ENGLISH WORDS 7  
  
‘own. If some shouted to you in the street, ‘Hey, are you -ish?” you might smile bemusedly and think to  
yourself, ‘Isn’t he weird!” In the next chapter we will take up the question of what to do with pieces of  
  
words that cannot be used meaningfully on their own. But for the moment we will focus exclusively on  
words.  
  
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WORDS ARE LIKE LIQUORICE ALLSORTS  
  
When we talk of words we do not always mean exactly the same thing. Like liquorice allsorts, words come  
in all sorts of varieties. We will start our discussions by distinguishing the different senses in which we use  
the term ‘word’.  
  
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Word-forms  
  
Let us use the term WORD-FORM to describe the physical form which realises or represents a word in  
speech or writing. Consider the words in the following extract from T.S.Eliot’s poem:  
  
(2.1)  
Half-past one,  
The street-lamp sputtered,  
  
‘The street-lamp muttered,  
  
‘The street-lamp said, ‘Regard that woman  
  
‘Who hesitates towards you in the light of the door  
Which opens on her like a grin...  
  
(Rhapsody on a windy night’ in Eliot 1963)  
  
In written English, words are easy to recognise. They are preceded by a space and followed by a space.  
Using this criterion, we can say that there are thirty-one words (ie. word-forms) in the extract from  
“Rhapsody’, We will call word-forms like these which we find in writing ORTHOGRAPHIC WORDS. If  
you look again at the extract, you might wonder if some of the hyphenated orthographic words are ‘really”  
individual words. Many people would hyphenate half-past as Eliot does but not street-lamp. They would  
write street lamp as two separate words, with a space between them. What would you do?  
  
The use of hyphens to indicate that something is a complex word containing more than one word-like  
unit is variable, largely depending on how transparent the compound nature of a word is. Shakespeare wrote  
today as to-day and tomorrow as to-morrow:  
  
a To-morrow, Caesar,  
I shall be furnished to inform you rightly...  
(Antony and Cleopatra, Lv)