

## Grammar Basics

“Kawaiisu Practical Grammar” covers basic information about how Kawaiisu words and sentences are put together. All of the chapters have enough explanation in them that it is possible to learn to use the Kawaiisu structures they present without reading this chapter.

But sometimes, learners want to know more about the “why”, and teachers want to be able to explain that why, too. This chapter gets a little bit deeper into that why by explaining some basic ideas about how languages work and presenting the labels, like “root,” “suffix,” and “agreement” that we use to talk about language. This additional explanation may answer some of your questions, and it may help you explain things if you’re teaching Kawaiisu to someone else. But remember: you learned to speak your first language without knowing what a noun is; this chapter is here as a useful tool, not because you **MUST** know this to understand the rest of this book.

### Parts of speech

The words in all languages can be grouped together based on their *part of speech*. Words belong to the same part of speech as each other because they serve the same function as each other in a language, and they are treated the same way. For example, *nouns* exist in all of the world’s languages. Nouns are words which typically point to objects out in the world; they are often described as labeling persons, places, things, or ideas. Nouns can also be the subjects of sentences; that is, they can label the person, places, thing, or idea that is the main point of a sentence. In English, many nouns can either be *singular* (they refer to one thing), or *plural* (referring to many things), and if they’re plural, they often have an –s on the end. So, for English, we could say that a *noun* is a word which labels a person, place, thing, or idea; can be the subject of a sentence; and usually can have an –s added on the end to make it plural.

We can come up with similar definitions for each of the other parts of speech in a language. In this section, we will go over each of the most common parts of speech. The discussions and definitions will focus on English, since that’s the language that everyone who’s reading this grammar can speak, and in each section we will point out briefly some of the ways that the English part of speech is similar to or different from the same part of speech in Kawaiisu. Of course, the information about Kawaiisu is covered in a lot more detail in the rest of this book.

### Nouns

As we said above, *nouns* are the words that allow us to point to things out there in the world – they name anything that’s a person, place, thing, or idea. Nouns can also show whether we’re talking about one thing (*singular*) or many (*plural*).

## Pronouns

Sometimes, we want to avoid having to say the same noun over and over again in a conversation. For example, it sounds funny to say: “This morning I walked my dog. My dog was very happy. I threw the ball for my dog, too. Then I fed my dog. My dog loves me.” So instead of using the phrase “my dog” again and again, we replace it with something called a *pronoun* – a word which stands in place of a noun. In this case, we’d use the English pronouns “she”, or “her”, as in: “This morning I walked my dog. *She* was very happy. I threw the ball for *her*, too. Then I fed *her*. *She* loves me.”

When it comes to pronouns, languages generally distinguish between the person who is doing the talking (called the *first person*), the person that the speaker is talking to directly (called the *second person*), and the person or people that the speaker is talking about (called the *third person*). Languages also often make a distinction between *singular* (one person), and *plural* (more than one person). And they can also choose to distinguish between the person doing the action (the *subject*) and the person the action is being done to (the *object*); that’s the difference between “she” (in “She loves me”) and “her” (in “I fed her”) above. In “she loves me”, “she” is doing the verb (the subject) and in “I fed her”, the action is being done to “her” (the object). English pronouns, then, look like this:

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	subject	object	subject	object
1 <sup>st</sup> person	I	me	we	us
2 <sup>nd</sup> person	you	you	you	you
3 <sup>rd</sup> person	she/he/it	her/him/it	they	them

Notice what English pays attention to with its pronouns: it pays attention to whether there’s one person or more than one, whether the person is the subject or object of the sentence, and, in the third person singular, whether the person is male or female or not a human. Kawaiisu pays attention to some different things, as you saw in Chapter 4. Kawaiisu doesn’t specify whether a third person is male or female. But it does specify whether a third person is nearby or far away. And Kawaiisu not only indicates whether you’re talking about one person (singular) or many (plural); it also explicitly distinguishes when you’re talking about two people (*dual*).

Languages also tend to have a way to indicate *possession* – to say who owns a particular object. Because objects are named by nouns, possession is often indicated by adding something to a noun (as in Kawaiisu) or putting another word with the noun (as in English).

These possessive markers often pay attention to the same kinds of distinctions as the pronouns of a language. The possessive markers in English certainly do:

SINGULAR	PLURAL	
<b>1<sup>st</sup> person</b>	my	our
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> person</b>	your	your
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> person</b>	her/his/its	their

And so do the possessives suffixes in Kawaiisu, as shown in Chapter 4.

