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Module 6 : Linguistic

Linguistics

- 6.1 Phonology**
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6.1 Phonology

Phonology is the study of the sound and structure of a language.

how to break down a word into its smaller sounds

6.1.1 Basics of phonology

Phonology is more relevant for people who are learning a new language, not learning spoken language for the first time.

Phonemes: A phoneme is a unit of sound that when replaced changes the sound of a word in a particular language.

Phonemes are broken down into two categories: vowels and consonants.

Vowels: A vowel is an open sound that is spoken without blockage from the lips or tongue.

- Single vowels
- Short vowels
- Schwa



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- Long vowels
- Diphthongs

Consonants: Consonants are sounds that are spoken with obstruction from the lips, teeth, or tongue.

- Voiced consonants
- Unvoiced consonants

Minimal pair: Two words that differ in meaning because they contain one phoneme that is different are called minimal pairs.

Phone: A phone is the smallest unit of sound and refers to the way in which an individual pronounces a sound. It can therefore exist in more than one language.

Accents: When a syllable or sound within a word is given more attention than the others. This changes the way an individual pronounces a word.

- Stress accent, dynamic accent, or stress: When an accented syllable is given a change in pitch and volume, it is referred by any of these three names.
- Pitch accent: When the accented syllable is differentiated through a change in only the pitch which it is pronounced.
- Quantitative accent: When the accented syllable is differentiated through only a lengthening of the syllable.

Intonations: A change in the pitch of a word or syllable that does not change the meaning of the word or syllable but rather indicates any of a number of different situations, including:

- Revealing the feelings of the speaker.
- Identifying the phrase as a question or distinguishing between different types of questions.
- Giving importance to a word or phrase in the statement or question

6.2 Morphology

Morphology is very closely related to phonology in that it is concerned with the structure of language. Specifically, however, morphology deals with the structure a language's morphemes, phonemes, and other linguistic units.



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6.2.1 Basics of morphology

To truly understand morphology, one must fully understand morphemes, which are the basis of the area of study.

Morphemes: Morphemes are sometimes referred to as the smallest linguistic unit that carries meaning. While phonemes are smaller, they essentially build towards pronunciation rather than meaning.

Morpheme 1: Market. The root of the word that carries the major meaning of the word. This word could stand alone and make sense if it needed to (though not in the sentence we plucked it from). This morpheme is called the free lexical morpheme.

Morpheme 2: -er. This is the suffix that is added to the word, carrying with it the inherent meaning of “one who does something.” Understanding the suffix allows a student to understand that a marketer is one who markets. This morpheme is called the bound lexical morpheme.

Morpheme 3: -s. This letter is added so that the amount is clear and that the word fits in the sentence grammatically with the intended meaning. The sentence would still make sense without this morpheme, but it would change the meaning. This morpheme is called the bound grammatical morpheme.

Free lexical morpheme: This term is used to describe a morpheme that can exist on its own and make sense. In the previous example, the free lexical morpheme was “market.” Alone, “market” is a word. Conversely, “er” is not a word that can exist on its own and still make sense. While in this case the free lexical morpheme was the root word, it does not have to be. The word “classroom” is composed of two free lexical morphemes—“class” and “room.”

Bound lexical morpheme: This term is used to describe a morpheme that is bound to another morpheme lexically and cannot make sense without it. This term often refers to prefixes and suffixes that are added to words to adjust their meaning. These morphemes cannot function alone and serve to simply modify the meaning of the free lexical morpheme to which they are attached.

Bound grammatical morpheme: This term is used to describe a morpheme that is bound to another morpheme and serves the purpose of helping its word fit into a sentence grammatically.

Free grammatical morpheme: While we did not clearly identify this in the previous examples, free grammatical morpheme is a term used to describe morphemes that are not bound to other morphemes but are there to serve a grammatical purpose. Usually, these words are articles,



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conjunctions, and prepositions. In the sentence above, “John threw the ball at Mike,” “at” is a free grammatical morpheme.

6.3 Lexicology

Lexicology is the study of words

6.3.1 Basics of lexicology

To understand lexicology, it is important to break it down into its smaller parts to look at how each works to create the overall study of lexicology.

