

She is the cow which has just had a calf.

She is the ship which was launched last month.

In consequence, we have a rather complex pattern of gender classes, with some overlapping, as summarized in Fig. 5.2.

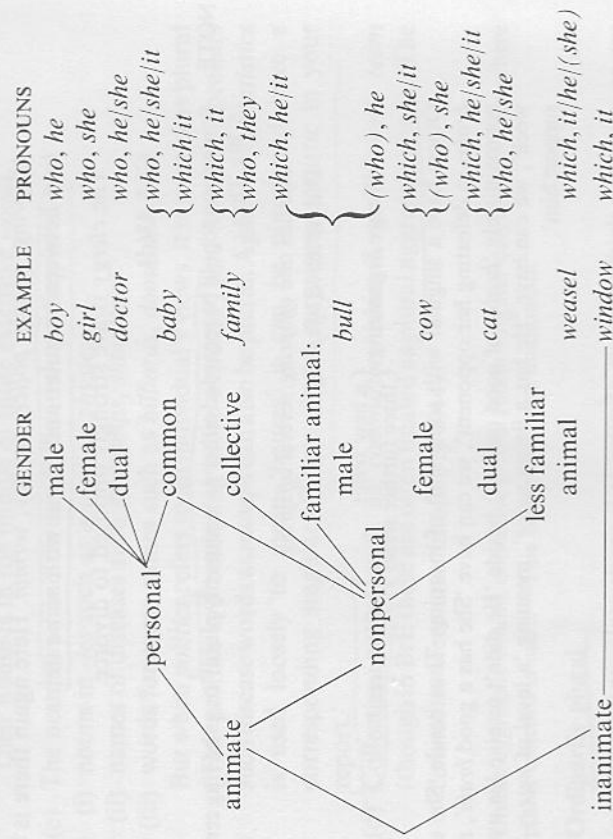


Fig. 5.2

Nouns with personal reference

These commonly occur in *male* and *female* pairs such as *father* ~ *mother*, *boy* ~ *girl*, *king* ~ *queen*. In some cases, the female member is morphologically marked: *god* ~ *goddess*, *hero* ~ *heroine*, *usher* ~ *usherette*, *man* ~ *woman*. With *widower* ~ *widow*, it is the male that is marked.

But many personal nouns can be regarded as having dual gender, since they can be male or female in reference as required; for example, *friend*, *guest*, *parent*, and *person*. Most of these are nouns of agency such as *artist*, *cook*, *doctor*, *inhabitant*, *librarian*, *novelist*, *professor*, *singer*, *speaker*, *student*, *teacher*, *writer*. By contrast, common gender applies to those nouns like *baby*, *infant*, *child*, which though referring undoubtedly to male or female human beings make gender so irrelevant that we can use the neuter pronoun *it(s)*:

The *baby* lost *its* parents when *it* was three weeks old.

The remaining class of person-referring nouns is *collective* where, like the common gender nouns, the sex of the persons concerned is irrelevant, as is shown by our use of *it* and *which*:

The committee, which met soon after it was appointed, had difficulty in agreeing its method of procedure.

But, especially in BrE, such collectives can take plural concord with the personal *wh*-pronoun:

The audience, who were largely students, were soon on *their* feet as they cheered the performers.

Further collectives: *army, association, class, club, community, company, council, crew, crowd, family, firm, government, jury, party, team, university*. Some occur with the definite article, for example: *the clergy, the intelligentsia, the public*. Some are proper names, for example: *the Vatican, Longman, General Motors, British Gas, Everton* (football team).

NOTE

[a] Nouns morphologically marked for gender often tend to be avoided, especially where the sex of the referent is irrelevant; in consequence, nouns with dual gender such as *author*, *chair(person)*, *poet*, *supervisor*, may be preferred to *authoress*, *chairman*, *poetess*, *foreman*.

[b] Although unmarked forms have traditionally been expressed as male while subsuming female ('*Man* is mortal', 'If any *person* is caught stealing from this store, *he* will be prosecuted': cf 6.4), reaction against sexual bias has resulted in evasions such as:

A { *doctor*
parent
singer } may appeal if { *he or she* wishes.
they wish.

[c] Countries and ships (especially by name) are often treated as female: 'France is increasing *her* exports'; 'The *Lotus* sank when *she* struck a reef'.

Nouns referring to animals and inanimates

Among animals, we must distinguish between what we may call the FAMILIAR and the LESS FAMILIAR. The former embrace the range of animals, birds, etc, in which human society takes a special interest, and which significantly impinge on familiar experience (for example, in farming or as domestic pets). Many of the nouns for these occur in MALE and FEMALE pairs, as with personal nouns, often with *he ~ she* as the reference pronoun though usually with *which* as the relative:

This is the *bull* *which* has a brand mark on *his* *(its)* back.

This is the cow which had *her/(its)* first calf when *she/(it)* was already seven years old.

Other such pairs include *ram* ~ *ewe*, *stallion* ~ *mare*, *hen* ~ *cock* (*erel*), and there are some with morphological marking, as in *lion* ~ *lioness*, *tiger* ~ *tigress*. But frequently, despite such pairs as *dog* ~ *bitch*, one of the two is used with *dual* gender, or an item outside the pairing (such as *sheep*, beside *ram* ~ *ewe*) so operates:

This *horse* is two years old; isn't *she* beautiful?

This *horse* has sired *his* first foal.

But LESS FAMILIAR animals constitute by far the majority of creatures in the animate world. Squirrels, ants, starlings, and moths may be fancifully