

SEMINAR 4B – PROPER NOUNS

- **proper nouns – grammatical features; names with the definite article – names with no article; nouns relating to region and nationality**

- are basically names: of specific people (*Kennedy*), places (*Tokyo*) and institutions (*The South China Morning Post*), months, days, festivals, magazines, etc.

- names can be single word nouns (*London*) or quite lengthy phrases (often including a definite article and premodifying items e.g. *The New York Times*)

- names reflect their uniqueness of reference in writing by our use of initial capitals. If we so wish, we can raise to the uniqueness of proper-noun status such concepts as *Fate*, *Heaven*, *Truth*, *Man*, *Paradise*, *Hell*, etc.

GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

- most proper nouns are singular and have no plural (*Indonesia*), or they have a plural but no singular (the *West Indies*)

- **proper nouns do not normally have determiner and number contrast**, but there are **many exceptions** to these restrictions – in special circumstances proper nouns are **reclassified as common nouns**, so they no longer have unique denotation:

- a) it is only the referent that is unique, and different referents may share the same name (i.e. several people or places may bear the same name) – e.g. there are several places called *Richmond*:

e.g. There is *a Richmond* in the south of England and *a Richmond* in the north, not to mention a dozen *Richmonds* outside the British Isles.

or I'm trying to find *Philip Johnson* in the phone book unless he's one of the several *P. Johnsons* he's not in.

The nouns conveying the name are used as though they were common nouns, they can have their meaning varied by articles and other determiners:

e.g. *a Shakespeare* (= an author like Shakespeare)
or *his new Shakespeare* (= his copy of the works of Sh.)
It's *a Rembrandt painting*. (also: It's a Rembrandt.)
He's not a Paganini.

Also:

e.g. I used to know *a Mary Roberts*, too. (=a person called Mary Roberts)
The doctor Brown I know comes from Australia.

She's *the second Mrs. White*. (the first one died)
Is there *a William* in this class?
He doesn't look like *a Burton*.

Further notes:

- **the definite article with nuclear stress** before a name has the special meaning of 'the well known person / place named...':

e.g. A: I used to know *John Lennon* quite well.
B: Surely you can't mean *the /ði/ John Lennon*?

- the use of '**one**' proves the status of the proper noun becoming a common noun as in:

e.g. I knew *a / one* John Lennon, but not the famous one.

- '**this**' and '**that**' are also possible:

e.g. Who's *this Mrs Robertson* that phoned?
Oh, you mean *that Mr. Phillips* (= a particular person)

- **possessives** and **genitives** – denote close family relationships:

e.g. Is *your Jennifer* still at school? (=your daughter Jennifer)
Did you know that *your Mrs White* has been arrested for shoplifting?
(= the one you know)
Granny is delighted with *Peter's Jane*. (= Peter's girlfriend)

- b) **number** and **determination** with the names of days, months, festivals, etc.

e.g. She'll be here *on Monday*. (specific reference – a particular time of a particular week, year, etc.)

but there is *a Monday* every week = *Mondays* necessarily have st in common (=the first working day of each week)

e.g. She's always here *on Mondays*. (not a specific reference)

- c) **a married couple** can be referred to as *the Johnsons* (it may also embrace their whole household)

- d) we can use **a famous name to mean the type that made it famous**

e.g. There were no *Shakespeares* in the 19th century. (=no writers of that quality – like Shakespeare)
Lu Xun is revered as *the Chinese Gorky*.

Or we can use partitive restrictive modification:

e.g. *The Dublin of Joyce* is still there for everyone to experience. (=the features of Dublin reflected in Joyce's writing)

unique meaning

*during Easter
in England
in Denmark
Chicago*

partitive meaning

*during the Easter of that year
in the England of Queen Elizabeth
in the Denmark of today
the Chicago I like (=the aspect of Ch.)*

ARTICLES WITH PROPER NOUNS

I. NAMES WITH THE DEFINITE ARTICLE

1) some titular names

e.g. *the King of Sweden, the President of General Motors, the Queen, the Marquis of Salisbury*

2) geographical names of plural form, especially:

- a) groups of islands – *the Hebrides, the Bahamas, the Shetlands, the Canaries*
- b) mountain ranges – *the Himalayas, the Alps, the Andes, the Pyrenees, the Rockies*

Also: nonplural mountain ranges: *the Sierra Nevada, the Caucasus*

Also: *the Netherlands, the Midlands, the Great Lakes*

3) other geographical names:

- a) rivers: *the Avon, the Danube, the Rhine*
- b) seas, oceans: *the Pacific (Ocean), the Baltic Sea,*
- c) canals: *the Suez Canal*
- d) other geographical names: *the Isle of Man, the Gulf of Mexico, the Bay of Biscay, the Cape of Good Hope (but: Hudson Bay, Long Island)*
- e) areas of territory: *the Sahara Desert* **but not! lakes** – *Lake Huron*

4) public institutions, facilities, etc.