### Verbs

Verbs are the heart of every sentence. Think about it. It would be weird to say a sentence with just a noun: “Sky.” But it’s very common to say a sentence with just a verb: “Run!” The focus of many verbs is action, and in fact, they are often defined as “action words” (like “Run!”). There are verbs which don’t focus on action necessarily (like “become”, or “seem”), but it’s a good rule of thumb. Because verbs focus on action, they also often can be changed to include information like when the action occurred; in English, that’s shown with the past tense marker –ed. So the difference between “walk” and “walked” has to do with when the action happens (now, or before now). This is called *tense*. And since there is usually someone doing the action that a verb describes, sometimes verbs can show something about who is acting (for example, “I run” versus “he runs”; the –s on the end of “runs” says that it’s not me running, and it’s not you running – it’s someone else, and there’s only one of them). This is called *agreement*.

Because of all of this information that can be included in talking about actions, verbs are also often the words in a language that have the most additional stuff going on, and Kawaiisu is no exception. There are some useful words to label that stuff, though, and those words are used in this grammar.

First, we can talk about the *root*. The root of any word is the heart of that word, the part that has the most obvious meaning associated with it. In the verb “runs”, “run” is the root of the verb. In “walked”, “walk” is the root. In English, roots can typically stand alone as words, or they can have bits added onto them. This is one area where Kawaiisu is different – verb roots in Kawaiisu typically need to have something attached to them in order to become words.

The name for something that is added to a root is an *affix*, because it’s “affixed” to the root. If something is added to the beginning of a root, it is called a *prefix*. If it is added to the end of a root, it is called a *suffix*. For example, the –ed in “walked” is a suffix; however, the un- in “untangle” is a prefix. A word like “untied” has three parts: the prefix un-, the root –tie-, and the suffix –ed.

As we said above, because verbs label actions, they can also include information about when that action occurred. This is called *tense*. Basic tenses include *past*, used to talk about actions before the time of speaking; *present*, used to talk about actions which are taking place during the time of speaking; and *future*, used to talk about actions which will take place after the time of speaking. This is what is happening in the sentences: “I ran” (past); “I run” (present); and “I will run” (future). This is a bit of a simplification, of course, but it’s a good start. In English, there is one common suffix used to indicate tense: -ed, which means *past*.

Speakers can also add to verbs to show how they feel about the likelihood of the action happening, or to show their attitude towards the action described by the verb. We call this *mood*. In English, mood is indicated by putting a separate word in front of the verb (these can be called *helping verbs*), as in, “I *should* go”. “Should” there says something about the speaker’s attitude about going – they feel that they ought to go for some reason. Notice how different that is from, “I *might* go”, where the speaker feels doubt about going. Kawaiisu shows this kind of information in suffixes like –guup, “ability, potential”.

And finally, speakers are able to either focus very closely on the action, coming in right in the middle of it, or they can pull back and see the whole action as complete. There are other options, too. This is called *aspect*. For example, if I say, “I am swimming”, I am focusing on the act of swimming right in the middle – it’s going on as I speak (we call that *progressive*, because the action is in progress). But if I say “I have swum”, I am looking at the whole act of swimming as something that’s been completed (we call that *perfective*). There are other aspects, although English only has those two. Kawaiisu shows this kind of information in suffixes like –ga’a, “again, still”.

We said above that verbs can often be changed to include information about who is doing the action described by the verb. English does very little of this; in fact, it has only one ending to say who’s doing the verb, and that’s the ending –s that we discussed above, as in “He runs”.

Kawaiisu has a number of endings that say quite a lot about who is doing the verb. We call that *agreement*, because the endings “agree” with (or match) the doer of the verb (also known as the *subject*). In agreement, languages generally distinguish between the person who is doing the talking (called the *first person*), the person that the speaker is talking to directly (called the *second person*), and the person or people that the speaker is talking about (called the *third person*).

Languages also often make a distinction between *singular* (one person), and *plural* (more than one person). Some languages, like Kawaiisu, also have a special way of showing the *dual* – this is used when talking about two people, rather than one person or many people.

So these endings, which are discussed in Chapter 3, pay attention to the same kinds of information that the Kawaiisu pronouns do – this makes a lot of sense, since they often match the pronouns in a sentence, in the same way that the English ending –s matches the pronouns “she/he/it”, as in “He runs”.

A note about irregularity. All languages have processes which are pretty *regular*, meaning they show up again and again in the language (like English –ed to mean past). But all languages also have exceptions to those rules. For example, in English, we don’t say “I runned to the store”, we say “I ran”. There are also times where different speakers regularly say things in different ways (for example, as a Californian, I say “you”, where a Texan might say “y’all”; I also say “swelled” in sentences like “my ankle swelled up”, while a friend of mine from Nebraska says “it swole up”). Part of learning a language is learning those exceptions – Kawaiisu will have them, too. Finding these irregularities doesn’t mean that there is no rule, or that you’ve learned the rule incorrectly; it just means that there’s an exception, and you can learn that, too.

