

PARTS OF SPEECH

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2.1 Introduction

As we learnt in the last lecture, stylistics is the study of style; in other words, the study of the manner of using language. For us to study the manner of language use, we need to understand the nature of language itself. That is why it is very important to begin our exploration of stylistics by studying parts of speech. Stylistics involves describing how language has been used and how it should be used for effective communication or to achieve the objective of the individual writer. For us to describe or talk about language, we need to have the terms to do so. In other words, we need to have the language to talk about language. Terms relating to parts of speech are important tools for talking about language and the manner in which we use it.

Classification of words

Parts of speech are classes or categories into which the words of language are grouped. Since words are the building blocks of expressions, we need to understand parts of speech for us to understand the internal structure of those expressions.

All the words in languages different languages are ordinarily grouped into eight categories depending on their function or use. To put differently, there are eight parts of speech with each part grouping together words performing a specific function in language.

The eight parts of speech into which words are ordinarily grouped are:

- 1) Noun
- 2) Pronoun
- 3) Adjective
- 4) Verb
- 5) Adverb
- 6) Conjunction
- 7) Preposition
- 8) Interjection

Let us now describe each of these parts of speech in terms of the role they play or their use in language.

Nouns

A noun is a word that names a person, a thing or a place. In other words, a noun is a naming word. Nouns that name a person include boy, woman, pilot, soldier, student, doctor, Susan and Katana. Mombasa, Lake Victoria, Garbatulla, Tharaka, Mount Kenya and Garissa are nouns that name places. Nouns that name a thing include chair, pen, bus, childhood, girlhood, intelligence, courage and humanity.

“A thing” in the statement “a noun is a word that names a person, a thing or a place” should be understood to refer to not only objects but also abstract phenomena such as concepts and ideas. That is why in the examples we have given above, we have included not only words such as chair, pen and bus but also childhood, intelligence and humanity.

Nouns may be sub-classified into different groups. Each sub-classification uses different parameters thereby yielding different results. Some of the types of nouns are:

- 1) Common nouns
- 2) Proper nouns
- 3) Collective nouns
- 4) Abstract nouns
- 5) Concrete nouns

Collective nouns include herd (of elephants), pride (of lions), swarm (of bees), flock (of birds), pack (of dogs), and school (of fish)

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that substitutes or replaces a noun. In other words, a pronoun occupies the place of a noun in an expression. Let us examine the following short passage:

Rose Kagundu Mukembu has written a very good play which *she* has dedicated to her late father. Her biggest regret is that *he* is not alive to see *it* performed next month when *it* opens at the Kenya National Theatre.

The words in italics, that is, *she*, *he* and *it* are pronouns. They replace or take the place of nouns. *She* replaces “Rose Kagundu Mukembu” which is a noun because it names a person. Likewise, *he* is a pronoun because it replaces “father” which also names a person. Finally, *it* is a pronoun because it stands in the place of the noun “play”.

Pronouns may sub-categorised into five types according to their functions. These sub-categories are:

- 1) Personal pronouns
- 2) Possessive pronouns
- 3) Demonstrative pronouns
- 4) Relative pronouns and
- 5) Interrogative pronouns
- 6) Reflexive pronouns

Personal pronouns are further divided into two groups, namely subject personal pronouns and object personal pronouns. Subject personal pronouns replace nouns in the subject position in a sentence whereas object personal pronouns replace nouns in the object position.

Personal pronouns in English are as follows:

Subject personal pronouns

Object personal pronouns

I	me
We	us
You (singular)	you (singular)
You (plural)	you (plural)
She / he / it	her / him / it
They	them

Possessive pronouns are: mine, ours, yours (singular), yours (plural), hers, his, its, theirs.

Demonstrative pronouns are: this, these, that and those when the words appear without a following noun. When these words are followed by nouns they are demonstrative adjectives and not pronouns. In the expression “this is mine”, “this” is a pronoun. However, in the sentence “This book is mine”, “this” is not a pronoun; it is an adjective.

Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses in a complex sentence. They consist of who, which, that and whom. They are italicized in the following sentences:

- 1) Akinyi, *who* was born in Nanyuki, has won a gold medal in the Olympics
- 2) The University of Nairobi, *which* was inaugurated in 1970, has been the main source of health professionals for the Kenyan economy.
- 3) We are looking for the dog *that* caused a stampede in the shopping mall.
- 4) Dr. Mwendwa, have you seen the patient *whom* you examined last night?

Interrogative pronouns are used in interrogative constructions. They consist of two groups, namely, subject interrogative pronouns and object interrogative pronouns. Subject interrogative pronouns replace nouns in the subject position of construction whereas object interrogative pronouns take the place of nouns in the object position.

Subject interrogative pronouns	Object interrogative pronouns
Who?	Whom?
Which?	Which?
Whose?	Whose?

Examples of sentences with subject interrogative pronouns:

- 1) *Who* brought these books?
- 2) *Which* produced more milk than others?
- 3) *Whose* car caused the accident?

