

Word as the basic unit of language

Lecture 2.



§ 1. The Definition of the Word

A successful definition should 1) contain **essential features** of a word and 2) **draw a sharp borderline** between various linguistic units:

- 1.1. word and phoneme (*Oh! I*)
- 1.2. word and morpheme (*man, wise, ism*)
- 1.3. word and phrase (*all right, alarm clock, the reciprocal pronouns each other and one another*)

Essential features

1.1. Unity of form and meaning

Word - Form

phonetic/graphic morphological structure grammar form

Word – Meaning

denotational connotational lexico-grammatic grammatic

- 1.2. When used in sentences words are **syntactically** organized. Their freedom of entering into syntactic constructions is limited by rules and constraints
- *They **told** me this story vs. They **spoke** me this story*
 - *to deny smth categorically vs. to admit categorically*

1.3. Words are characterized by (in)ability to occur **in different situations**

- *In a business letter: 'I was a bit **put out** to hear that you are not going to place the order with us'*
- *To a friend: 'I **regret to inform** you that our meeting will have to be **postponed**.'*

Distinctive features: Within the scope of linguistics the word has been defined syntactically, semantically, phonologically and by combining various approaches.

Syntactic: H. Sweet "the minimum sentence"
L. Bloomfield "a minimum free form".

Syntactic and semantic aspects:

E. Sapir - "one of the smallest completely satisfying bits of isolated 'meaning', into which the sentence resolves itself. It cannot be cut into without a disturbance of meaning".

Indivisibility criterion: *A lion is a word-group* because we can insert other words between them: *a living lion*. **Alive is a word:** it is indivisible, nothing can be inserted between its elements.

Semantic:

Stephen Ullmann: "words are **meaningful units**."

Semantic-phonological approach:

A.H.Gardiner: "A word is an articulate **sound-symbol** in its aspect of **denoting something** which is spoken about."

Thus, a satisfying word-definition should reflect the following features as borrowed from the above explanations:

1. the association of a particular meaning with a particular group of sounds
2. capable of a particular grammatical employment
3. the smallest significant unit, used in isolation
4. capable of functioning alone
5. characterized by morphological uninterruptability and
6. having semantic integrity

§ 2. Types of lexical units

The units/elements of a vocabulary are lexical units, which means that they are two-facet elements possessing form and meaning.

They are, apart from words:

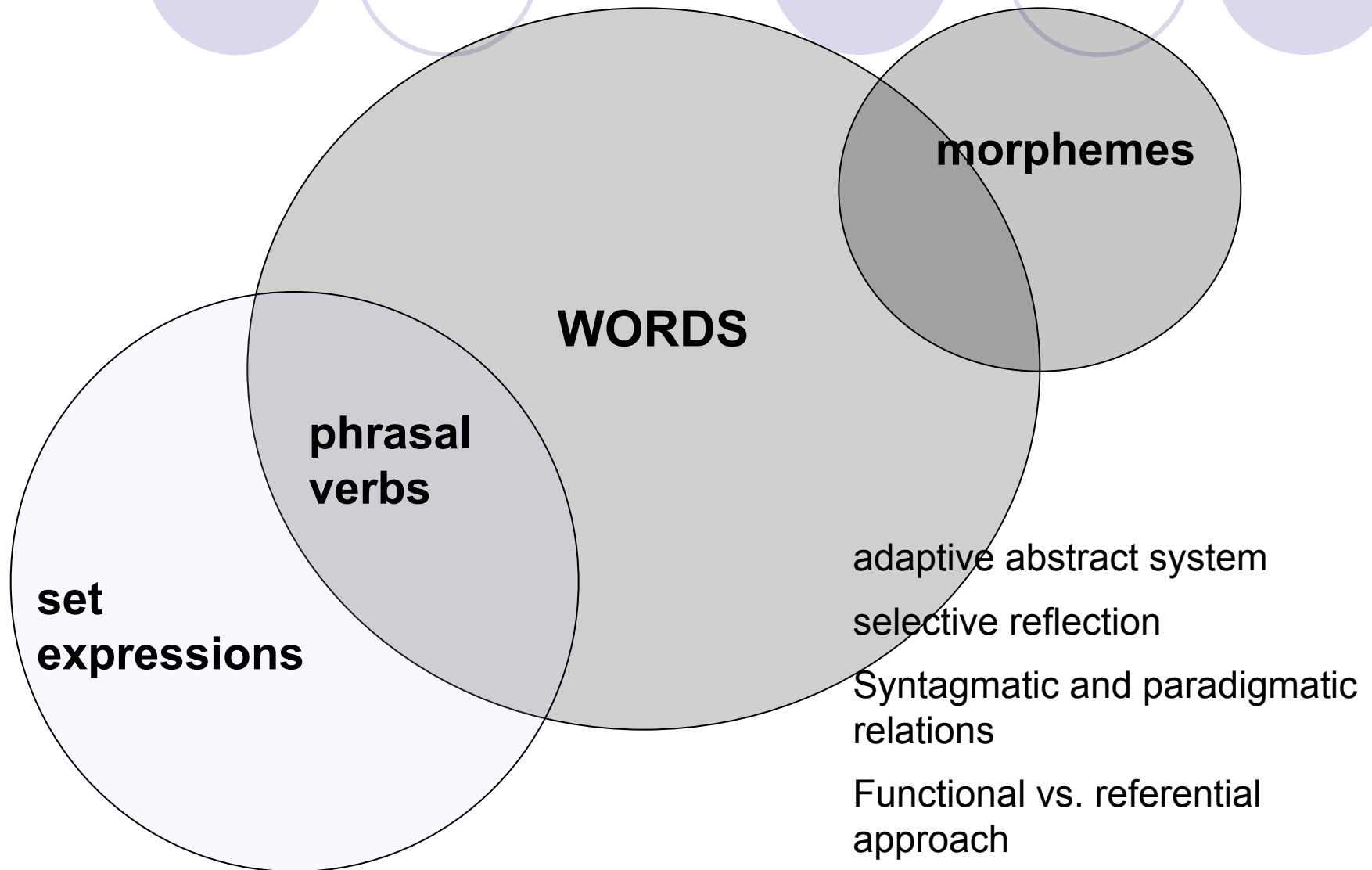
1. **Set expressions** or groups of words into which words may be combined
2. **Morphemes** which are parts of words, into which words may be analyzed

