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Homework 1  
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Your first reading for this course was *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, originally published in 1865. You've also been strongly recommended to listen to an audiobook version thereof.

To acquire a few basic tools of analysis, you have read chapters 1, 2, 12, from the book edited by Fasold & Connor-Linton (2006):

- chapter 1, "The sounds of language", by Elizabeth Zsiga;
- chapter 2, "Words and their parts", by Donna Lardiere;
- chapter 12, "Writing", by Jeff Connor-Linton;

You have also read chapter 7, "Syntax", by Poole (1999); chapter 1 from Van Valin, Jr.'s (2001); chapter 3, "Semantics", by Poole (1999); and chapter 4, "Meaning", by Paul Portner, also published in the book edited by Fasold & Connor-Linton (2006).

Your reading of these introductory chapters to some of the main branches of linguistics should *not* aim at being thorough at this point. These readings should allow you to get infused with the kind of object language becomes when studied as a scientific object. The idea is that you can get a general sense of what gets studied in phonetics, phonology, morphology, the study of writing systems, syntax, and semantics.

And hopefully you have found the time to watch these documentaries: Nurith Aviv's (2003) *L'Alphabet de Bruly Bouabré*, and the BBC Documentaries (2020) *The Secret History of Writing*, Episodes 1-3.

In this homework assignment, your main task will be to analyse a number of passages from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Each of the five items below should be addressed in a couple of paragraphs (at least one, probably not more than three), almost all of them will be **arguments** in prose. The word limit in the answer you give per item below is  $\pm 500$  words, so the total word count for this homework set is  $\pm 2500$  words. (The word count does not comprise citations, bibliographic references, or footnotes.)

1. Relying on the notion of phoneme introduced in Zsiga (2006), account for the pun you find in this passage from Carroll [1865]:

"You promised to tell me your story, you know," said Alice, "and why it is that you hate—C and D," she added in a whisper, half afraid that it would be offended again.

"Mine is a long and a sad tale!" said the Mouse, turning to Alice, and sighing.

"It *is* a long tail, certainly," said Alice, looking down with wonder at the Mouse's tail: "but why do you call it sad?" And she kept on puzzling about it while the Mouse was speaking, so that her idea of the tale was something like this:— [...]" (Ch. III, p. 27-28)

Find two similar puns in the novel, puns where homophony or near-homophony is at work, and provide analyses thereof.

For most such puns in the novel, reading the novel (instead of listening to an audiobook version) can obscure the humorous effect intended by the author. Account for this relying on Connor-Linton's (2006) overview of alphabetic systems of writing.

2. Reading this passage from Carroll [1865] is not a challenge for any competent English speaker:

“Curioser and curioser!” cried Alice (she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot how to speak good English). (Ch. II, p. 16)

Relying on the notion of grammatical morpheme introduced by Lardiere (2006), explain why any competent speaker of English can understand this passage.

Find at least one other similar pun in the novel, a pun where the author plays with the morphological rules of English to invent words whose meaning seems transparent to the competent speaker, and provide analyses thereof.

Inspired by Carroll's playful mastery of English morphology, coin a new English word and provide a dictionary-like definition thereof. An excellent dictionary you can rely on to find inspiration regarding how to provide a definition is the Cambridge Dictionary.<sup>1</sup>

3. In the book, you can find at least two proper names which are often repeated, “Alice” and “Dinah”. Team up with a classmate who masters a language whose writing system is not the Latin alphabet used in English (e.g., Nepalese, Chinese, Greek, Japanese, etc.), compare how these proper names are rendered in foreign translations of Carroll's novel.<sup>2</sup> Relying on Connor-Linton's (2006) observations on how different writing systems work, and on class discussions regarding the difference and the relation between transcription, translation, and transliteration, analyse the way in which the translator of Carroll's novel has rendered these proper names in the target language at hand.

(Please indicate explicitly the names of the students who teamed up to address this prompt, in a footnote.)

4. This passage from Carroll [1865] shows another sort of pun, one where word order plays a role:

“I hope they'll remember her saucer of milk at tea-time. Dinah my dear! I wish you were down here with me! There are no mice in the air, I'm afraid, but you might catch a bat, and that's very like a mouse, you know. But do cats eat bats, I wonder?” And here Alice began to get rather sleepy, and went on saying to

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<sup>1</sup>Available on <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>

<sup>2</sup>Free loans of a number of translations of Carroll [1865] can be found on <https://archive.org/>

herself, in a dreamy sort of way, “Do cats eat bats? Do cats eat bats?” and sometimes, “Do bats eat cats?” for, you see, as she couldn’t answer either question, it didn’t much matter which way she put it. (Ch. I, p. 11)

You learn in Lardiere (2006) that different languages signal grammatical roles in rather different ways, that in English word order is crucial in this task. In Poole (1999), ch. 7, and in Van Valin, Jr. (2001), ch. 1, you see examples of how other languages rely on different syntactic structures to form sentences. One could say that, in the case of English, it is rather exceptional that you change the word order in a sentence and that you thereby obtain a sentence.