- a) hotels, restaurants: *the Grand (Hotel), the Waldorf Astoria, the Hilton*
- b) theatres, opera houses, cinemas, clubs: *the Globe (Theatre), the Odeon*
- c) museums, galleries, libraries, hospitals: *the British Museum*

5) **names of ships:** *the Queen Mary, the Mayflower*

6) **newspapers and periodicals:** *the Economist, the New York Times, the Observer, the Providence Journal*

but **not magazines:** *Time, Punch, New Scientist*

7) **political parties:** *the Labour party*

Note:

a) when the name of a public institution begins with a genitive, *the* is not used:

e.g. *St John's College*

Gaylord's (Restaurant)

b) exception: *the Hague*

c) *the University of London* but *London University*

II. NAMES WITH NO ARTICLE

1) personal names

First names (forenames): *Margaret*

Surnames (family n.) alone: *Smith*

First n. and surname together: *Margaret Smith*

Names as these may be prefaced by the **normal titles (Mr, Mrs, Miss, Ms)** or **those indicating the person's status:**

e.g.	<i>Dr Brown</i>	<i>General MacArthur</i>
	<i>Captain O'Connor</i>	<i>Professor Smith</i>
	<i>Private Walker</i>	<i>Cardinal Spellman</i>
	<i>Lord Nelson</i>	<i>Judge Fox</i>
	<i>Lady Churchill</i>	

- Sir + first name: Sir John
Sir + first name + surname: Sir John Smith
but not! ~~Sir Smith~~

- the Lord = God

2) temporal names

- a) festivals, religious periods: *Christmas (Day), Good Friday, New Year, Ramadan*
- b) months, days of the week: *January, Tuesday*

unless they refer to individual periods:

e.g. She left on *the next Sunday*. (context determines which Sunday)
He left on *a Sunday*.

3) geographical names:

- a) extraterrestrial: *Jupiter, Mars (but the moon, the sun)*
- b) continents: *Asia, South America, Antarctica*
- c) countries: *Canada, France*

but! *the Crimea*
(the) Sudan
(the) Ukraine
(the) Sinai

+ when the names end with a compass point: e.g. *the Far East, the Midwest*

- d) cities, towns: *Boston, Rome* **but!** *the Hague, the Bronx, the City*
- e) lakes: *Lake Michigan, Loch Ness*
- f) mountains: *Mount Everest, Mont Blanc, Ben Nevis*
- g) streets, buildings: *Park Lane, Fifth Avenue, Brooklyn Bridge, Scotland Yard*

but! *the Mall, the Strand* (streets)

Note:

- Br. E. – *the University of London* v. *London University*
- Am. E. – *the University of California* v. *California State University*
- universities named after a person have only one form: *Yale University*

- *the north of France* v. *northern France*
the south east of Spain v. *south-eastern Spain*

III. NOUNS RELATING TO REGION AND NATIONALITY

e.g. *Russia* - *Russian*

- 1) general adjective – Both the men are *Russian*.
- 2) language name – She speaks *Russian* fluently.
- 3) sg. noun with specific reference – He is *a Russian*, I think.
- 4) pl. noun with specific reference – There are several *Russians* among my students.
- 5) pl. noun used generically – *The Russians* are a deeply patriotic people.

1) and 2) are always identical!

Note: a few examples

	1 + 2	3	4	5
the Netherlands	Dutch	a Dutchman	Dutchmen	the Dutch
Denmark	Danish	a Dane	Danes	the Danish
Sweden	Swedish	a Swede	Swedes	the Swedish
Finland	Finnish	a Finn	Finns	the Finnish
Poland	Polish	a Pole	Poles	the Polish
Spain	Spanish	a Spaniard	Spaniards	the Spanish
Britain	British	a British	British	the British
Scotland	Scots or Scottish	a Scotsman or a Scot	Scotsmen or Scots	the Scots

Also: *Briton(s)* as forms 3 + 4, informally *Brit(s)*

Scotland: the use of *Scotch*, *Scotchman*, etc. is controversial; *Scotch* tends to be limited only to *whisky*.