Subsystems of Language

In this course, you need to have a good understanding of the structure of English. The following pages give you information on each of the sub-system and there are specific activities to complete in order to consolidate your knowledge. Some of these activities are quite challenging but you can do them!

The 5 subsystems of language are the different elements that make up a language.
Phonology – the study of the sounds of the language (pronunciation, accent etc.)
Morphology and **Lexicology** – the study of the words (lexicon) and parts of words (morphemes) of a language
Syntax – the study of the structure of sentences
Discourse – the study of the structure of texts and conversations
Semantics – the study of how meaning is constructed

Phonology

A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language. Phonemes can be either vowels or consonants. We are used to thinking about sounds being the same as letters – but think about the way that the letter 'c' can represent ether the sound /k/ (like in 'cat') or /s/ (like in 'cease'). Also, sometimes we use two letters to make one sound, for example 'th' in 'thing'.

The **IPA** (International Phonetic Alphabet) is a system that linguists use to describe sounds, as it has one symbol for every sound in any language in the world. Many of the symbols will be familiar to you, as they are based on the Roman Alphabet, for example the sound 'p' is represented by the symbol /p/ and 'd' is /d/. However, there are some symbols that you'll need to learn, such as /θ/ for 'th' in '*th*ing' and /ð/ for the harder 'th' in '*th*at'. And there are some symbols that you'll need to relearn, for instance, the sound 'y' in 'yellow' is represented as /j/.

You may have noticed in a dictionary that after a word is listed there is a pronunciation guide – this is in IPA. It is useful to describe pronunciation using this system, as it is simple to show the difference between the way an Australian would pronounce the word 'car', /ka:/, and the way an American would pronounce it, /kar/. We will spend some time on this next year.

Activity 1
In the meantime, think about some of the variations you've heard in the way people pronounce the following words. Try to record some of the different ways people say these words (ask around if you need to!). You *should* find that it's hard to show the differences using our spelling system.

Appreciate_____

Overdue_____

Issue_____

Garage_____

Advertisement_____

Morphology and Lexicology

Morphemes

A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a language. It might be a full word, 'cat' (which means 'a four-legged domestic feline') or an affix such as '-s' (which may mean 'more than one', but only once attached to another word, e.g. cats).

All words, therefore, have at least one morpheme

car = one morpheme
cars = two morphemes *(car + s, indicating plural)*
man = one morpheme
men = two morphemes *(man + plural marker)*
judged = two morphemes *(judge + past tense)*
disrespectful = three morphemes *(negative prefix + respect + adjective marker)*

A free morpheme is one that can stand alone as a whole word: *house, tree, man, girl, table, book, true, sit, beauty, tall, very etc.*

A bound morpheme must be connected to a free morpheme to have meaning: *-ed, -ing, un-, dis-, -s, re-, -ful etc.*

Inflectional morphemes change the grammatical function of a word, but not the meaning (e.g. cat*s*, play*ed*, dog*'s* bowl, green*er*)
Derivational morphemes either change the word class of the word (to run -> runn*er*, beautiful -> beautiful*ly*) or change the meaning of the word (honest -> *dis*honest, happy -> *un*happy, learn -> *re*learn)

Activity 2
Combine some of the free and bound morphemes listed above to create new words:

_____ _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____ _____

Lexis

A lexicon is a collection of the words of a language (it's a synonym for a dictionary). You need to know the different ways that words can be described, sometimes known as their **word class** or their **part of speech.**

While we are often taught to recognise the class a word belongs to by its function (it names something, it's a doing word), it is much more effective to know the grammatical rules of a word, and to know how to 'test' its word class.