Lexeme: A lexeme is a lexicological unit of linguistics, which, for the most part, refers to a root word.

Lexical items: Whereas a lexeme is the root of a word, a lexical item is the entirety of a word or phrase that imparts meaning.

Lexical structure: Lexical structure refers to the internal structure of lexemes as well as the structure of the lexicon of a language. The “lexicon” is just a fancy term for all of the words in a group.

Paradigms: Differences in meaning that rely on the substitution of words. In other words, if you look closely at a phrase, such as “Bill ran to his truck,” making a paradigmatic change would require a substitution. This would result in a different phrase, for example, “Bill ran to his wife” or “Frank ran to his truck.” These changes completely change the meaning of the sentence because different subjects and objects can be substituted.

Syntagms: These are differences that result from the positioning of words in a phrase. In other words, to make a syntagmatic change in a sentence, you would change the order of the words to adjust the meaning of the sentence. For example, if the sentence “Johnny threw the ball to Mary” is changed to “Mary threw the ball to Johnny,” then the difference is syntagmatic.

Co-text: We will discuss semantic ideas in detail later in the module, but this term is relevant to both aspects of linguistics. The co-text of a word is the linguistic context, which means that it is the linguistic meaning of a word or the meaning that a word inherently carries with it.

Context: Context is another semantic term but also a concept that even laymen know. The context of a word is the words and sentences around it that give it meaning. Whereas co-text covers the various



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meanings that can be attributed to a word, the context refers to the specific meaning of the word that is intended based on the surrounding words and sentences.

6.4 Syntax

Now that we have learned about how sounds and words are created, it is time to discuss how sentences are formed. Syntax is the set of rules that govern the grammatical construction of sentences in a language. For English, these rules are fairly complicated, but let's take a close look at some of the basic ideas behind English grammar and syntax.

6.4.1 Basics of syntax

To understand syntax, we have to look more closely at all of the parts that make up a sentence. The first step is to understand how sentences are classified:

Clausal sentence (simple sentence): A clausal sentence is a simple sentence that contains only one clause or one complete proposition (subject and predicate). For example, the sentence "Gloria is going to the store" contains only one clause, which includes a subject ("Gloria"), a verb ("is going"), and an object ("the store").

Compound sentence: A compound sentence is a sentence that consists of more than one clause (known in this case as coordinating clauses because they work together to complete an idea). For example, the sentence "Maryann went to the mall and got a new shirt" is a compound sentence containing the clauses "Maryann went to the mall" and "got a new shirt." In the second clause, the subject ("Maryann") is implicit.

What about the words that make up these clauses? The English language has innumerable rules for how words should be structured and organized within a sentence. The first categories you need to know to understand these rules, though, are the parts of speech.

- Noun: A noun is word that describes a person, place, thing, or idea.
- Verb: A verb describes an action or a state of being.
- Adjective: An adjective is a word that modifies a noun.
- Adverb: An adverb is a word that modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb.
- Preposition: A preposition is a word that describes the relationship between a verb and its object.
- Pronoun: A pronoun is a more general word that takes the place of a specific noun.



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- **Conjunction:** A conjunction is a word that links two coordinating clauses together.

Now that we know the parts of speech, we can begin diagramming sentences. Here is an example of a sentence with all of the parts of speech labeled:

Lei quickly ran down the dark street to find and catch his dog.

While it would be impossible for us to cover every single syntactical rule in the English language, here are a few more that are directly relevant to your students who are learning English for the first time:

- Every sentence needs at least a subject and a predicate. The subject of the sentence is the noun that is acting or being. The predicate is the phrase that consists of the verb and the object (not every sentence needs an explicit object).
- The verb and the subject of the sentence need to agree, meaning that if you are using a plural noun, you need to use the plural form of a verb.
- For the most part, the best way to frame a sentence is in active rather than passive voice. This means that the sentence “Sammy threw the ball to Jane” is more grammatically sound than if it were passive and written “The ball was thrown to Jane by Sammy.”
- Verb tense needs to agree throughout a piece of writing or spoken language. If the first verb you use is in past tense, then all subsequent verbs with the same intention should be past tense.

