

## Lecture 2.1

### 0.18 three basic aspects of structure

They are often referred to as 'levels' of language, though this term is often used loosely to refer to any dimension of linguistic enquiry. Virtually every main heading in my course diagram has been referred to as a 'level' by some linguist or other over the years. I use the term 'level' narrowly, referring to a dimension of language structure capable of being studied in its own terms. In this approach, sub-divisions within each major heading are called 'levels' too – the levels (or 'sub-levels') of morphology and syntax, for example. Note also that some linguists (such as Noam Chomsky) use the term 'grammar' as a higher-order heading: in his approach, the three nodes in my diagram are all part of the study of grammar.

### 1.01 beware the term 'semantics'

Notice how the description of the Semantic Web always uses a more general notion than language, such as 'content' or 'information' or 'data', as at:

<[http://semanticweb.org/wiki/Main\\_Page](http://semanticweb.org/wiki/Main_Page)> and

<<http://www.w3.org/standards/semanticweb>>.

### 2.27 lexeme

The term was coined on analogy with the other '-eme' terms in linguistics, especially 'phoneme' and 'morpheme'. Terms such as 'lexical item', 'lexical unit', and 'unit of sense' are also used. A lexeme is an abstract unit. 'GO' is the lexeme that underlies 'go, goes, going, gone', etc. 'BE' is the lexeme underlying 'be, am, is, are, was', etc. Lexemes are usually distinguished typographically in some way (such as in capitals or bold face) to distinguish them from the words they bring together. Any of these associated words could be used to identify the lexeme, but it is usual to take the basic form of a word as the identifier, and this is the form that appears in dictionary headwords. So 'GO' is the way we identify this lexeme, not 'GOES' or some of its other variant forms. Similarly, 'CAT' is the lexeme underlying 'cat' and 'cats'. 'BIG' is

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the lexeme underlying 'big', 'bigger', and 'biggest'. There are also some lexemes that have only one form, such as 'THE'.

'Lexeme' is rarely used outside linguistics, though it is increasingly used these days in such areas as computing and online advertising. And it is acquiring a greater degree of popular usage, thanks to its regular appearance in Ben Schott's blog for *The New York Times*, which has a 'daily lexeme':

<<http://schott.blogs.nytimes.com>>.

3.16 in underneath

I changed my construction after 'in'. The sentence begins at 'underneath'.

3.43 the headwords

This is the usual way of describing the boldface items that introduce dictionary entries. They should really be called 'head lexemes'.

4.45 how many words are there in Shakespeare?

Totals vary. Everything depends on the texts you decide to include under the heading of 'Shakespeare'. Is the play *King Edward III* to be included? Also, strictly speaking, we should ask 'how many words are there in the canon associated with Shakespeare?', for several of the plays are known to be collaborations. The total will also depend on which versions of the plays are included, for some plays exist in Quarto and Folio versions that use different words. And if we include all the editorial emendations that have been made over the centuries, that will also alter the final total. Bear these points in mind when you encounter such sites as <<http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/stats>>, which give precise numbers. I discuss this issue further in the opening chapter of *Think on my Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language* (Cambridge University Press).

6.15 that dictionary

The allusion is to the dictionary referred to at the very beginning of Lecture 1.1. By a 'college-sized dictionary' I mean the sort of dictionary that has been compiled to meet the needs of students attending universities, which usually has between 1000

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and 2000 pages and between 100,000 and 200,000 entries. I suggest you take one of the smaller editions. When I say 'choose 20 or 30 pages', I mean distributed randomly throughout the book. Don't take them all from a single section of the alphabet. And don't forget to look out for any boldface items within an entry (such as 'forcefully' and 'forcefulness' within 'forceful') or multi-word units listed as lexemes (such as 'come in').

7.01 multiply, as it were, by the number of pages

You will have to work out the average number of words per page first. If you have examined 20 pages and ticked 800 words, and the dictionary is 1500 pages long, your result should be 60,000 (800 divided by 20 = 40 words per page  $\times$  1500 = 60,000). When I said 'all of you will know half the lexemes in the dictionary', I was thinking of a dictionary containing about 100,000 entries. Obviously that proportion will be smaller if you use a larger dictionary.

