

APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE




Lecture 3: The Lexical System

How many words do you 'know'?

Nunan (p.58)

1. Bird	11. Conversion	21. Blowout
2. Fell	12. Fixture	22. Crupper
3. Improve	13. Accede	23. Gloaming
4. Barn	14. Avocation	24. Minnesinger
5. Fatigue	15. Calyx	25. Perpetuity
6. Kettle	16. Concave	26. Riffle
7. Combat	17. Hierarchy	27. Behindhand
8. Resent	18. Monologue	28. Embolism
9. Redeem	19. Tamper	29. Angst
10. Hurrah	20. Acanthus	30. Blowhard



31. Devolute	41. Gunlock
32. Envoi	42. Dipole
33. Golliwog	43. Rigorism
34. Neonate	44. Localist
35. Plainchant	45. Benchboard
36. Astrochemistry	46. Stirabout
37. Nondurables	47. Hypothallus
38. Carboxyl	48. Doombook
39. Eyestalk	49. Paradiplomatic
40. Curragh	50. Poroplastic

FOCUS

- What is a word?
- What do we know when we know a word?
- What criteria and definitions do linguists use?



What is a word?

- **SIGN** (word) = **SIGNIFIER** (word form – written/sound) + **SIGNIFIED** (meaning-object/concept/emotion)
- Ferdinand De Saussure: arbitrary relation-based on social convention
- When you know a word: knowledge of form (sound/gesture) & meaning → inseparable parts of the linguistic sign

Lexical diversity

■ TYPE/TOKEN

Token = individual occurrences of words

Type = different realisations of words

e.g. The elephant is the largest creature in the zoo.

9 tokens; 7 types

Ratio = 9:7

- Child language research: index of lexical diversity



Word tests

■ The ‘Indivisibility Test’

☐ Can you add additional words in the spaces?

The cat sat on the mat

The *furry* cat sat *lazily* on the *scruffy* mat

* The cafurryt satl azilyon the mscruffyat



Word tests

■ The ‘Pause Test’

- ☐ Can you pause where there is white space on the page?
- ☐ This test does not work when we encounter contractions, for example

■ This test is not necessarily foolproof

Word tests

■ The 'Standalone Test'

- Can the word stand alone as a complete utterance?

Andreas decided to play his violin quickly

Whose violin is that? *Andreas's*

What's Andreas playing? *Violin*

How did he play? *Quickly*

What do you want to do? *Play*

Whose is it? *His*

Etc.



Descriptions of words

- Pronunciation
- Meaning
- Classification of words
- Structure



Form & meaning: arbitrary relation

- Words with the same sound and different meanings, *bare* & *bear*
- Words with the same meaning different sounds, *sofa* & *couch*

Form & meaning: arbitrary relation

- **Polysemy**- words which share the same form and a common meaning, e.g. 'caught'
- I *caught* a cab on 39th street
- He *caught* my eye
- Elena *caught* the butterfly
- I think I've *caught* a cold
- She was *caught* in the act



Form & meaning: arbitrary relation

- **Homonyms** - words which share the same form but have completely different meanings e.g. 'bank'

Puns (or paronomasia)

- A word/phrase which exploits confusion between similar sounding/spelling words/phrases:
 - *homophony* e.g. 'are you trying to be punny'
 - *homography* – reading/Reading
 - *homonymy* – bear (animal); bear (carry)
 - *polysemy* – fell (down/stock market/mountain)

Newspaper headlines



- Yacht a cheek (cost of Royal yacht, The Sun)
- Sheep rustling? Round up the ewe-sual suspects
(The Telegraph)
- The Ups and Gowns of Tinsel Town
(The Oscars, Daily Mail)



Classification of Words

■ PARTS OF SPEECH

Nouns: e.g. bed, head, competence

Pronouns: e.g. he, she, who

Verbs: e.g. is, want, see

Adverbs: e.g. intensively, yesterday, soon

Adjectives: e.g. blue, ugly, flattering

Prepositions: e.g. in, under, on

Determiners: a, the, this

Conjunctions: and, if, however

Interjections: oh, yeah, wow

Word class

- The lecture room
The reading room
- ‘Conversion’ – a word takes on an additional function and can be realised as >1 word class
e.g. ‘google’ > ‘googled’/’googling’



Content words & Function words

- Content words: nouns, verbs, adjectives & adverbs
- Open class words: we can add new words, e.g. *facebook, blog, online*
- Function words: (no clear lexical meanings, grammatical function) conjunctions (and, or, but); prepositions, articles, pronouns
- Closed class words: Unreceptive to new members

Content words & Function words

- A bird in the hand
- A bird in the hand
- Lexical density = ratio of content: function words
- Balanced lexical density: approximately 50 percent; high-density texts will have more than 50:50; Academic texts produce highest densities.

