DESCRIBING PRODUCTS, GADGETS, DEVICES AND COMPONENTS

3.1. Expressing and describing shapes, size, quantity and dimensions

Typically, describing products, gadgets, their parts or components entails mastering specific functional language patterns (e.g. patterns deployed to describe similarities (X is similar to, X is comparable in, there are significant/minor/obvious similarities between), patterns deployed to show the whole-part relationship (X is made up of, X encompasses/embraces/includes/covers, X can be further classified/divided into) and, equally important, specific sets of vocabulary items that render characteristics essential for engineering professionals to comment on product/gadget specifications and functionalities (e.g. words and expressions to describe shapes (a square/triangle/cone-shaped part, a crescent-shaped plastic case, a U-shaped arrangement, a jagged edge), words and expressions to describe properties (2 cm width, 5.3 m height, thermal stability, friction-resistant, durable plastic reinforcement, arsenic-free display glass).

Notice the grey vocabulary items and the **bold patterns** in the description of the smartphone iPhone 4 provided below:



"The iPhone 4 is **sandwiched** between two **panes of glass**. The **front pane** covers a **multi-touch viewscreen** laminated in an **oil-resistant film**. The **outside edge** is a **single continuous band** of **brushed stainless steel alloy** to which the guts of the phone are anchored; the **steel band** doubles as the iPhone's two antennae. Embedded along that band are the power, sleep/wake, ring/silent and volume buttons, the phone microphone, a **3.5-mm headphone** jack, a multimedia speaker and a **dock-connector** port for syncing the iPhone with iTunes (among other connection purposes)."

(Will Conley, *Demand Media*, available at http://science.opposingviews.com)

This unit is envisioned as a resource pool displaying topic-oriented vocabulary items and language patterns organised under various headings corresponding to communicative goals relevant for engineers when describing product/gadget specifications and functionalities:

♣ Resources to describe **shapes**

- a crescent-shaped plastic case
- a U-shaped arrangement
- a jagged edge
- a blunt blade
- a small/medium/giant-sized lid
- a dented side
- to keep/retain/lose/change one's shape
- to distort/change shape
- to take shape
- in the shape of
- a shapely design
- to come in all shapes and sizes
- in any shape or form
- a square/triangle/cone-shaped part
- oval/oblong/circular/hexagonal/square in shape

Geometric	Related adjectives		
shapes/volumes			
circle	circular		
triangle	triangular		
rectangle	rectangular		
line	linear		
round	rounded		
square	square (shaped like a) a square table, a square carpet squared (marked by squares) squared paper, squared textile		
cube	cubic		
pyramid	pyramidal		
cone	conical		
sphere	spherical		
cylinder	cylindrical		
spiral	spiral		

[♣] Resources to describe **size**, **quantity**, **dimensions**

one-size-fits-all

to be/not to be the right size

to be a fair size

X is 50 yards in size

to increase/decrease in size

a small-sized room

a medium-sized room

a large-sized room

X is 2 centimetres thin

X is 2.5 metres high

X is 2 kilometres long

X is 12 metres wide

to be produced in large/small quantities

Dimensions	Related	d adjectives	Related action
length	long	short	to lengthen
height	high	short/low	to heighten
width	wide		to widen
breadth	broad		to broaden
narrowness		narrow	to narrow
depth	deep		to deepen
shallowness		shallow	-
thickness	thick	thin	to thicken
thinness		thin	to thin

big/large/bulky/enormous/cumbersome/massive/huge/gigantic/colossal

spacious/large/immense/vast

high/significant/substantial/considerable/sizeable

to increase/to enlarge/to grow/ to augment/to expand/ to extend/ to maximise, to lengthen, to step up, to boost

small/low/little/minor/slight/insignificant

tiny/minuscule/microscopic

to decrease/to reduce/to drop/to fall/to shrink/to limit/ to lower/

to halve/to narrow down/to cut down/ to scale down/ to downsize/

to streamline/ to minimise