

Discussion Questions on Words and Morphology

1. To get an idea of the amount of specific linguistic data we store in our brains, it is more significant to ask how many “listemes” we know than how many “words” we know. Here are some pairs of items which we might say “mean” the same thing or look linguistically “the same”, yet they involve separate mental storage. Think of others like these.

- Descriptive titles vs. their acronyms: University of California at Los Angeles vs. UCLA

In this and other cases like "American Automobile Association" vs. "AAA", we have to be familiar with both the full phrase as a listeme and with the acronym use to refer to it as a separate listeme. A correct understanding of what the phrase "American Automobile Association" requires that we know something about the organization--that information does not come just from the words in the phrase. Likewise, we have to have at least one listeme "AAA" which we know as referring to that organization. The three letters alone do not show what the referent is. For example, at UCLA there is an "African Activists Association" which has the same acronym but a different referent.

- Names of places vs. descriptions: The United States vs. “the country between Mexico and Canada”

The phrase "the country between Mexico and Canada" is NOT a listeme on its own. If we know the meanings of the individual words and the grammar of English, we know which place is being referred to even if we don't know its name. The name of the country itself, however, must be a listeme. There are many countries in the world that comprise several states, but only one of those is actually called "The United States". We could learn the name of the country separate from the description of its location.

- Compounds vs. phrases with the same words: The White House vs. the white house






This is similar to the preceding item. The phrase "the white house" is not a listeme. If we know the words and the correct grammatical structure, we understand the kind of structure it could be applied to (including The White House). "The White House", on the other hand is a listeme because proper understanding of the phrase requires specific knowledge about the place, e.g. that it is the President's residence, that it is located at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C, etc.

- Idioms vs. phrases of the same structure: He hit the nail on the head. vs. He hit the catfish on the head.

There are two ways that we can tell that idioms are listemes, not just phrases that we put together from knowledge of individual words and grammatical structure.

- 1 **Meaning:** Like phrases such as "The United States" and "The White House" just above, there are aspects of the meaning that we cannot predict just from knowing the words, e.g. "I hit the nail on the head" in its idiomatic usage has nothing to do with nails.
- 2, **Form:** We have to memorize idioms in a specific structure--we cannot make changes that would otherwise not seem to affect the core meaning. Thus, we could not say, "I hammered the nail on the head," or, "On the head was where I hit the nail," and still retain the idiomatic meaning.

2. Which of the signs and symbols below display an *arbitrary* relationship between form and meaning and which have a *non-arbitrary* relationship? Which, if any, COMBINE aspects of arbitrariness and non-arbitrariness.

	Message: Access for handicapped people.	Nonarbitrary: The picture of a person in a wheelchair relates directly to the meaning. SEE THE NOTE BELOW THIS TABLE
	Message: Come to a stop at an intersection.	Arbitrary: The octagonal shape has no direct relation to the notion of stopping--it is a conventional relation. Likewise, for the word STOP , which would be different in different languages and being <i>language</i> , has an arbitrary relation to the message.
	Message: Female, having to do with women or females.	Arbitrary: Today this is a conventionalized symbol with no direct relation to the meaning--it does not resemble a woman. The origin of the symbol is Venus's mirror, which would have a nonarbitrary relation to femininity, but most people would not be aware of this connection.
	Message: Do not park here.	Combines elements of arbitrariness and nonarbitrariness: The "P" for "Parking" is arbitrary --there is not a direct relation between the sound of the word "parking" nor the shape of the letter "P" and the meaning. However, the "banned" sign (the crossing out of the "P") could be viewed as nonarbitrary . By crossing out the "P", it shows in a direct way that parking is banned.
	Message: "One way" in Spanish. Indicates that traffic is allowed only in the direction indicated by the arrow.	Combines elements of arbitrariness and nonarbitrariness: The arrow shape of the sign is nonarbitrary --it shows in a direct way the direction of traffic flow. The linguistic message on the sign has the arbitrary relation to its meaning for the same reason that nearly all linguistic expressions have this relation.

NOTE: A common error students make in designating a sign as "arbitrary" is to say, "It can refer to more than one thing." For example, the "handicapped" sign could mark a parking spot for handicapped people, it could designate a restroom with handicapped access, it could designate a handicapped entrance to a public place, etc. This does NOT make the sign "arbitrary". In each case, there is a nonarbitrary connection between the sign and the meaning it conveys, that is, in each case the handicapped symbol is used to convey the meaning in a direct way. The question one must ask is, "In the context where the sign appears, is the relationship arbitrary or nonarbitrary in that context?"