6.5 Semantics

We have successfully worked our way up to understanding how sentences are structured, and now it is time to discuss words again, but this time we will look at the connotative and complex meanings that they carry. Semantics is a branch of linguistics that involves the study of words and their meanings.

6.5.1 Theories of semantics

Typically, the concept of semantics is divided into three theories of semantics: formal semantics, lexical semantics, and conceptual semantics. Each of these types of semantics delves into the true meanings of words and will help your students understand the intricacies of the English language.

Formal semantics: Formal semantics is a very mathematical theory that strives to understand the meaning of words by forming exact mathematical principles and ideals that speakers and writers can



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use. People who subscribe to the formal semantics theory look for the relationship between how language forms and the world in which it forms to try to understand how people create meaningful discourse.

Lexical semantics: Lexical semantics is a theory that the meaning of a word is understood by looking at its context. In this way, sentences can be broken down into semantic constituents or words and phrases that carry meaning and context. This theory promotes the analysis of how words and phrases play off each other to build meaning.

Conceptual semantics: Conceptual semantics is a theory that highlights the importance of the internal structure of words. Theorists believe that the best way to understand the meaning of a word in a sentence is to look at the word itself, its internal structure, and how it combines different, smaller elements.

6.5.2 Extending word meaning

Truly understanding the English language means understanding the complexities of the language that allow speakers of the language to build different layers of meaning in their speech. Understanding these complexities takes a strong grasp of semantics and the ability to analyze context. When we talk about word meaning, we can generally break it down into two categories:

Denotation: Denotation refers to the literal meaning of a word. You can easily find the denotation for a word in the dictionary. With synonyms, the denotation is similar or the same.

Connotation: Connotation refers to the implied meaning that the word often has because the word is used to describe something beyond what the denotation states. Take a look at two synonyms, such as “skinny” and “thin.” If you use these two words to describe a person, their denotations are pretty much the same, but the connotation behind “skinny” is more negative than the connotation behind “thin.” Thin implies someone who is at a healthy weight, while skinny implies that the person is frail or weak. It takes true understanding of a language to get such small, but important complexities of meaning.

Because of the complexity of language, speakers and writers can build meaning that is implicit rather than explicit and sometimes difficult to decipher even for the most fluent English speaker.

Literal language: Literal language is when a speaker or writer directly describes what they mean.

Figurative language: When the writer builds meaning that goes beyond the literal meaning. Here are some examples of figurative language:



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- Metaphors
- Similes
- Personification
- Irony
- Symbolism

6.5.3 More semantic terminology

Beyond what we already described are important terms within the study of semantics you should be aware of.

Synonymy: This word literally translates to “sameness of meaning” and is the root of the word “synonym.” As we displayed in our discussion of connotation, however, while two words can be synonyms, they do not necessarily mean the same thing. If two words meant exactly the same thing, then one would be extraneous. Synonyms are necessary because they represent the detail and specificity of the English language.

Hyponymy: This term literally translates to “inclusion of meaning” and essentially refers to words that belong in groups. A fork is a hyponym of silverware because it is a member of the silverware group.

Antonymy: This term literally translates to “oppositeness of meaning,” which means that antonyms are meant to be opposites. It is very difficult to find an exact antonym for most words, however, so words are often paired up because they’re close to being antonyms, much like how synonyms have similar but not exact meanings.

Incompatibility: This term literally translates to “mutual exclusiveness within the same subordinate category,” which means that it refers to two members of a group that are different entities. For example, cats and dogs are both animals, so they would fit under the purview of this term.

Homonymy: This is a term that refers to when two words sound the same even though they have different meanings. These can be especially confusing to new language learners because they require a strong idea of context to identify. A good example of a group of homonyms is “there,” “their,” and “they’re.”

Polysemy: This term refers to when a word has more than one meaning. This is different from a homonym because the spelling of the word does not change depending on the meaning. For



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example, the word “close” can refer to two items that are in near proximity to each other, or it can refer to something being shut.

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