

Living beings are of either the male or the female sex. Now compare the following pairs of words.

Boy, girl

Man, woman

Husband, wife

Lion, lioness

Here the first word of each pair is the name of a male animal. The second word of each pair is the name of a female animal. A noun that denotes a male animal is said to be of the masculine gender. A noun that denotes a female animal is said to be of the feminine gender.

A noun that denotes either a male or a female is said to be of the common gender. Examples are: *parent, child, friend, servant, thief, enemy, cousin, student, baby, teacher, writer etc.*

A noun that denotes a thing that is neither male nor female is said to be of the neuter gender. Examples are: *book, pen, room, house, tree etc.*

It is thus seen that in modern English, the gender of a noun is entirely a matter of sex or the absence of it. It has nothing to do with the form of a noun, which determines its gender in many other languages.

Note that inanimate objects are often personified, that is, spoken of as if they were living beings. We then regard them as males or females.

The masculine gender is often applied to lifeless objects known for strength or violence. Examples are: *sun, summer, winter, time, death etc.*

The feminine gender is often applied to lifeless objects known for beauty or gracefulness. Examples are: *moon, earth, spring, autumn, nature, liberty, justice, peace, mercy, hope etc.*