3. We have claimed that linguistic expressions (words, phrases) have an *arbitrary* relation between form and meaning. Consider the forms below. To what extent do they seem to have a *non-arbitrary* relationship between their form and meaning? To what extent do they have an arbitrary relationship? (As a partial answer to the latter question, find the way languages other than English express these concepts.)

Animal sounds: cock-a-doodle-doo, cluck-cluck, moo, baa, meow

	<p>English: cock-a-doodle-doo French: cocorico Spanish: kikiriki German: Kikeriki Russian: kukareku Greek: kikiriku Korean: kokiyo Japanese: kekekokkoo Mandarin Chinese: 'o'o'o Wolof: kookoriikook Hausa: k'ik'irik'i Bole: kikir-kikir</p>
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Non-arbitrary relation between sound and meaning: A rooster's crow comprises several "syllables", a feature shared by all the human language words for the sound. The crow seems to start with a "stop" and to have the "syllables" separated by "stops", features which the words all share. They even share the feature of beginning with the sound [k], correlating with the fact that the rooster is "articulating" his stops in the back part of the vocal tract.

Arbitrary aspects: Though the various words for a rooster's crow are clearly imitative (= nonarbitrary), they share with all words of a language the fact that they are conventionalized in form. Speakers learn how to say "cock-a-doodle-doo" in the languages of their communities. Individuals do not each make up their own representation of what they think a rooster sounds like.

Environmental sounds: splash, bang, zip

English: splash (noun, verb, adverb)
Spanish: chisporotear (verb)
French: éclabousser (verb)
Greek: plats (adverb)
Korean: chelsek (adverb)
Japanese: pachan, pochan (adverb)
Mandarin Chinese: chyan (verb)
Wolof: pattax (adverb)
Hausa: bundum (adverb)
Bole: tashak (adverb)

The same sorts of considerations apply to environmental sounds as to animal sounds. For example, the "s" and "sh" of "splash" seem to have a **nonarbitrary** connection to the "white noise" produced by splashing water. Most of the other languages listed above seem to share this to some extent. On the other hand, this word has an **arbitrary** connection to its referent in that it is conventionalized--one could not just make up other words referring to this sound and expect people to understand them, as shown by the very different forms from language to language. Moreover, other words in English sharing the "s/sh" sound features do not evoke splashing water, e.g. 'sash', 'shapes', etc.

Sound symbolic expressions: fuzzy-wuzzy, roly-poly, teeny-weeny, slick/slimy/slide/slobber/slide/slither/etc. (cf. slit/slice/slash/slay/etc.), gruff/grumpy/growl/grumble/grouch/etc.

Nonarbitrary: Looking within a language, it cannot be an accident that there are groups of words referring to things or ideas that share some property, e.g. "sl-" words in English referring to objects or situations sharing wetness (or the appearance of wetness) and viscosity. When such a sound-symbolic connection exists, speakers will sense a (nonarbitrary) connection between such a situation and a word they may have never heard before. For example, which definition do you think would best fit the "English" words below:

slormy	a. large and round b. oily to the touch c. having a grainy texture d. moving with scurrying motions
to groodge	a. to sing out of tune b. to be fair in rendering judgments c. to complete one's work on time d. to complain about unfair treatment

Arbitrary: The meaning associations here are almost surely conventionalized within one language. For example, other languages would probably not have an association of "sl" with "wet and viscous". Even in English, this is not a "direct" connection, since "sl" is also associated with "cutting" as in "slice, slash, etc.", a meaning unrelated to "wet and viscous". These kinds of meaning associations are in the realm of things which language is not well-equipped to encode in a precise way, such as ideas associated with the senses (sight, sound, feel) or with emotions--recall the questions in the first assignment on the independence of language and thought.

4. We develop instinctive knowledge of morphology. Sentences (a-e) below contain underlined words that you do not know (neither does anyone else because they didn't exist before I wrote this question!). Fill in the blanks in the bracketed sets of sentences, adding appropriate morphology to the root of the underlined word. State whether the affixes you have added are *prefixes* or *suffixes* and whether they are *derivational* or *inflectional*.

Here are some suggested answers that seem natural. There must be many others.

a. This woman trogg engines.

{ She is a trogger _____.
 { She is trogging the engine. It will soon be trogged _____ }

- trogg-er: -er is a **derivational suffix** added to verbs meaning "one who does the action"
- trogg-ing: -ing here is an **inflectional suffix** that is required on verbs following "be" in the meaning "be in the process of doing"
- trogg-ed: -ed here is an **inflectional suffix** that is required in the "passive" following the verb "be". ("Passive" means that the action is affecting the subject. Compare "active" *she trogged the engine* vs. "passive" *the engine was trogged*.)

I don't think there are any alternatives here, i.e. I think all speakers of English would share the judgments here.

b. The universe is known to be spandolic.

