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Noun

1. Distinctive properties

A *noun* is the name used to denote the class of lexemes whose forms can fill the syntactic position opened by the constitutive element of a clause. Primarily, nouns constitute a nominal phrase and act as its head, also referred to as the central element of that phrase (Topolińska 1984). Nouns in the nominative case govern the third person verbal form. Nouns are the lexical exponents of the argument and the predicate, either basic or non-basic; cf. e.g. *Brat został sędzią., Pamiętam waszego syna jako młodzieńca.*

Nouns have the selective category of gender (except for dual-gender nouns, such as *sierota, kaleka, gaduła, niezdara, ofermą*) and the paradigmatic categories of case and number (the latter being syntactically independent, unlike in the case of adjectives and verbs, which are determined by the number of the noun). Nouns not inflected for number are either classified as singularia tantum (e.g. *młodzież, nienawiść, woda, igliwie, sitowie*) or pluralia tantum (e.g. *drzwi, skrzypce, sanie, spodnie, usta, urodziny*). Some nouns are not inflected for case in one of the numbers (e.g. *liceum, muzeum, konsylium*), while some are neither inflected for case nor for number (Laskowski 1999a; Krzyżanowski 2013); cf. e.g. *atelier, emu, foyer, hobby, kiwi, lady, zebu.*

In many languages, Polish included, we distinguish between **countable and uncountable nouns** (Bogusławski 1973; Feleszko 1978, 1980; Laskowski 1998; Wierzbicka 1988). The former group is made of expressions designating morphic objects (Bogusławski 1973: 8), e.g. *jabłko, krzesło, talerz, lampa, dom*, as well as events of limited duration, e.g. *błysk, okrzyk, rzut, skok*, while the latter is made of substance nouns, also referred to as material nouns, e.g. *żelazo, krew, dym, piasek, mąka, pleśń, popiół, pot, śnieg*, as well as nouns that designate properties, processes, states, e.g. *biel, głód, strach, złość, lakomstwo, chciwość* (cf. Laskowski 1998: 204). One distinctive semantic property of substance nouns that is lacking in morphic nouns is “the implication between assigning a given predicate to object x and assigning it to any part of object x (meaning that if a predicate is assigned to x it cannot be negated with respect to any part of x)” (cf. Bogusławski 1973: 7). This property is a consequence of the

arbitrary divisibility of any substance into any number parts, each of which is a substance as well (e.g. the predicate *flour* is true for any heap of flour) (cf. Whorf 1982; Wierzbicka 1988; Grochowski 1992). Morphic objects are indivisible into parts – when divided, they can no longer be identified (e.g. none of the parts of a chair can be truthfully assigned the predicate *chair* on its own).

Only countable nouns are **numerically quantifiable**, which means that they have the paradigmatic category of number and may co-occur with cardinal numerals – lexical markers of the size of a set (cf. e.g. *cztery gumki, osiem gruszek, dwanaście ołówków* and **cztery pleśnie, *osiem śniegów, *dwanaście wód*). Uncountable nouns are only subject to **partitive quantification**; they do not have the paradigmatic category of number, and may only co-occur with indefinite numerals (in Polish also referred to as ‘improper’ numerals or *liczebniki niewłaściwe*, cf. e.g. *trochę żelaza, mało szpinaku, dużo dymu, nieco strachu, odrobinę powietrza*). On top of this, they may be found in nominal strings (Topolińska 1984), or, in other words, in predicative compounds (Bogusławski 1973), filling the syntactic position opened by a nominal unit of conventional measurement (cf. e.g. *litr mleka, kilogram jabłek, metr płótna, tydzień urlopu*) or unconventional measurement (cf. e.g. *główka sałaty, kostka masła, szklanka wody, garnek mleka, bochenek chleba*) (cf. Bednarek 1994; Ampel 1999; Chachulska 2002; Schabowska 1967).

Uncountable nouns are either classified as singularia tantum (e.g. *piwo, żelazo, czern, wiara, rozum*) or pluralia tantum (e.g. *fusy, męty, pomyje*) (Laskowski 1998: 206). Singularia tantum include the names of substances (e.g. *benzyna, piasek, ołów*), abstract concepts (e.g. *wiedza, gorycz, nienawiść*) and sets of objects (e.g. *chłopstwo, państwo, generałostwo, studenteria, igliwie, listowie*); with regard to the latter, the morphological plural form cannot be created for semantic reasons (Bogusławski 1973: 16, 20). In the case of pluralia tantum, the opposition between singular and plural is neutralised. A reference to a specific element requires the use of such lexemes as *para, porcja* and a cardinal numeral (if pluralis has been selected); e.g. *para nożyczek, sześć par nożyczek; porcja lodów, pięć porcji lodów*; or the use of a collective numeral, e.g. *czworo drzwi, dwoje sań*. The pluralis of substance nouns (e.g. *piwa, herbaty, kawy, lody*) is ambiguous: ‘portions of x’, ‘types of x’ (Bogusławski 1973: 25).