Morphology: internal structure of words & rules for word formation

- Internal structure of words: rule-governed
- Morpheme: the most elemental unit of grammatical form (a-, e.g. *amoral*; *camel*, *helicopter*, etc)
- Discreteness: part of linguistic creativity; decomposition of words into morphemes vs. animal communication system, e.g. *moralizers*: *moral+ize+er+s*



Morphology: internal structure of words & rules for word formation

- Free morphemes: they constitute words by themselves

e.g. **car**; **in**

- Bound morphemes: always parts of words (affixes)

e.g. **cars**; **undecided**

Morphology

- **Inflectional morphology** –grammatical changes to words: way in which words inflect to express grammatical contrasts in sentences/utterances,

e.g. clock/clocks, love/loved

Inflectional morphemes

- English: a small set of bound morphemes, the suffixes change the word, but not its grammatical class

-s	plural morpheme	dogs
-s	3 rd person sing. present	lives
-ing	progressive	living
-ed	past tense	lived
-ed	past participle	had lived
-er	comparative	taller
-est	superlative	tallest
-'s, -s'	possessive	Adrian's, the Jones'

Morphology

- **Derivational morphology** – principles applied to the construction of new words without reference to the grammatical role of the word in a sentence/utterance e.g. engage > disengage; munch > munchable

Derivational morphemes

- Large set of bound morphemes: prefixes (which **do not** change the grammatical class of the root, e.g. *disregard*, *multinational*) and suffixes (which usually **do** change the grammatical category, e.g. *movement*, *government*, *happiness* vs. *friendship*, *humanity*, *pinkish*)
- Common derivational morphemes (semantic meaning) include:
 - [-ize, -able, -tion, -ism, -ate, -ness, -ity, -ify, -ive, -ist, -en, dis-, un-, dis-, re-, pre-, bi-, post-]

Affixes

- **Prefixes** – appear before the base of the word
e.g. unqualified, prejudge
- **Infixes** – inserted into the middle of the stem
e.g. fabu – tabi - lous
- **Suffixes** – appended to the end of the base or stem
e.g. undecideded, sleeping, boys



Circumfixes: German

Circumfixes → attached to a base morpheme initially and finally

Past participle of regular verbs

ge + verb root + t

‘geliebt’

English borrowings in Modern Xhosa

(Mesthrie et al 2000:250)

e.g. *Modern Xhosa borrowings from English*
(i-prefix- ?)

ikompyuta
imoto



Comanche (SW USA): resist borrowings from English

Bicycle - *na-ta? - ?ai-ki-?*

- gloss = 'thing to make oneself go with the feet'

Lemon - *?ohaplti? a-taka-sikikimatl*

- gloss = 'orange's brother, tastes sour'

(Casagrande 1954, cited in Mesthrie et al 2000:250)



SUMMARY

- We considered what constitutes a ‘word’?
- Discussed tests used by linguists.
- Discussed how linguists classified/classify words.
- Considered the internal structure of words & its importance in lexical development.



Post-class reading & references

- Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, Chapter 2
- Crystal, Chapters 37 & 38
- Nunan, Chapter 3

- Mesthrie et al (2000) *Introducing Sociolinguistics*.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.



Exercise

- Divide the following words by placing a + between their morphemes. (Some of the words may be monomorphemic and therefore indivisible.)



■ *Example:* replaces = re + place + s

- a. retroactive
- b. befriended
- c. televise
- d. margin
- e. endearment
- f. psychology
- g. unpalatable
- h. holiday
- i. grandmother
- j. morphemic
- k. mistreatment
- l. deactivation
- m. saltpeter
- n. airsickness