{ Many scientists study spandolicity.
 { What is it that spandolicizes the universe? }

- **spandolic-ity**: *-ity* is a **derivational suffix** which can be added to adjectives to form verbs. The suffix *-ness* (see next example) is kind of an all-purpose noun-forming suffix, and "spandolicness" seems to work here, too, but the *-ity* ending is typical of words that have a Latin origin, and "spandolic" has a sort of "Latinate" look.
- **spandolic-ize**: *-ize* is a **derivational suffix** which can be added to adjectives or nouns to form verbs. It also seems to form a pair with the noun-forming suffix *-ity*, e.g. *familiarity/familiarize*, *publicity/publicize*. We might suggest *spandolicate*, with a verb-forming suffix *-ate*, but this would suggest that instead of *spandolicity*, we should have *spandolic-at-ion* for the noun, with a derivation suffix *-ion* added to the verb.

Notice that in both the suggested derived forms, we would automatically pronounce the "c" as [s] rather than with the [k] sound we here in *spandolic*.

c. This is a noccis chair.

{ It has the quality of noccisness.
 { I'd like to noccisize all my chairs. }

- **noccis-ness**: *-ness* is a **derivational suffix** used to form nouns from adjectives or sometimes nouns (from *antelope* we might speak of *antelopeness* as the property of being like an antelope). There are other possibilities, e.g. *noccisity*, *noccisitation*, but these sound rather heavy, pompous, or whimsical.
- **noccis-ize**: *-ize* is the same **derivational suffix** in the preceding example. It is probably the most common verb-forming suffix, though *noccis-ate* or *noccis-ify* are candidates.

d. This chair has a caffet.

{ To get rid of the caffets, I will decaffet all my chairs.
 { These chairs are all caffeted. }

- **de-caffet**: *de-* is a **derivational prefix** which can be added to nouns to mean "remove the noun" or to verbs to mean "do the opposite of the base action" (*emphasize* vs. *deemphasize*).
- **caffet-ed**: Using the criteria from our class, *-ed* would be a **derivational suffix**. We said that if an affix changes the grammatical category of a word, it is a derivational affix, and from the context, *caffet* seems to be a noun (or possibly a verb "to caffet" which can also be used as a noun, like "to chip" which gives the noun "a chip"). *Caffeted* is used as an adjective, so the *-ed* ending has changed its category. On the other hand, it has the form of a "past participle", which is usually considered to be an **inflected** form of a verb.

e. I seppled the chair.

Seppleness is a desirable quality in chairs,
 but some people prefer their chairs to be unseppled.

sepple-ness: As noted in (c), *-ness* is a sort of all-purpose noun forming **derivational suffix**. It is most commonly used with adjectives, but can be used with nouns, which is probably its function here--*sepple* seems basically to be a verb, but many verbs can be used as nouns ("that book was a good read").

un-seppled: *un-* is a **derivational prefix**, used with both verbs and adjectives. See discussion of *caffeted* (d) for **-ed**.

5. Below are four cartoons. For each one, state the basis of the joke, e.g. "a non-standard interpretation of a compound (or idiom)" or "creation of a compound not previously used".



Reinterpretation of a compound: 'Peanut butter' is a compound made up of the words 'peanut' (itself a compound comprising 'pea' and 'nut') and 'butter' which, in its normal use, means "butter made from peanuts". As is general with compounds, one has to know the specific interpretation because others are available, such as "butter to put on peanuts"!

<p>IN THE BLEACHERS By Steve Moore</p>	<p>SINGLE SLICES By Peter Kohlsaat</p>
<p>Newly formed compound: Compounding is very productive in English--nearly any words can be put together to make a compound</p>	<p>Reinterpretation of a derivational morpheme as a root word: The <u>derivational suffix</u> <i>-ship</i> (as in <i>friendship</i>, <i>horsemanship</i>, <i>fellowship</i>) happens to sound like the <u>root word</u> <i>ship</i> 'a sailing vessel'. The</p>

and some interpretation can be put on it. Here, "nose" has been substituted for "foot" as in "foot-long hotdog".	woman on the left has used this similarity to create a <u>compound</u> comprising the words <i>relation</i> and <i>ship</i> 'sailing vessel' rather than the unitary <u>derived word</u> comprising the word <i>relation</i> plus the suffix <i>-ship</i> .
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Reinterpretation of an idiom: An idiom is a phrase whose meaning cannot be predicted from the individual words. Here, "stand someone up" means to fail to show up for a date. The joke lies in taking the words of the idiom literally, i.e. "to make something erect".

6. Draw trees like those on pages 41-44 for the following expressions from the cartoons:

- relationship
- nose-long hot dog

