General Criteria

of Distinguishing Parts of Speech

The Part of Speech Category

is a lexical-grammatical category.

The grammatical signs characterize and distinguish between words, rather than their separate forms.

The word classes are characterized by certain grammatical (morphological) forms and a certain grammatical (syntactic) combinability.

Parts of Speech

are word classes united semantically and characterized by a very abstract, common meaning, which is expressed by a combination of grammatical features of these words.

Criteria

Semantic

(meaning)

According to the **general** (lexical-grammatical) **meaning** common to all the words of the given PoS.

GM: nouns — substantivity, verbs — process, action or state, adjectives — quality, property, numerals — quantity, adverbs — circumstances, quality of the process, etc.

Formal

(form)

According to the **specific inflectional features** common to all the words of the gives PoS, i.e. common **grammatical** (morphological) **categories**.

GC: nouns — number and case, verbs — tense, mood, voice, aspect, etc., adjectives — degrees of comparison.

Functional

(function)

According to the **syntactic role** of the words of the given PoS in the sentence and their ability to **combine** with other words.

SR: **adjectives** — attributes, **adverbs** — adv. modifiers.

C: adjectives — w/nouns, adverbs — w/adjectives and verbs.

Formal and Functional Criteria

In general grammatical characteristic of PoS their morphological and syntactic features play an equally important role. But the syntactic part is more general and that is why it takes the first place in the grammatical characteristic of a word. It is due to the fact that morphologically not all the word classes can be definitely distinguished, but they have their certain syntactic role.

E.g.: **interjections** and **adverbs** are both **uninflected**, but they belong to different PoS due to their **different syntactic roles**.

The Role of Lexical Morphology

There are certain word-forming affixes which indicate the PoS of a given word.

E.g.: -ness, -dom, -hood (nouns), -ate, -ize, -en (verbs), -ly (adverbs), etc.

But the role of these indicators in distinguishing PoS is **insignificant** and they are applicable only when they **do not contradict** the results obtained from the grammatical form of the word.

E.g.: difference (n) 'разница' — difference (v) 'отличать'.

The Problem of Validity of Criteria

In order to have **scientific validity** any classification must be organized on a **constant basis**, i.e. the adopted principle(s) must be applicable to all the words of a given class and the classes must be **mutually exclusive**.

The classification could be consistent if based on a single principle.

A. I. Smirnitsky (1956) **doubts the validity** of distinguishing PoS according to the **formal** or **functional** criteria only: "nouns are nouns not because they are able to decline, but they are able to decline because they are nouns".

Syntactic role may be induced by the general meaning. E.g.: adjectives — property — combined with nouns — attribute.

Thank you for your attention!