7.39 semantic fields

An illustration of the possible range of semantic fields can be seen at:

<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/iedocctr/ie-ling/ie-sem>.

Notice that the notion of a semantic field can be used at any level of categorization. 'Animals' is a semantic field, but so is 'mammals' (a type of animal) and 'dogs' (a type of mammal) and 'poodles' (a type of dog). If a category is a semantic field, it will have its own vocabulary. However, the notion is not clear-cut. Some lexemes belong to several semantic fields, and there will always be different viewpoints about how a semantic field is to be labelled and which lexemes properly belong there. Does 'tomato' belong to the field of fruit or vegetable, or both? There are many such problems in this kind of analysis.

9.01 clusters of words

I mention only two of the kinds of 'sense relation' that bring words together: sameness of meaning (synonymy) and oppositeness of meaning (antonymy). Other sense relations include hyponymy (the relationship of inclusion: 'poodle' is a kind of

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'dog') and meronymy (the relationship between parts and wholes: 'roof' is part of a 'house'). Incompatibility refers to the sets of words that go together but exclude each other, such as the days of the week or the instruments of the orchestra: it is not possible for someone to say 'I am thinking of an instrument of the orchestra and it is a clarinet and a trumpet'.

9.44 unless you're in jest

It is possible to refer to someone in a jocular way and say 'He's very married', or for someone who has just started a new relationship to say 'I'm not quite as single today as I was yesterday'. But these are playful usages, which rely for their effect on our awareness that 'single' and 'married' are not normally used in this way. Examples of other nongradable antonyms: 'dead/alive', 'enter/exit', 'husband/wife', 'left/right', 'up/down'.

10.23 put into sequences

I talk only about coherence in this lecture. Another important kind of sequence is illustrated by the notion of 'collocation' – the habitual co-occurrence of lexemes. 'Auspicious', for example, collocates with such nouns as 'occasion' and 'event'.

11.15 a sequencing problem

Further examples of sequencing activities that have been used with children can be seen at:

<<http://www.speechtx.com/emergent/sequencing.htm>> and

<<http://www.quia.com/pages/sequencingfun.html>>.

The cards I use in the lecture were produced by Learning Developmental Aids in the 1970s.

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### 16.05 lots of meanings

The technical term in linguistics for the several meanings of a word (lexeme) is 'polysemy'. Most words are polysemic. Scientific and technical terms are least likely to be polysemic. But the words we use in everyday speech are typically polysemic – and some amazingly so. A verb such as 'take', for example, has dozens of meanings, as can be seen in any dictionary.

### 16.28 all the clauses and the phrases

These are examples of constructions taken from a particular approach to grammar – the one most likely to be encountered in the tradition of grammar teaching in schools. Not all approaches use the term 'clause', for example. But the point I'm making applies to any kind of grammatical approach. Whatever apparatus and terminology we use to talk about grammar, the end result is the same: it enables us to make sense.

### 16.56 no grammar

The first stage of language learning does use a basic grammatical notion: the sentence. Single-word utterances (such as 'dada, gone') are sometimes called 'holophrases' or 'holophrastic sentences' (from Greek '*holo-*' meaning 'whole, entire').

### 17.09 round about 18 months

This is the average age that we observe children beginning to put two words together with a growing awareness of the functions they perform in a sentence, as illustrated by the contrast between 'daddy push' and 'push daddy'. There is more on the development of grammar in children in Lecture 3.2.

### 19.46 morphology

We can get an impression of the world of plant morphology by looking at the images on Google:

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<[http://www.google.co.uk/images?hl=en&q=morphology+plants&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=3nPVTN2sN9X-4AbGsPXbBw&sa=X&oi=image\\_result\\_group&ct=title&resnum=3&ved=0CDUQsAQwAg&biw=1218&bih=690](http://www.google.co.uk/images?hl=en&q=morphology+plants&um=1&ie=UTF-8&source=univ&ei=3nPVTN2sN9X-4AbGsPXbBw&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&ct=title&resnum=3&ved=0CDUQsAQwAg&biw=1218&bih=690)>.

For geomorphology, see:

<<http://www.geomorphology.org.uk/gallery#0>>.

20.40 initial letters

A large collection of data on abbreviations is at:

<<http://www.abbreviations.com>>.