A detailed description of the inflection of nouns may be found in the following studies (Bańko 2002; Bogusławski 1987, 1992, 2009, 2010; Doroszewski 1952: 133–200; Dyszak 1999; Gruszczyński 1987, 1989; Gruszczyński, Bralczyk 2002; Habrajska 1995; Krzyżanowski 2013; Laskowski 1987, 2012; Orzechowska 1984: 220–274, 1998: 270–332; Stefańczyk 2007; Tokarski 2001; Wróbel 2001: 90–123; Wróbel, Kowalik, Orzechowska, Rokicka 1993; Zaron 2004). Cf. also a discussion on the grammatical categories of nouns (Laskowski (ed.) 1976).

Selected works on noun formation include (Doroszewski 1952: 268–319; Grzegorzczkova 1972; Grzegorzczkova, Puzynina 1979, 1984: 332–407, 1998: 389–468; Jadacka 1995; Kleszczowa 2012; Kreja 1969; Laskowski 1973; Puzynina 1969; Waszakowa 1993, 1994; Wróbel 2001).

2. Semantic classifications

From the semantic perspective, the class of nouns includes **names/proper names** (*nomina propria*) and **common names** (*nomina appellativa*). The former are individual names with a purely referential function, devoid of any meaning (they do not carry any predicative content, Bogusławski 1977; Karolak 1991, 2001); they do not open any syntactic positions, they

cannot perform the function of a predicative expression. Rather, they provide a reference to a single object in the real world (*Wista, Kraków, Słowacki*) or a possible one (*Zeus, Goplana, Kmicic*). Cf. logical concepts of proper names (Czeżowski 1958; Dąmbska 1975; Grodziński 1973; Kripke 1980; Searle 1967; Strawson 1980). The other group, by contrast, consists of the names of concepts denoting sets of 1. objects or 2. relationships. A set of objects is made of natural species and artefacts. Nominal lexemes that belong to this group do not open any syntactic positions. The names of relationships include the names of the states of things, activities, events, phenomena, properties (e.g. *bieg, oddech, pożar, spadek, pranie, zastój, zorza, czerwień, cierpliwość*) (Gruszczyński, Bralczyk 2002: 217). The nouns that denote relationships can mean objects perceptible by the senses (e.g. *dźwięk, swąd, światło, mgła, skok, rzut*), as well as mental objects (e.g. *gniew, żal, radość, marzenie, zamiar*). The distinction between these names is not a sharp one (cf. e.g. *zdanie, twierdzenie, idea, postanowienie*) (cf. Karolak 1999; Laskowski 1999b). Relational nouns open at least one syntactic position; cf. e.g. *mycie (of what), odpoczynek (where), przerwa (for what), początek (of what), środek (of what)* (Wajszczuk 2010).

The names of natural species are the names of zoological and botanical objects other than scientific terms, i.e. the names of beings that may be assigned the predicate *żyje* (lives) or *rośnie* (grows) (Bogusławski 1988: 127–130). When it comes to biological species, the basic categorisation of the world, coded into natural languages, is taxonomic (systematical) in nature. Lower order species are grouped together to create higher order species (Grochowski 1993: 67). For instance, taxonomic supercategories such as *ptak, kwiat* or *drzewo* constitute common semantic denominators for lower level categories, such as, respectively, *jaskółka, papuga, drozd; tulipan, żonkil, róża, dąb, klon, wierzba* (Wierzbicka 1985: 261). This assumption is quite commonly shared in lexical semantics. Nevertheless, the semantic structure of the names of species has been hotly debated – some researchers believe it to be relatively simple (Bogusławski 1988), while others document its complexity, referring to the so-called common knowledge of the world (Wierzbicka 1985).

Bogusławski (1988) has presented the rules of hierarchisation of the names of species and the principles for defining them, determined by the assignment of a specific name to a specific level of classification. Cf. e.g. the (metalinguistic) descriptions proposed by the author (Bogusławski 1988: 136) which – in his opinion – could be added to such lexemes as *jamnik* and *terier ostrowłosy* respectively: “The name of a dog based on the natural subspecies,” “the name of a terrier based on the natural subspecies.” Wierzbicka (1985) characterised the names of species (in pluralis, e.g. *tigers, squirrels, cats, dogs*), assigning to them an entry comprising the concept of a kind of something and a formula consisting of a counterfactual sentence where people, imagining beings of a certain kind, could say such and such things about them. This formula introduced a description of the prototypical representatives of the concept being explained; it was divided into parts concerning such attributes of a living being (of a given kind) as, for instance, its natural environment, size, appearance, behaviour, or attitude towards people.

