

02 – The lexicon

Lexicology and Lexicography – Course Website

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Outline

1. What is a word? Criteria and problems
2. Names and multi-word expressions
3. Paradigms: inflection and derivation
4. Practice: Using the OED

Criteria for wordness

Utterance criterion

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- but: mentioning vs use

A: Is it *inadvisable* or *unadvisable*?

B: Un.

- grammatical words as utterances (e.g. *the*) only in special contexts

Phonological criterion

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- but: sequencing and alternatives affect prosody
 - *in the beginning* vs *first* vs *forever* vs *for ever*
- minimal pair in intonation: *record* (N) vs *record* (V) in isolation vs context

Examples:

- *He will re'cord the song. / He bought the 'record.*

Semantic criterion

“A word has a single, unitary meaning.” (**Bauer 2022**: 2)

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but: near-synonymous expressions can differ in meaning

finally vs *in the end* (closure vs narrative sequencing)

Examples:

- We *finally arrived after midnight.* / *In the end, we stayed home.*

Orthographic criterion

“words are unitary orthographic units” (**Bauer 2022**: 2)

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- but: spacing and hyphenation vary
 - *coffee pot* vs *coffee-pot*
 - *in so far as* vs *in-so-far-as*
- diachronic change: *all right* vs *alright* (usage note in OED)

Examples:

- *It's all right.* / *It's alright.* (nonstandard in some styles).

Dictionary criterion

“A word is listed in the dictionary.” ([Bauer 2022](#): 2)

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but: circularity; sub-lexical units are also listed (e.g. prefix *un-*)

Practical definition

“We will accept the spelling conventions of English as defining words [...] which has the advantage of being practical.” (**Bauer 2022**: 3)

Further reading: Haspelmath, Martin. 2023. “Defining the Word.” *WORD* 69 (3): 283–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.2023.2237272>.

Criteria cheat sheet

| Criterion | Diagnostic | Quick example |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Utterance | standalone? | <i>Un.</i> (context-dependent) |
| Phonology | stress pattern? | <i>first</i> vs <i>for ever</i> |
| Semantic | unitary meaning? | <i>finally</i> vs <i>in the end</i> |
| Orthography | spacing/hyphens? | <i>alright</i> vs <i>all right</i> |
| Dictionary | listed? | <i>un-</i> (sub-lexical but listed) |

Check: is this a word?

alright

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→ orthographic controversy; cf. practical definition (accept spelling conventions)

honeybee vs *honey bee*

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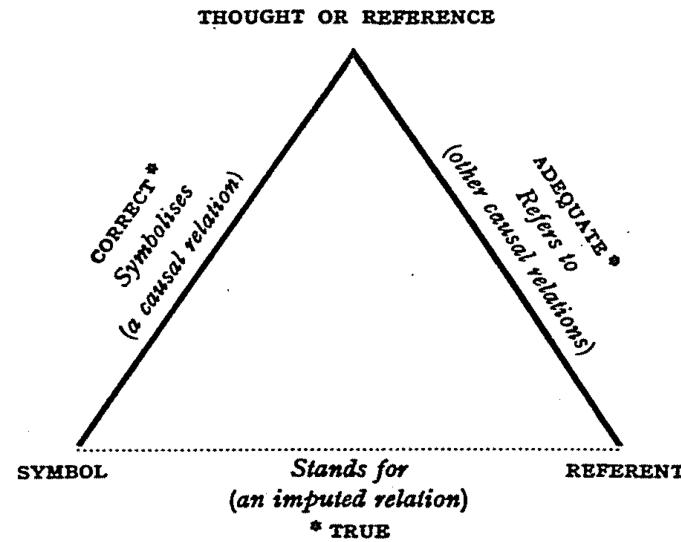
→ orthographic criterion; both attested; check dictionary practice

Problems in delineating the
term *word*

Names

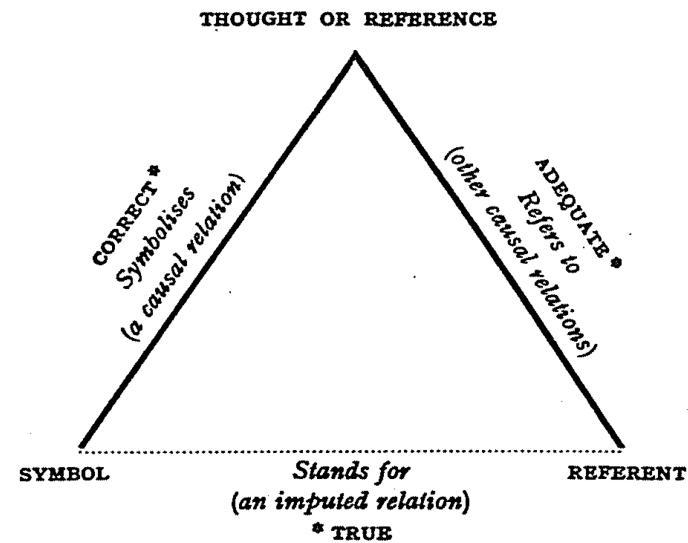
Names

- names have unique reference; they pattern differently from common nouns
- examples:
 - *the Samantha*
 - *This isn't the Paris I remember.*
(common-noun use; compare corpus: "This isn't the Paris of my youth")
- roles as noun phrases (no modifiers): *the former Argentine*



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When do names pattern like common nouns?

Multi-word expressions (MWE)

- compounds: *blackbird*, *coffee pot*
- phrasal verbs: *look up*, *take off*
- collocations: *strong tea*, *make a decision*
- idioms & proverbs: *kick the bucket*, *Too many cooks spoil the broth*

Compounds

- *passion flower; sunflower; wall-flower*
- onomasiological competition: *honey bee* vs *honeybee*

Worked example: *honey bee* vs *honeybee*

- both forms occur; dictionaries may list one as headword with variant
- evidence to check:
 - headword spelling
 - variant forms list
 - example citations
- OED finding: *honeybee* (primary); *honey bee* (variant)

| Evidence | Result |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Historical precedence | separate words older |
| Current usage | both forms common |

Phrasal verbs

- *He passed out.*
- *He fainted.*

Examples:

- *She looked up the word. / She looked the word up.*

Collocations

Continuum:

- **strong**: *kith and kin*
- **intermediate**: *all things considered; as a matter of fact; excuse me; good afternoon; I'm sorry to say; in other words; in the long run*
- **weak**: function-word sequences like *in the*

Examples:

- *take a quick photo* (typical) vs *make a quick photo* (less typical)

Worked example: collocation strength

- cues for strength:
 - fixedness
 - semantic transparency
 - paradigmatic alternatives

| Phrase | Typical? | Notes |
|--------------|----------|----------------------------|
| take a photo | yes | conventional light verb |
| make a photo | variable | regional/genre variation |
| do a photo | rare | atypical in standard usage |

Idioms & proverbs

- **Idioms:** *He kicked the bucket.* (= He died)
- **Proverbs:** *Too many cooks spoil the broth.* (fixed formulaic)

Examples:

- *She spilled the beans.* (= revealed the secret)
- *A stitch in time saves nine.* (cannot reorder)

Worked example: ambiguous case

break down

Form test:

Stress test:

Meaning test:

Conclusion:

Worked example: ambiguous case

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- written as two words → phrasal verb

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Conclusion:

- primarily phrasal verb; can form compound noun *breakdown*

Check: Classifying multi-word expressions

take a photo

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→ collocation (light verb construction)

kick the bucket

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take a photo

→ collocation (light verb construction)

kick the bucket

→ idiom (non-compositional)

Paradigms

Inflectional paradigms

"The term 'paradigm' is in general usage, but its usage is often limited. Although *paradigm* can justifiably be used of any substitution class, it is most often used of substitution classes within the word. Thus the normal use for the term *paradigm* is the kind of substitution class illustrated in the following example." (**Bauer 2022**)

(12): walk, walks, walked, walking

This paradigm illustrates two different kinds of word: there is a sense in which all the items are different **word-forms**, and a contrasting sense in which the paradigm illustrates different uses of the same word, the **lexeme**."

Derivational paradigms

(13)

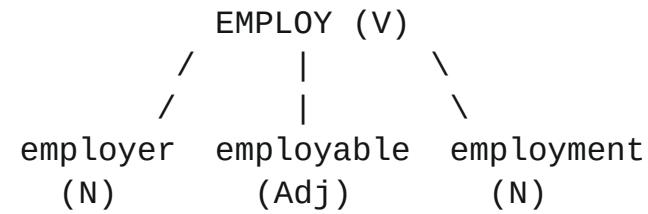
| | deceive | employ | proceed | theorise |
|------------------|----------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Verb | deceive | employ | proceed | theorise |
| Noun | deception | employer | process | theory |
| Adjective | deceptive | employable | processual | theoretical |

Although these examples show individual word families, these series are often generalised over several word families (e.g. *theory – theorist – theorise* parallels *fantasy – fantasist – fantasise*).

Inflection vs Derivation: key contrast

| Type | Same lexeme? | Word class change? | Example |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---|
| Inflection | yes | no | WALK → <i>walks, walked, walking</i> |
| Derivation | no (new lexeme) | often | EMPLOY → <i>employer</i> (N), <i>employable</i> (Adj) |

Visual family tree: derivation



Check: Paradigms

1. Identify all inflected forms for the lexeme *walk^v*
 2. Find as many derived forms as possible for the base ANALYE.

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- N: *analysis, analyst*
- Adj: *analytic, analytical*
- Adv: *analytically*
- V: *analyse*
→ also AmE: *analyze, analyzer, analyzable*

Practice: Using the OED – Topic & Objective

- Topic: Using dictionary data to examine lexical structure and usage.
- Objective: Identify and describe “problematic” lexical cases via OED evidence.

Navigation targets (OED)

- Forms/Spelling (variants)
- Phrasal verbs / Idioms sections
- Examples/Citations pane

Tasks

Starter headwords (choose one or explore all):

- *alright* (spelling variant)
- *kick the bucket* (idiom)
- *honeybee* (compound with variants)

What to look for:

- **Task A** (find two problematic cases): variant spellings? usage labels? date range in citations?
- **Task B** (compare entries): entry structure? cross-references? examples?
- **Task C** (extract citations & discuss): fixedness cues? semantic transparency? paradigmatic alternatives?

References

Bauer, Laurie. 2022. *An Introduction to English Lexicology*. Edinburgh University Press.