Word Class	Explanation	The tests	Examples
Content			
Nouns	*"Naming Words"* Name objects, ideas and things. You can often see/touch/hear these things.	You can put "a" or "the" in front of these words. They can be made into plural '-s' or other. They can be replaced with a pronoun	Tree Chair Face Water Happiness

Word Class	Explanation	The tests	Examples
Verbs	*"Doing words"* Name actions, processes and states of being. You can usually see someone doing these things	You can put 'to' in front of these words. You can put the present tense "ing" or the past tense "-ed" on the end of these words.	Smile Run Think Love Read
Adjectives	*"Describing words"* Give extra description to a noun.	You can place these words in between "the/a" and a *noun*. You can either add '-er'/ 'more' and '-est'/'most'	Green Tall Beautiful Smelly Lovely
Adverbs	*"Describing words"* Give extra description to a verb, adjective, or whole phrase or sentence.	These words often end in "-ly". You can place them near a verb.	Quickly Fast Beautifully Actually Really
Function			
Determiners	'Determine' the qualities of the noun	Go before a noun (or adjective and noun)	the, a, these, this, that…
Conjunctions	Join words, phrases or clauses	Must be between two items	And, or, but, while, if, because…
Prepositions	Tell you where something is	Should be between two nouns, phrases or clauses	On, between, in, under, over, at…
Pronouns	Replace the noun in the sentence to avoid repetition	Will be able to replace the pronoun with the relevant noun	I, me, you, he, she, it, we, they, us…
Auxiliary Verbs	Give further information about the possibility or the probability of the verb	Acts like a verb in many ways but can't take '-ing' or '-ed' morphemes. Must be positioned with a verb	Will, can, should, could, may, won't…

Activity 3

Colour code every word in the following poem, using the 'tests' above to help you decide.

My Excuses

I started on my homework
but my pen ran out of ink.
My hamster ate my homework.
My computer's on the blink.

I accidentally dropped it
in the soup my mom was cooking.
My brother flushed it down the toilet
when I wasn't looking.

My mother ran my homework
through the washer and the dryer.
An airplane crashed into our house.
My homework caught on fire.

Tornadoes blew my notes away.
Volcanoes struck our town.
My notes were taken hostage
by an evil killer clown.

Some aliens abducted me.
I had a shark attack.
A pirate swiped my homework
and refused to give it back.

I worked on these excuses
so darned long my teacher said,
"I think you'll find it's easier
to do the work instead."

--Kenn Nesbitt

Syntax

Each language has individual rules for forming sentences. There are two constructions that you need to know coming into this subject: Sentence Types and Sentence Structures.

Sentence Types

These can partially be determined by the function they are performing (making a statement, asking a question, etc.) but more importantly, by the order of the words in the sentence

Note first:

- *The 'subject' is the main focus of the sentence: the person or thing doing the verb. It will be either a noun or a pronoun.*
- *A 'Wh-word' is any of **where, why, when, who, or how***

Declaratives

- **Examples: "I am going to the shop", "It is warm today", "The dog is barking"**
- Function: make statements
- *Word Order: Subject – Verb – everything else*

Interrogatives

- **Examples:**
  - **"Are you going to the shop?", "Would you like to come?"** OR
  - **"Where are you going?", "How are you getting there?"**
- Function: ask questions
- *Word Order: There are two forms*
  - *Auxiliary Verb – Subject – Verb – everything else*
  - *Wh-word – Auxiliary Verb – Subject*

Imperatives

- **Examples: "Go to the shop", "Shut the door", "Take a seat"**
- Function: make demands
- *Word Order: Verb – everything else*
  - *(NOTE: No subject – it's assumed that it's "you")*

Exclamatives

- **Examples: "What a nice shop", "How exciting"**
- Function: make exclamatory remarks
- *Word Order: Wh-word – everything else*
  - (NOTE: Usually no verb, or if there is, much later in sentence than it would be for a declarative)

Activity 4

Identify each of the following sentences, using the word order as your main piece of information.