Examples of sentences with object interrogative pronouns:

- 1) *Whom* did you see at the railway station?
- 2) *Which* was delivered last week?
- 3) *Whose* food did you eat?

Adjectives

An adjective is a word that gives information on or qualifies a noun, a pronoun or another adjective or a word that can occur in predicative function as subject or object predicate. The italicized words in the following sentences are adjectives:

- 1) They have bought *a large* house in Runda
- 2) *The two brilliant* girls from Gatunga Primary School have been admitted to *a very good national* school.
- 3) Today, the professor is *excited*.
- 4) She found the play *educative*.

“Large”, (in Sentence 1), “two” and “brilliant” (in Sentence 2), “excited” (in Sentence 3) and “educative” (in Sentence 4) are adjectives. Each of the words gives us information on a noun either directly or as subject or object predicate. “Large” tells what kind of house that was bought in Runda – it is a big house. “Two” and “brilliant” give us information on the noun “girls”. “Two” gives the number of girls whereas “brilliant” gives us their attribute.

We indicated above that we would italicize adjectives. As can be seen from the two sentences, *a* and *the* are italicized. Most people know *a*, *an*, and *the* as articles. Indeed, they are articles. But it will be remembered that in our listing of the eight parts of speech, there was no mention of articles. That was not an oversight. Articles are not a part of speech at par with, among others, nouns, adverbs and conjunctions. They are sub-category of adjectives. That is why they are italicized in the above sentences. In the sentence, “*a*” gives the information that the house in question is not a house known to us. If the house was known to us, the definite article “*the*” and not the indefinite article “*a*” would have been used in the sentence. The second sentence refers to definite girls. The word “*the*” gives that information on the noun “girls”. In a nutshell, to the extent that articles give us information on nouns, they are functionary a sub-category of adjectives.

Verbs

A verb is a word or a group of words that expresses an action or indicates the state of being. When a verb is not a single word but a group of words, it is referred to as Phrasal verb. Write down, look up, wake up, check in and show up are phrasal verbs.

Verbs may be grouped into two according to whether or not they require a direct object for the sentence where they are used to be complete. Those verbs that require a direct object are referred to as transitive verbs whereas those that do not require a direct object are called intransitive verbs. The italicized verbs in the following three sentences are transitive:

- 1) Mwikali *bought* a book
- 2) The hotel *serves* very good food.
- 3) The students have *finished* their homework

In the next three sentences, the italicized words are intransitive verbs:

- 1) The ex-president *passed on* in his sleep
- 2) We *laughed* the whole afternoon.
- 3) He *slept* for twelve hours.

Note that, “passed on” is not only a intransitive verb; it is also a phrasal verb. In other words, it is a verb consisting of more than one word.

Adverbs

An adverb is a word that qualifies or gives information on a verb, adjective, another adverb, a phrase or a sentence. There are several types of adverbs. These are:

- 1) Adverbs of manner
- 2) Adverbs of time
- 3) Adverbs of place
- 4) Adverbs of degree
- 5) Adverbs of number
- 6) Adverbs of affirmation or negation, and
- 7) Adverbs of questioning

In the following three sentences, an adverb is added to a verb, an adjective another adverb, and a whole sentence respectively:

- 1) He writes *well*
- 2) She drives a *totally* black car
- 3) They ran *very* fast *indeed*.
- 4) *Certainly*, I liked every word she said.

Adverbs that qualify verbs are of three types, namely:

- 1) Adverbs of manner
- 2) Adverbs of time
- 3) Adverbs of place

As we have indicated above, an adverb gives more information on the verb. If the extra information on the manner in which the subject performs the action denoted by the subject, the adverb is referred to as an adverb of manner. In other words, an adverb of manner is an adverb that answers the question “How?” with the regard to action denoted by the adverb. When the adverb specifies where the action denoted by the verb took place, it is referred to as an adverb of place. In other words, adverbs of place answer the question “Where?” Finally, adverbs of time specify when the action denoted by the verb took place. In other words, such adverbs answer the question “When?”

As we have seen, besides adverbs that say more about verbs, there are also adverbs that qualify other adverbs, adjectives or whole sentences.

Adverbs that qualify other adverbs include extremely, nearly, very, almost, more and most.

They operate as follows:

- 1) He ran *extremely* fast.
- 2) We were *nearly* there when the alarm went off.
- 3) They worked *very* slowly.

- 4) She dressed *most* elegantly
- 5) They boarded the plane *almost* at noon.
- 5) I suggest that you do this assignment *more* carefully.

Adverbs that qualify adjectives include almost, rather, only, very, just and quite. The following sentences illustrate how they function:

- 1) The performance was *rather* dull.
- 2) The room was *quite* dark.
- 3) The books they wanted to sell to us were *very* old
- 3) It was the car was *only* red when it was bought.
- 4) It was *just* white.