The names of artefacts are the names of specific concrete objects made by people. They are characterised by certain specific material properties (they have their own shape or they do not; they constitute the opposition between morphic and amorphic (substance) objects, they have been made by people with a special purpose in mind. The class of the names of

artefacts includes, for instance, the names of tools, substances, materials, clothes, interior spaces, containers, vehicles, ornaments. Relying on the rules of complete, exact and exhaustive semantic analysis of expressions, Wierzbicka (1985) proposed extensive (including multi-page) explications of numerous names of artefacts, comprising the descriptions of their prototypical referents and the manner of their functioning; cf. e.g. explications for *kubki* and *filiżanki*, *rowery* and *samochody*. The researcher applied an analogous method to define the names of vegetables and fruits, contrasting them with the taxonomic supercategories from the worlds of fauna and flora (Wierzbicka 1999: 109 ff.). In contrast to this proposal, yet another concept assumes that only partial definitions of the said names of artefacts can be achieved, (cf. Grochowski 1993: 60–75).

Nouns form an open class (unlike the closed classes of conjunctions or particles), which means that the set of lexemes it consists of is infinite. New nouns – both proper and common names – may be created depending on the needs of language users.

3. The noun in research on parts of speech

The history of research on parts of speech shows an evolution of the criteria applied to distinguish the classes of lexemes, including nouns. Overall, the focus has initially shifted from general semantic criteria to those that combine semantics and grammar, syntax in particular, and then to the functional-syntactic criteria and semantically motivated syntactic criteria.

In many modern languages, the noun was only distinguished in the 18th–19th century – together with adjectives and numerals – as a result of the division of the category of names known from Greek and Latin grammar (Jodłowski 1971: 12). In many traditional grammars, a noun was defined as a name of things *sensu largo*, construed as everything one may speak about (Skarżyński 1994; Jodłowski 1971). This – most general – description was often replaced with a scope-based definition of noun (Gruszczyński, Bralczyk 2002: 217) providing a list of kinds of things that nouns could name. It contains concrete objects, persons, animals, plants, abstract concepts (including activities and properties). This way of presenting both the references of nouns and the content expressed by them (which often formed an inseparable whole) was typical of the traditional grammar books. Stanisław Szober (1957: 92, 97) used the term *noun* to refer to words that denote objects, divided into sensory and detached ones. The former included persons, animals, plants, things, and phenomena, while the latter properties and activities. On top of this, he distinguished between single and collective, as well as proper and common nouns. The classification of nouns by Henryk Ułaszyn (1923: 218) was quite similar; his categories are more detailed and hierarchical; he also distinguished between non-personal and inanimate nouns, and contrasted diminutives with augmentatives. Henryk Gaertner (1938: 144) referred to the semantic property of nouns arising from what they mean as their *objective referentiality*. This is a common property shared across all nouns – concrete and abstract. Concrete nouns are either amorphic (their referents do not have a specific shape) or morphic (they have a specific shape). Abstract nouns name properties that are not time-dependent (qualitative, e.g. *klótniwość*, *zieloność*) or exist at a specific point in time (symptomatic, e.g. *bieg*, *witanie*, *schnięcie*). Gaertner (1938: 146–148) divided concrete nouns into personal and impersonal nouns, with the latter being further subdivided

into animate and inanimate. The scholar further differentiated between general and individual, as well as between common and proper nouns. According to Zenon Klemensiewicz (1960: 49–50), a noun is a name of an object – either perceptible or imperceptible to the senses, as well as a name of an abstract quality. The scholar also contrasted common nouns against proper names and further distinguished collective nouns.

In his classification of parts of speech (made by enumeration), Stanisław Jodłowski (1976: 18) applied mixed epistemological, technical, syntactic and morphological criteria. He defined nouns as words denoting “external and internal, concrete and abstract (real and fictitious) elements of the reality,” of mnemonic, naming nature, capable of serving as a subject and “taking modifiers.” When discussing the differences between basic parts of speech, Witold Doroszewski (1952: 132) relied on grammatical criteria only. He described nouns as words inflected for case and number, but not inflected for gender. In a sentence, they perform the function of the subject, and are complemented by verbs and adjectives. “Nouns differ from pronouns by the fact that in a sentence a noun corresponds to an extra-syntactic referent (*koń biegnie*), while a pronoun performs its referential role within the sentence itself (*on biegnie* – on – someone already mentioned).”