1. "How beautiful a street is in winter!" (Virginia Woolf)
2. "Have the skillet hot and keep it well greased." (Ernest Hemingway)
3. "We boarded our train with feelings of unbounded relief." (James Weldon Johnson)
4. "Each cell measured about ten feet by ten and was quite bare within except for a plank bed and a pot of drinking water." (George Orwell)

5. "Where were the blackbirds?" (Richard Jefferies)

6. "Always obey your parents, when they are present." (Mark Twain)

7. "The house was so big that there was always a room to hide in, and I had a red pony and a garden where I could wander." (W.B. Yeats)

8. "Even now, the sight of an old, six-inch, worm-eaten cork brings fragrant memories!" (Samuel H. Scudder)

Sentence Structure

Sentence structure has very little to do with the function of a sentence, and is determined by the features within. Concentrate firstly on the number of verbs in the sentence (disregard any auxiliaries) and then look to see how they are combined.

Note first:

*A **Phrase** is a group of connected words without a verb.*
*A **Clause** is a group of connected words with a verb.*
*A **Sentence** can have more than one clause (and therefore more than one verb).*
*There are only three **coordinating conjunctions** – they are 'and', 'or' and 'but'*
*There are many **subordinating conjunctions** – some examples are 'because', 'if', 'when', 'while', 'as' etc.*

Grammar hierarchy:

- **Sentence**

"The naughty children would watch television while their mother made their tea in the kitchen"

- **Clause – a string of words containing a verb**

"The naughty children would watch television" OR "their mother made their tea"

- **Phrase**

"The naughty children" or "in the kitchen"

- **Lexical Verb – the verb that has 'meaning' in the clause**

"watched"

- **Auxiliary Verb – the grammatical, or 'helping' verbs**

"would"

Fragment (the "non"-sentence)

A sentence *without* a verb. This is non-standard.

E.g. "Yes Indeedy", "What a day!", "Huge sale today" "T-shirts and jumpers half-price today"

Simple Sentence

- A sentence with one main verb (don't count auxiliaries). Eg "She may have been *swimming*".
- May have numerous other phrases, but only concentrate on verbs.

  E.g. "Surprisingly, she was *swimming* in the pool yesterday in the lightning and thunder."

Compound Sentence

- A sentence that has **two or more clauses**
- Each clause makes sense **independently** of the other (they can be split into two simple sentences)

Eg. "The boy *danced* **and** the girl *sang*"

Eg "There *was* thunder and lightning yesterday **and** she still went *swimming*."

A compound sentence will use **coordinating conjunctions ("and", "or", "but")** to join the clause together.

Be careful: sometimes when "and" "or" and "but" appear in a sentence they have other jobs besides connecting two clauses together, and this would mean the sentence is not compound.

E.g. She went swimming in the thunder and *lightning = one verb = simple sentence*

Complex Sentence

- Contains at least two verbs, therefore at least **two clauses**.
- Only one clause makes sense on its own – this is labelled the independent clause.
- The other clause is the subordinate/dependent clause – it relies on the independent clause for meaning.
- Clauses are joined by a **subordinating conjunction**. Common subordinating conjunctions are **"if, when, because, while, as, then"** but there are many more. The subordinating clause belongs to the subordinate clause, and must move with it.

Eg. "The boy *danced* **while** the girl *sang*"

Eg "The spectators *laughed* **because** the journalists *responded* with fury"

OR "**Because** the journalists *responded* with fury, the spectators *laughed*"

NOT "The journalists responded with fury** because **the spectators laughed" = meetings changed

Compound-Complex Sentence

- **three or more clauses** (and therefore **verbs**)
- **at least one independent clause** and **at least one subordinate/dependent clause**
- **at least one coordinating conjunction** AND
- **at least one subordinating conjunction**

Eg "The minister *told* the waiting journalists **that** the announcement had been *delayed*, **and** the journalists *responded* with fury, **but** the spectators merely *laughed*."

TIPS:

1. Count the main/lexical verbs – if there is one it's not a fragment, and if there's more than one, it is not a simple sentence.
2. Look for co-ordinating conjunctions and figure out if they are balancing or connecting two clauses – if all the clauses make sense on their own, it's a compound sentence.
3. Look for subordinating conjunctions or clauses that can't stand on their own. If there aren't any coordinating conjunctions or there isn't more than one independent clause, the sentence is complex.
4. If there are both types of conjunctions, then you know that it is a compound-complex sentence.

