

Classes in the Lexicon

Linguistic Principles of English Grammar, 2007 -- Thomas E. Payne

The difference between lexicon and (morpho-) syntax is the difference between what speakers must know outright, vs. what they can construct based on what they already know.
 – Charles Fillmore

Biggest division in the lexicon Full Lexical Words vs. Grammatical Morphemes :

Full lexical words	Grammatical morphemes
Tend to be larger in form	Tend to be smaller in form
Occur in relatively open classes. It is fairly easy to add new members to a class of lexical words, via BORROWING from other languages, innovation of new terms, etc.	Occur in relatively closed classes. It is difficult to add new members to classes of grammatical morphemes.
Occur in relatively large classes.	Occur in relatively small classes. There are only a few items in each class of grammatical morphemes.
Tend to have rich meanings, such as "Alice," "frumious," or "evaluate." Lexical words express many semantic features.	Tend to have narrow meanings, such as "feminine, singular," or "past tense."
Tend to stand on their own as FREE morphemes.	Tend to BIND to other items, i.e., they tend to be CLITICS or affixes (see below).

Summary of properties of *Prototypical Nouns and Verbs*:

	Prototypical noun	Prototypical verb
Functional properties	Semantics: Denotes a single visible object that is stable over time.	Denotes a kinetic, visible action that creates a visible effect. Action is highly non-stable over time.
	Discourse pragmatics: Introduces and refers to manipulable participants in discourse, i.e., those that have a continuous reference throughout the discourse.	Action occurs in an event sequence in discourse.
Structural properties	Morphology (or internal syntax): Capable of expressing all typically nominal categories available in the language, e.g. determiners, classifiers, number, case, gender, etc.	Capable of expressing all typically verbal morphological categories available in the language, e.g. tense, aspect, mode, subject agreement, evidentiality, etc.
	(External) Syntax: Can be the subject or object of a verb. Can be the head of a noun phrase.	Typically is the main predicator in a clause Can be the head of a verb phrase

"Nouniness" and "Verbiness" are a matter of degree, roughly corresponding to how "discourse manipulable" the concept is.

- (1) a. After the break, McTavish threw the log.
b. To throw a log that size requires great strength.
- (2) a. Early in the chase the hounds started up an old red fox,
and we hunted him all morning.
b. We went fox-hunting in the Berkshires.

Exercise:

Based on the data below, and any other data you can come up with, identify the noun-like and verb-like properties of the nominalizations *acceptance* and *accepting*. Overall, which of these is more verb-like and which is more noun-like? What does this mean in terms of the definitions of 'noun' and 'verb'?

1. Our accepting his offer would be a mistake.
2. Their acceptance of the offer was received this morning.
 ?Our accepting of his offer.
 *Their acceptance his offer.
3. We've had four acceptances so far.
 *acceptings
4. Everyone craves acceptance from others.
 *accepting
5. I don't like accepting the offer so quickly.
 *acceptance (of)
6. Acceptance of the offer by all parties is certain.
 *Accepting (of) the offer by all parties is certain.
7. Their rapid acceptance of the offer . . .
 *rapidly
8. Their *rapid accepting the offer . . .
 rapidly