A long list of texting abbreviations is at:

<<http://www.netlingo.com/acronyms.php>>,

though only a tiny proportion of these are in common use.

20.52 brunch

Word blends are often called 'portmanteau words' – a term introduced by Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking-Glass*. Other examples are 'smog' (smoke + fog), 'motel' (motor + hotel), and 'ginormous' (gigantic + enormous). There is some background at:

<[http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Portmanteau\\_word](http://www.worldlingo.com/ma/enwiki/en/Portmanteau_word)>.

20.58 compound words

Several sites list compound words, such as (for English):

<<http://www.docstoc.com/docs/13434578/Compound-Word-List>>.

Some languages have a much more complex system for forming compounds, such as German:

<<http://german.about.com/od/nounsandcases/a/German-Compound-Words.htm>>.

21.08 word-endings

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Word-endings are more technically referred to under the heading of 'inflections'. A word can show its grammatical function in a sentence by varying its 'affixes' – at the end ('suffixes'), at the beginning ('prefixes'), or in the middle ('infixes'). English only uses suffixes in a grammatical way, and there are very few of them (such as the plural '-s' in nouns, the '-ed' past tense ending in verbs, and the '-er' and '-est' expression of comparison in adjectives). There are rather more in French and German. Even more in Latin and Hebrew. And many thousands more in some African languages.

21.56 quite big books

Such as Francis Katamba and John Stonham, *Morphology* (Palgrave Macmillan) and Geert Booij, *The Grammar of Words* (Oxford University Press).

22.37 the syntax of cooking

The point can be illustrated not only from book titles. Unusual 'syntax' collocations are easy to find on the Internet, such as in this account of a menu in which the expected 'rules for the construction of individual dishes' are disturbed:

<<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/28/marinetti-futurist-cooking.html>>.

22.57 the example I gave you earlier

At Lecture 1.1, 16.16.

23.19 coherence that I was telling you about before

At Lecture 2.1, 10.29.

23.31 later on

At Lecture 3.2, 26.05.

23.36 how children learn it

For the stages of grammatical acquisition, see my *Listen to your Child* (Penguin).

24.50 the point about productivity

In Lecture 1.1, 10.51.

25.39 normal nonfluency

This is a term used mainly in speech pathology, where it contrasts with the kind of behaviour called stammering or stuttering. The nonfluency can be much milder than in my example, or much more severe; but in all cases it is a normal behaviour which lasts for a few weeks or months and then dies away, as children become more able to process complex constructions. There is no anxiety on the part of the child, and it is important (though not easy) for parents not to show impatience too, as they wait for the child to finish a sentence. If their anxiety transferred to the child, it could be a factor in the later development of a genuine stammer.

26.34 them mice

It's important to view child language acquisition in terms of the dialect that the child is learning. Learning to speak and write the standard language (in this example, 'those mice' rather than 'them mice') is something that will take place in school. This is discussed further at 29.52. Using 'them' for 'those' is a feature of many dialects, not just Liverpool.

26.40 all those irregular forms

Because language has variant irregular forms, and is always changing, we may even as adults have an uncertain intuition about some usages, such as 'drank/drank, swam/swum, broadcasted/broadcast, highlighted/highlit'.

28.15 passive examples that I gave you a little while ago

In Lecture 1.2, 24.40.

29.11 by the panda

I exaggerate the loudness in the lecture!

29.54 prescriptive

Prescriptive rules are sometimes called 'normative' rules. In relation to grammar, there are not many of them (a few dozen), and each rule generates varying amounts of support, but when people really believe in the merit of a particular prescriptive



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rule, they do so with great insistence and emotion. There is no general agreement, because adherence to such rules is closely bound up with an individual's personality, temperament, and school experience. One prescriptivist may have a particular dislike of split infinitives (such as 'to really go'), but doesn't mind ending a sentence with a preposition ('the woman I was talking to'). Another hates prepositional endings, but doesn't mind split infinitives. From a linguistic point of view, the important thing is not to condemn a usage out of hand (especially when it is widely used by educated people), but to understand the different stylistic or semantic effects conveyed by the alternatives, and develop a control over their use. This is discussed further in Lecture 6.1, 12.49.