- **Morphemes** are structural units which either **form a new word or modify its meaning**. Their meaning is of more abstract and general nature. Morphemes can't function alone and deny grammar change.
- **Set expressions** are word groups consisting of two or more words whose combination is integrated so that they are introduced in speech ready-made as units with a specialized meaning of the whole that is not understood as a mere sum total of the meanings of the elements.

Words are the central elements of language system = we speak in words and not otherwise, because they :

1. are the biggest units of morphology and the smallest of syntax
2. embody the main structural properties and functions of the language (nominative, significative, communicative and pragmatic)
3. can be used in isolation
4. are thought of as having a single referent or represent a concept, a feeling, an action
5. are the smallest units of written discourse: they are marked off by solid spelling
6. segmentation of a sentence into words is easily done by an illiterate speaker, but that of a word into morphemes presents sometimes difficulties even for trained linguists
7. are written as a sequence of letters bounded by spaces on a page (with exceptions)


**Thus, the vocabulary of a language is not homogeneous,
it's made of sets with blurred boundaries**



§ 3. Types of words

Eight Kinds of Words by Tom McArthur:

- The **orthographic** word
(a visual sign with space around: colour vs. color)
- The **phonological** word
(a spoken signal: a notion vs. an ocean)
- The **morphological** word
(a unity behind variants of form)
- The **lexical** word
(lexeme, full word as related to a thing, action or state in the world)

- 
- The **grammatical** word
(form word, a closed set of conj-s, determiners, particles, pronouns, etc.)
 - The **onomastic** word
(words with unique reference: Napoleon)
 - The **lexicographical** word
(a word as an entry in the dictionary)
 - The **statistical** word
(each letter or group of letters from space to space)

Types of words as regards their structure, semantics and function (E.M. Mednicova):

MORPHOLOGICALLY:

Monomorphemic: root-words

Polymorphemic: derivatives, compounds, compound-derivatives, derivational compounds

SEMANTICALLY:

Monosemantic: words having only one lexical meaning and denoting, accordingly, one concept

Polysemantic: words having several meanings, thus denoting a whole set of related concepts grouped according to the national peculiarities of a given language

SYNTACTICALLY:

Categorematic: notional words

Syncategorematic: form-words

STYLISTICALLY:

Neutral

Elevated (bookish) (steed, to commence, spouse, slay, maiden)

Colloquial (smart, cute, chap, trash, horny)

Substandard words (vulgarisms, taboo, jargon argot, slang), **etc (there are various other stylistic groupings).**

ETYMOLOGICALLY:

Native

Borrowed

Hybrid

international words

Practical tasks # 2

1. Which criterion can be used to distinguish word from other language units? Match:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| a) Phoneme | 1) meaningful unit able of functioning alone |
| b) Morpheme | 2) unity of form and meaning |
| c) Free phrase | 3) semantic integrity |

2. Which units from the list below are not lexical units?

- | | |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| a) Shch | d) he is a genius |
| b) To make fire | e) in a nutshell |
| c) Did | f) dogs |



3. How many lexemes are there in the phrase:

Don't trouble trouble until trouble troubles you.

4. Which one of these words is monosemantic?

to get, a cat, an aspen-tree, to borrow, a ball, to follow.