

Philosophy of language (PHIL UA-9085)

Brief overview of writing systems 2

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Plan for today

Words and their parts

Writing

Morphology

- **Morphology** studies of the internal structure of words and their meaningful parts.
- **What is a word?** This is actually a hard question.

All languages have words, but the particular sign a language uses to express a particular meaning is arbitrary.

- Morphology is concerned with the relation between meaning and form, within words and between words.

The pairing of a meaning with a form applies to **whole words**, like *sleep*, as well as to **parts of words** like the 'past' meaning associated with the ending -ed as in *frimped*.

- Grammatical function can be signalled via word order, or via morphological form. (Compare English vs. Latin.)
- Two basic kinds of morphemes: **lexical morphemes or lexemes**, and **grammatical morphemes**.

Both lexemes and grammatical morphemes can be either free or bound.

Morphology (cont.)

- Morphological operations:

- Affixation (prefix, suffix, infix, circumfix).
- Reduplication.
- Root change (Ablaut and suppletion).
- Suprasegmental change: a shift in tone or stress to signal a grammatical function.

- Morphological processes: derivation and inflection.

- **Derivational morphology** creates new lexemes from existing ones, often with a change in meaning: derivational affixes, compounding.
- **Inflectional morphology** adds grammatical information to a lexeme: person, number, gender, case, tense, aspect, mood.

- How is morphological knowledge acquired?

Children swim in a linguistic sea where the meaning of an utterance and distinctions such as case, number, person, gender, conjugation class, and so on, must be deduced in context and compared with minimally contrasting forms that have already been acquired.

- Such knowledge is acquired via the gradual accumulation of minimal contrasts **of sounds**.

Writing represents speech

- Writing comes **after** speech.

The central characteristic of a writing system is that it systematically “represents units of language”; it systematically encodes spoken (audible) language into a visible (or tactile) form.

- Types of writing systems can be classified by **which units** of language are graphically represented.

- logographic systems,
- syllabic systems,
- alphabetic systems (organised according to the phonemic principle), among which abjads.

- **Primary** vs. **secondary** symbolisation.

What's next?

Session 7: Tuesday 13 February 2024

Topic: Brief overview of syntax

Reading: Stuart C. Poole (1999), ch. 7, Robert Van Valin, Jr. (2001), ch. 1

Contact

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