I had expected). Adverbs, with or without their own modifiers, are often used as modifiers of an adjective or another adverb: (really old) ( very soon). Otherwise, they can act as adverbials in the clause ( I'll see you *soon again*).

#### C- Semantic:

As modifiers, adverbs most often express the degree of a following adjective or adverb: ( totally wrong) ( right now). As elements of clauses ( adverbials), adverbs and adverb phrases have a wide range of meanings:

- They can modify an action, process, or state, by expressing such notions as time, place, and manner. ( So I learner German quite *quickly*) ( She was *here earlier today*).
- They can convey the speaker's or writer's attitude towards the information in the rest of the clause. ( *Surely* that child is not mine!).
- They can express a connection with what was said earlier. ( It must be beautiful, *though*).

### Comparing lexical word classes in use

- Nouns and verbs are clearly the most common types of words overall.
- Conversation has a high density of verbs, unlike informative writing such as news and academic prose, which has a high density of nouns.
- Adjectives are linked to nouns, because they most frequently modify nouns. So informative writing, which has the highest density of nouns, also has the highest density of adjectives.
- Adverbs, on the other hand, are linked to verbs. They typically describe circumstances relating to actions, processes, and states that are denoted by verbs. So conversation and fiction writing, which have the highest density of verbs, also have the highest density of adverbs.

Notes: