02 — The lexicon

Lexicology and Lexicography — Course Website

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Outline

Criteria for wordness

Utterance criterion

"A word is the smallest unit which can stand on its own as an utterance." (**Bauer 2022**: 1)

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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?	*Un.* (context-dependent)
Phonology	stress pattern?	*first* vs *for ever*
Semantic	unitary meaning?	*finally* vs *in the end*
Orthography	spacing/hyphens?	*alright* vs *all right*
Dictionary	listed?	*un-* (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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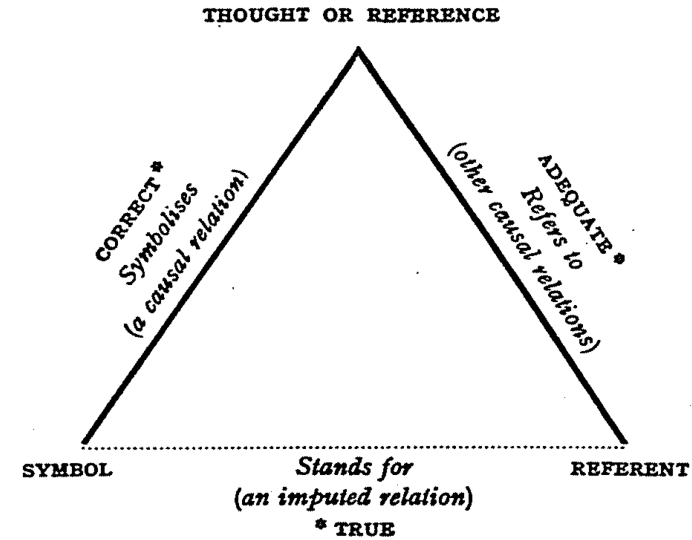
honeybee vs *honey bee*

→ 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*

THOUGHT OR REFERENCE

CORRECT *
Symbolises
(a causal relation)

ADEQUATE *
Refers to
(other causal relations)

SYMBOL .... *Stands for*
(an imputed relation)
* **TRUE**
REFERENT

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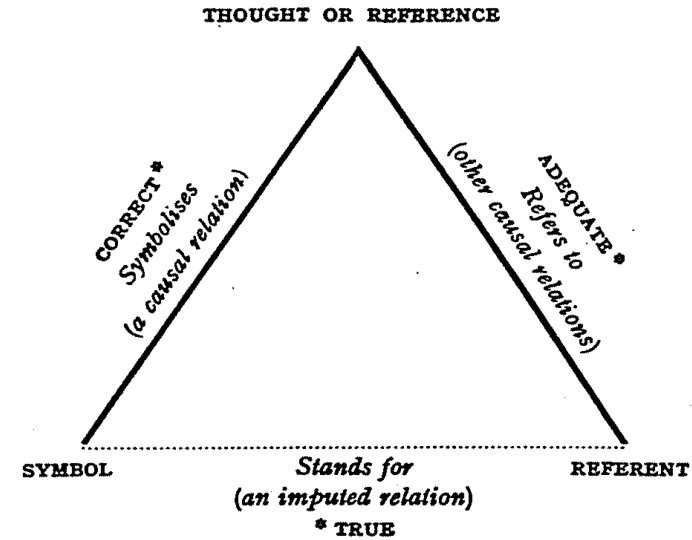
When do names pattern like common nouns?

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

break down

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- written as two words → phrasal verb

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- stress on particle *down* → phrasal verb

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- can be literal (*car broke down*) or figurative (*negotiations broke down*) → both possible

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Stress test:

- stress on particle *down* → phrasal verb

Meaning test:

- can be literal (*car broke down*) or figurative (*negotiations broke down*) → both possible

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**."
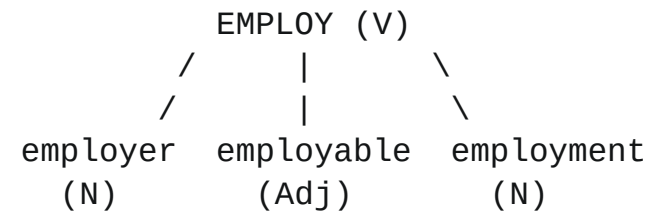
Derivational paradigms

(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 → *walks, walked, walking*
Derivation	no (new lexeme)	often	EMPLOY → *employer* (N), *employable* (Adj)

Visual family tree: derivation

```
             EMPLOY (V)
           /     |     \
          /      |      \
     employer employable employment
       (N)      (Adj)      (N)
```

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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   - *walked*: past tense
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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

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.