Find a similar sort of pun, present in ch. VII, and explain why the different word order in the strings results in sentences with rather different meanings.

5. This passage from Carroll [1865] shows yet another sort of pun, one where polysemy plays a role:

At last the Mouse, who seemed to be a person of authority among them, called out, “Sit down, all of you, and listen to me! I’ll soon make you dry enough!” They all sat down at once, in a large ring, with the Mouse in the middle. Alice kept her eyes anxiously fixed on it, for she felt sure she would catch a bad cold if she did not get dry very soon.

“Ahem!” said the Mouse with an important air, “are you all ready? This is the driest thing I know. Silence all round, if you please! ‘William the Conqueror, whose cause was favoured by the pope, was soon submitted to by the English, who wanted leaders, and had been of late much accustomed to usurpation and conquest. Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria—’” (Ch. III, p. 25)

Relying on the notion of polysemy, a notion among many others (homonymy, synonymy, etc.) introduced in Portner (2006) and Poole (1999), ch. 3, account for this pun. Find another similar pun in the novel, where polysemy or homonymy are at work, and provide an analysis thereof.

Consider finally a related case, one where the flexibility of pronouns is at work:

“I thought you did,” said the Mouse. “—I proceed. ‘Edwin and Morcar, the earls of Mercia and Northumbria, declared for him: and even Stigand, the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury, found it advisable—’”

“Found what?” said the Duck.

“Found it,” the Mouse replied rather crossly: “of course you know what ‘it’ means.”

“I know what ‘it’ means well enough, when I find a thing,” said the Duck: “it’s generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find?” (Ch. III, p. 25)

The pun here relates to the notion of deixis or indexicality discussed in Portner (2006) and Poole (1999), ch. 3. Rely on this concept to account for the pun in the passage above. (N.B.: One could argue that near-homophony also plays a substantive role in this pun.)

Here are some notes to bear in mind:

- Read the prompts attentively. Task achievement is a must.
- Your **target audience** is an undergraduate student who is *not* taking the course. Thus you cannot assume your audience has read what you have read. Therefore, you have to reconstruct concepts, positions, discussions, and claims so that a reader unfamiliar with the texts can understand your claims, follow your arguments, and be persuaded by them.
- Proper bibliographic references are a must. Failing to handle them properly almost always amounts to plagiarism. Reread the course syllabus and this page to understand the risks you incur when you commit such a fraud: **Academic Honesty/Plagiarism**.
- Quotations should respect typographic specificities of the original. Proper bibliographic references should be included after the end of any quotation you include.
- Choose a citation style (I don't have a favourite one) and stick to it.
- Edit and proofread thoroughly whatever you submit. In this course, this affects your grade.

## References

### *Books:*

Lewis Carroll [1865] (1998) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland AND Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, The centenary edition, edited with an introduction and notes by Hugh Haughton, London, Penguin Books.

### *Book chapters:*

Elizabeth Zsiga (2006) "The sounds of language", in Ralph. W. Fasold and Jeff Connor-Linton (eds.) *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp. 33-53.

Donna Lardiere (2006) "Words and their parts", in Ralph. W. Fasold and Jeff Connor-Linton (eds.) *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp. 55-96.

Jeff Connor-Linton (2006) "Writing", in Ralph. W. Fasold and Jeff Connor-Linton (eds.) *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp. 401-432.

Stuart C. Poole (1999) *An introduction to linguistics*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave, ch. 7: "Syntax", pp. 83-95.

Robert Van Valin, Jr. (2001) *An Introduction to Syntax*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, ch. 1 "Syntax, lexical categories, and morphology", pp. 1-20.

Stuart C. Poole (1999): *An introduction to linguistics*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave, ch. 3: "Semantics", pp. 21-40.

Paul Portner (2006) "Meaning", in Ralph. W. Fasold and Jeff Connor-Linton (eds.) *An Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, pp. 137-168.

*Films:*

Nurith Aviv (2003) *L' Alphabet de Bruly Bouabré*, 17', available in the course's Google Drive.

BBC Documentaries (2020) *The Secret History of Writing*, Episodes 1-3, 2h56', available on <https://youtu.be/BxUuPq3mWaU?feature=shared>