Conjunctions

A conjunction is word that joins words, phrases, and sentences. They are of two types, namely, coordinating and correlative conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions join grammatically equivalent units. They include: and, or, yet, so and but. Correlative conjunctions occur in groups of two words and they join words or groups of words that have equal weight in an expression such as a phrase, a clause or a sentence. They include: either...or, neither...nor, whether...or, and both...and, not only...but also, and just as... so.

Below are examples of coordinating conjunctions. Each of them is highlighted by italics:

- 1) A girl *or* a boy will be given the scholarship depending on the academic performance over the last three years.
- 2) He walked into a nearby shop and bought himself a sky-blue shirt *and* a light-grey coat.
- 3) He went to the bank *but* he did not succeed in getting the loan.
- 4) I did not find the book I wanted; *so*, I bought this one.
- 5) She passed with excellent grades *yet* she was not hired by the college.

Correlative conjunctions consist of two or more words which in usage occupy two different parts of a sentence. They operate as shown in the following examples:

- 1) *Neither* my father *nor* my mother told me that grandmother had Maasai blood
- 2) We *either* eat what the hotel is offering *or* we stay hungry till evening.
- 3) *Whether* we stay in camp *or* in hostel, we will still need to cook for ourselves.
- 4) *Just as* I told you *so* did it turn out to be.
- 5) *Both* the President *and* the Prime minister are agreed that security needs to be beefed up.
- 6) *Not only* does Tharaka have more than ten permanent rivers *but also* minerals such as iron

Preposition

A preposition is a word or a group of words that show the manner in which other words are related or connected. Single-word prepositions include: above, in, from, by, to, at and under. Multiple-word prepositions include: in front of, instead of, because of, apart from, in spite of,

and out of. Prepositions are usually followed by a noun, a pronoun, a verb in the –ing form, or a wh- clause.

In the following sentences, prepositions appear in italics:

- 1) The food is *in* the micro-wave
- 2) I am not traveling to-night *because of* some logistical issues.
- 3) The car is parked *in front of* the supermarket.
- 4) *Apart from* the members of the academic staff several postgraduate students will be attending the conference.
- 5) He did perform well *in spite of* spending many hours *in* the library.
- 6) They are limping *from* walking for twenty kilometers.

It is important to point out although, in enumerating where prepositions are found we have listed both nouns and –ing form verbs, there a sense in which –ing form verbs are nouns. So, it is somewhat redundant to add –ing form verbs after mentioning nouns. A fool-proof evidence to support the claim that –ing form verbs are indeed functionally nouns is not difficult to obtain. Let's compare the following two sentences:

- 1) He needs to improve his garden
- 2) She must work on her swimming

Not only do “garden” and “swimming” occupy similar positions within their respective sentences but also each of them is preceded by a possessive adjective. In Sentence 1) “garden” is preceded by “his” whereas in Sentence 2) “swimming” is preceded by “her”. The ability of “garden” and “swimming” to occupy similar position in the sentence structure is an indication that the two words belong to the same of words. At any rate, by definition, an adjective is a word that qualifies a noun. We can therefore safely conclude that, functionally, “swimming” is a noun because it can be qualified by the possessive adjective “her”.

Sometimes prepositions are part of fixed phrases found in phrasal verbs and in collocations such as idiomatic expressions. In phrasal verbs, the first word is an ordinary verb followed by a preposition. This can clearly be seen in phrasal verbs such as carry through, call on, stand by, send for, dig in, look after and believe in. In idiomatic expressions such as peace *of* mind, bring *to* a halt, and tongue *in* the cheek, the words in italics are prepositions are fixed in the respective idiomatic expressions.

Interjection

An interjection is word or group of words that expresses the speaker's feelings or attitude. In English interjections include: wow! Good Lord! Heavens! Gosh! and oh! In Kiswahili, Ala! Ole wangu! are interjections. A common interjection in French is voila!

CONCLUSION

Parts of speech constitute an important part of grammar. Understanding them helps to us avoid making certain grammatical mistakes such as, for instance, using a transitive verb without an object or placing an object pronoun in a subject position. However, the main reason this article is placed in the section of Marimba Publications website headed “Communication” is because knowing the categories and sub-categories of parts of speech helps us to create and appreciate language rhythm which is one of the most important ingredients of language elegance. I tell my students of stylistics that, in goods, quality in substance is not adequate; the goods must also have good packaging. When we buy goods, our decision for doing so is not only dependent on the usefulness of the good but also on how it is presented by the manufacturer and/or the vendor. Likewise, in a novel, a play, poem or a speech, we look for and expect more than just the ideas or the thoughts of the writer. We look for and expect elegance or beauty. We don’t want to be merely informed. We love being entertained in the process of being informed. We appreciate more if what we are reading or listening to has aesthetic beauty. Language rhythm is an important part of that beauty. That rhythm is based on parallelism which in turn is nothing more than repetition of the same or similar linguistic patterns. Such sameness or similarity is founded on the same or similar sequential arrangement of parts of speech respectively.

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