

Some Linguistics Terms

Hi everyone! Here are some terms that may be useful for your writing in this class, as grouped into the Big Three characteristics. I've included definitions for the terms that you may not be familiar with. Note that I do not expect a mastery of the terms on this list by any means, but I encourage you to try to use them where you think appropriate. 😊

SOUND

- Phoneme: an individual speech sound; note that non-speech sounds (like random noises) are not considered phonemes
 - Ex: The word “two” has two phonemes: /t/ and /u/ (you do not need to learn the phonemes for this course)
- Consonant
- Vowel
- Syllable
- Intonation: the “melody” of speech; often indicates whether the utterance is a statement, a question, or something else
 - “You talked to David” vs. “Who did you talk to?”
- Pitch: how high or low you speak
- Speech rate: how fast or slow you speak
- Intensity: how loud or soft you speak
- Stress: some sort of acoustic prominence, marked in English by greater intensity and higher pitch
 - “RE-cord” vs “re-CORD”

STRUCTURE

- Morpheme: any meaningful sub-part of a word
 - Ex: In “dogwood”, the morphemes are “dog” + “wood”; in “absurdly”, the morphemes are “absurd-ly”
 - Note that I would not say that “ab” is not a morpheme here like it is in “abnormal”, as “surd” does not carry any meaning
- Root: generally, the most important morpheme in a word
 - Ex: In “dogwood”, “wood” is the root, as it contributes the most meaning
- Affix: meaningful sub-words that attach to a root
 - Prefix: meaningful sub-words that come before a root: “**de**”-“value”-“d”
 - Suffix: meaningful sub-words that come after a root: “de”-“value”-“**d**”
 - Interfix: meaningful sub-words that come between a root, commonly with curse words: “abso”-“fucking”-“lutely”

- Noun: a person, place, thing, or idea
 - John, carpenter, Rome, school, dish, ball, love, hope, etc.
- Pronominal: nouns that must refer to other nouns
 - He, them, she, this, it, etc.
- Verb
- Adjective
- Adverb: denotes the when, where, and how of verbs
 - Ex: John ran **quickly**, John ran **later**, John ran **around**
- Preposition: denotes a relation, usually physical
 - Ex: above, across, of, under, by, toward, with, etc.
- Conjunction: words that group other words
 - Ex: and, or, but
- Complementizer: words that are used to introduce additional clauses:
 - Ex: I know **that** the students are awesome.
 - Ex: I know **whether** the students are awesome.
 - **Though** the students are tired, they are awesome.
- Determiner: as the name suggests, indicates the “set” of nouns that we are working with
 - Ex: **The** dog... (one specific dog from the set of dogs)
 - Ex: **A** dog.... (any specific dog from the set of dogs)
 - Ex: **Every** dog.... (the set of all dogs)
 - Ex: **Five** dogs.... (five specific dogs from the set of dogs)
 - Ex: **No** dogs.... (no dogs from the set of dogs)

MEANING

- Tag question: a statement that is appended with a last-minute question
 - Ex: This is great, **isn't it?**
 - Ex: You know what you're doing, **right?**
- Stance: the sociolinguistic “persona” that a speaker adopts while talking
 - Ex: “I was talking to John. He said, ‘**My students are awesome**’”
- Connotation: the sociolinguistic implications of a word
 - Ex: “I **ate** my sandwich” (casual lunch) vs. “I **destroyed** my lunch” (not so casual lunch)
- Synonym: a word that means the same thing as another word
- Antonym: a word that means the opposite of another word
- Polysemy: a word that has multiple meanings
 - Ex: “bright” (shining) vs. “bright” (intelligent)
- Homophony: a subset of polysemy, where the two words have entirely different meanings
 - Ex: “bat” (baseball tool) vs. “bat” (winged animal)
- Entailment: if Sentence A is true, then so is Sentence B
 - Ex: “Every dog likes to bark” entails “This dog likes to bark”, but note that “This dog likes to bark” does not mean that “Every dog likes to bark”
- Ambiguity