In the studies by the canonical representatives of Polish structuralism (Jerzy Kuryłowicz and his followers), the category of a part of speech was assigned to words that had a symbolic function and were primarily and secondarily correlated with specified parts of sentence. According to Kuryłowicz (1936/1979: 148–150), a noun means an object and it primarily performs the function of a subject or an object, which follows from the lexical meaning of the word. Tadeusz Milewski (1965: 98, 107) classified nouns as auto-semantic words with a symbolic function and considered them as primary naming words, being semantically complete, which do not connote anything, but are connoted by secondary naming words – adjectives and verbs.

Adam Heinz (1965: 19–21) believed that the category of parts of speech consists in the association of conceptual classes, which perform functions that are semantically and syntactically primary for them in an utterance, with basic syntagmatic positions. As a result of the mutual subordination of the conceptual matrix and the syntagmatic matrix, he assumed that a noun is primarily the name of things and fills the position of a subject. The primary function of the noun is manifested in the category of the nominative case. The secondary function of a noun is that of predicative (*brat jest lekarzem*) and attributive (*dom ojca*), as well as adnominal (*dom olbrzym*) and adverbial (*dom stał pod lasem*) description.

Zygmunt Saloni (1974) defined nouns on the basis of inflectional criteria as lexemes inflected for case and not inflected for gender. One disadvantage of this definition is the automatic exclusion of such lexemes as *atelier*, *zebu*, *bordo*, *khaki* from the class. In order to avoid this outcome, in his comments the author applied to this classification the concept of complete or partial neutralisation of forms in a specific category. For instance, he interpreted the lexeme *widzimi się* as inflected, but claimed that all its forms have been neutralised from the perspective of case and number.

In his functional syntactic classifications, Roman Laskowski (1984: 31, 35, 220, 1998: 57, 62) defined nouns as lexemes performing the function of a syntactically dependent component in a sentence (a dependent of the verb and accommodated by it) and forming the main element (the head) of the nominal group. From the perspective of semantic syntax, nouns

are lexemes that perform the function of the argument or the predicative expressions. In the former role, primary for proper names, they designate individual objects, while in the latter they denote a class of physical objects or conditions of things (processes, activities, static relationships). A noun as the head of a nominal group sets the value of the inflectional categories of gender, number and case of the adjective dependent on it. The noun determines the value of the category of gender of the numeral, while the numeral determines the case and the number of the noun. Nouns in the nominative case determine the value of the category of number and gender (including the category of the person) of the verb. Laskowski (1984: 35, 1998: 62) further extended the class of nouns by including pronouns (cf. e.g. *ja, ty, ktoś, ktokolwiek, nikt*), even though they do not take attributive expressions, are not used predicatively and have the selective category of number.

Influenced by the classification by Laskowski, Henryk Wróbel (1996: 57, 2001: 78) proposed his own, formal syntactic classification of lexemes. He defined nouns as auto-syntagmatic lexemes, operating in a clause as an accommodated dependent. When in the nominative case, nouns govern the form of number and, in certain cases, also the gender of the verb being the head of the clause. Wróbel further identified the existence of nouns which do not change their form, such as *alibi, tabu, aluminium*.

Referring to yet another terminological apparatus of syntax – the connotative, accommodative, and inflectional properties of lexical units – Zofia Zaron (2003: 187) proposed their functional classification. She characterised the noun as a lexeme without sentence-forming properties, categorially connoting (Gołąb 1967) verbs (or other nouns), and accommodating only third-person verbal forms. Few noun units are not inflected for case and for number.

In a semantically motivated syntactic classification by Jadwiga Wajszczuk (2010), nouns, classified as syntactemes, are a priori divided into three sub-sets. The author defined syntactemes using weak alternative as lexemes which open marked semantic positions for units from other classes or fill, based on their meaning, such positions opened by other units. Relying on this definition, one may distinguish between: 1. lexemes which only fill positions opened by other units without opening any positions themselves; Wajszczuk refers to them as terms (in Polish: *terminały*); 2. lexemes which only open positions (on one or both sides) for units from other classes, while they themselves do not fill any positions; these are referred to as independent predicates; 3. lexemes which both fill the positions opened by other units and open positions for other units on one or both sides; they are referred to as dependent predicates. According to Wajszczuk (2010: 27–28) the class of terms includes proper names and the names of natural species (cf. e.g. *brzoza, sasanka, lew, wiewiórka*) as well as artefacts (cf. e.g. *dom, stół, filiżanka*), while the class of dependent predicates consists of deverbal and relational nouns (cf. e.g. *pranie, odpoczynek, przerwa, sąsiad, ojciec, stolica, brzeg*).

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