

# Lecture 06 : Lexicology

Dr. Guermi

Lexicology is a branch of linguistics dealing with the study of the word and its form, behaviour and functions. Thus, the lexis or the lexicon denotes the sum of words making up the vocabulary of the language, or the total stock of words contained in the dictionary. Lexicologists are interested in the generalizations and regularities characterizing the forms of words and their relations together.

## What do we mean by « word » ?

In linguistics, a word of a spoken language can be defined as the smallest sequence of phonemes that can be uttered in isolation with objective or practical meaning. It is the central unit of investigation in lexicology. However, when considering this definition in the eye of the lexicologists, the claim has some validity, but would 'a' or 'my' normally occur in isolation? They would not, yet we like to think of them as words. Are homographs and homophones considered separate words? Are compound nouns considered to be one semantic unit or more? What is a lexeme? What is a dictionary entry (a set of information that describes a word or phrase)? Some scholars have suggested that a word contains one unit of meaning. This perhaps true if we think of words like "car" or "snow", but when we think of the word "cow" it might be regarded as follows:

Cow: + noun, bovine, female. (It doesn't contain one unit of meaning).

A better approach to define words is to isolate four of the most frequently implied meanings of "word":

- An orthographic word: one which has a space on either side of it. this definition applies only to the written medium, because we rarely pause between words in speech.
- A morphological word: considers form only and not meaning. For example: "Ball" the dance and "balls" the object, are two morphological words because they are not identical in form.
- A lexical word, it comprehends the various forms of items which are closely related by meaning. Thus, chair and chairs are two morphological words but one lexical word. This leads us to defining the word lexeme. A lexeme is a theoretical construct that stands for the unitary meaning and shared syntactic properties of a group of word forms. A lexeme is stripped of any inflectional endings. Thus play, plays, played, and playing are all inflected forms of the lexeme play.
- A semantic word, involves distinguishing items which may be morphologically identical, but differ in meaning, like the previous example of "ball" and "ball" which is known as the phenomenon of "polysemy" (the capacity for a sign to have multiple related meanings).

## Word-formation

There are many techniques of word-formation, we select only the followings:

- The first derivation technique is summarised as follows:

*Suffixation:* man+ ly = manly

*Prefixation:* un +true =untrue

*Affixation:* dis+ taste+ ful =distasteful

- Compounding:

- *It frequently involves two nouns:*

Book + case = bookcase

Wall + paper= wallpaper

Bull's +eye = bullseye (the apostrophes are occasionally not found in the compound.)

- *Noun +verb*

Blood + shed = bloodshed

- *Adjective +noun*

Blue +bell = bluebell

- *Adjective + verb*

Easy + going =easygoing

- *Verb + noun*

Lock+ jaw = lockjaw

- *Verb + adverb*

Come +back = comeback

- *Adverb+verb*

Down + fall = downfall.

Often, when the compound is new, whether it involves a prefix, and a word or two words, a hyphen is used between the parts:

come-back      dis-inter

but as the compound becomes more familiar, the hyphen is dropped (unless two vowels come together:

co-operation      take-off

- Blends: involves joining two words together by taking parts of both.

Breakfast = lunch = brunch

Motor + hotel = motel

- Acronyms: creating words out of the initial letters of well-known organisations:

UN : United + Nations

### Word- classes

Word class, is sorting words according to their function. A word class is a group of words that have **similar properties** and play a **similar role** in a sentence.

In the English language, there are four main word classes:

- **Nouns**

- Nouns are the **names** that we give to people, places, objects, feelings, concepts, etc.
- eg 'dog', 'water', 'Chloe', 'courage'
- eg 'The **dog** swam in the **water** ' or ' **Chloe** is here'

- **Verbs**

- Verbs are words that show **action** , **event** , **feeling** , or **state** of being. This can be a physical action or event, or it can be a feeling that is experienced.
- eg 'run', 'go', 'swam', 'wish'
- eg 'I **run** ten miles per day' 'I **wish** '

- **Adjectives**

- Adjectives are words used to **modify** nouns. They describe an attribute, quality, or state of being of the noun.
- eg 'Sharp', 'long', 'ashamed'
- eg 'The **long** needle was also **sharp** '

- **Adverbs**

- Adverbs are words that work with verbs, adjectives, and alongside other adverbs. They provide **further descriptions of how, where, when, and how often** something is done.
- eg 'quickly' (how), 'yesterday' (when), 'behind' (where)
- eg 'The dog **quickly** ran **behind** the cat'

These are **lexical** (or open / form) word classes that carry most of the meaning in a sentence. They make up the majority of the words in the English language.

## The other five word classes

- **Prepositions**

- A preposition is often a small word showing direction, location, time, or introducing an object.
- eg 'to' (direction), 'at' (location), 'after' (time),
- 'I went **to** the moon **at** 8 pm **after** dinner'.

- **Pronouns**

- Pronouns take the place of a noun in the sentence. They often refer to a noun that has already been mentioned.
- eg 'I', 'you', 'it', 'them', 'hers', 'his', 'himself', 'ourselves'
- Chloe (noun) → ' **she** ' (pronoun)
- Chloe's dog → ' **her** dog'

- **Determiners**

- Determiners work alongside nouns to clarify information about the quantity, location, or ownership of the noun. It 'determines' exactly what you are referring to.
- eg 'a', 'the', 'some', 'this', 'every', 'neither'
- ' **The** man had **some** cheese'

- **Conjunctions**

- Conjunctions are words that link two parts of a sentence or coordinate words in the same sentence.
- eg 'but', 'and', 'or', 'because', 'however', 'even though'
- 'She bought milk **and** cheese **but** not eggs'

- **Interjections**

- Interjections are words used to express an emotion or a reaction. They often stand alone from the rest of the sentence.
- eg 'ow', 'oops', 'phew', 'ahh'

These are called **function** (or closed / structure) classes and are used for a grammatical or structural function. They help us to understand the relationship between the lexical terms. These classes are studied in depth in lexicology and are known as lexical classes.