Activity 5

Following the steps above, identify the sentence structure of the following sentences.

1. The man went to the store.
2. The man went to the store and the salesclerk sold him some milk.
3. When an atom is split it releases neutrons.
4. What is most important to him is his family.

5. That critic writes that Al Purdy is the best poet in Canada.
6. You are what you eat.
7. She is very suspicious about what he said.
8. The woman who bought the red dress is my aunt.
9. When I arrived at the University classes had already started.
10. We will ask Paul for more information and request a revision of the program because it gave us inconsistent results.

Discourse

Here we are analysing the way texts and conversations are ordered and organised. We are no longer looking at individual elements.

In spoken conversations we have a number of ways to organise our language:
- Openings "Hello, how are you?" "Good thanks, how are you?", and Closings "Okay, thanks for that", "See you"
- Question and answer adjacency pairs "Do you have the time?" "Yes, it's 3 o'clock"
- Discourse Markers to point to new topics "Anyway", "So" etc.

In written language we do this organisation in a much more visual way
- Headings to introduce topic
- Paragraphs to separate ideas
- Topic sentences
- Introductions and conclusions in essays, greetings and farewells in letters/emails
- Features to ensure the text is coherent (easy to understand) and cohesive (focused on a clear topic or topics)

Semantics

Semantics is about the way we construct meaning. We usually do this by choosing words that have particular connotations, that is, common understandings of what a word means socially or culturally. For example, the words *"adolescent", "juvenile", "teenager"* and *"young adult"* all have a similar dictionary definition. However, you probably have a preference for the one you'd like used about you and your friends! That's because a word like *'juvenile'* has attracted negative connotations, thanks mainly to its pairings with *'detention centre'* and *'delinquent'*. Euphemisms are words with a more positive meaning than the typical word choice ('curvaceous' rather than 'overweight', 'passed away' rather than 'died'). Dysphemisms are words with negative meanings ('fat', 'carked it').

We may also see the word semantics used when we are grouping lexical items into a 'semantic field'. This is a group of words that have a related meaning, for example the semantic field of *colour* will include the words *blue, green, red, yellow*, etc.

Insert for Sections 1 and 2

Please remove from the centre of this book during reading time.

SECTION 1: Written text – Questions 1–5

Text 1

Part 1 – There are 14 lines in Part 1 of the text. Lines 10–14 are reproduced on the right-hand side of the text.



10 That's like, really rad
11 Book now at your preferred V Australia travel agent or visit vaustralia.com.au
12 Vaustralia
13 Every day a new idea takes off
14 International airline of Virgin Blue

Part 2 – This is the small print that appears at the bottom of the original text.

15 * Departing Melbourne to Los Angeles. All fares are subject to availability and
16 may vary until ticketed, and are for international economy return travel. Conditions
17 and travel restrictions apply. For travel between 1 Dec and 16 Jan, 2009. Seats are
18 limited and may not be available on all flights or peak days. Tickets purchased
19 through the Guest Contact Centre cost $50 AUD more. Connecting flights
20 between Australian domestic ports are operated by Virgin Blue Airlines. Non-stop
21 flights from Melbourne due to commence 1 Dec 2009 and are subject to regulatory
22 approval. Fares are correct as at 23 Nov, 2009 and are subject to change. Fares are
23 non-refundable. Refunds on or after the day of travel are not permitted and fare
24 will be forfeited. Further conditions apply, see vaustralia.com.au for details.
25 Minimum 4 night stay. On sale until midnight 1 Dec, 2009 or until sold out.

SECTION 1 – Written text

Instructions for Section 1

Refer to the insert from the centre of this book while answering this section. Section 1 requires answers to questions about a written text. Answer **all** questions in this section. In your response you are expected to demonstrate your ability to use relevant descriptive and metalinguistic tools. You are required to demonstrate familiarity with the topics of Unit 3 'Language in Society' and the topics of Unit 4 'Texts in their Australian Contexts'. Section 1 is worth 30% of the total marks.

Text 1: Questions 1–5

Questions 1–3 relate to Part 1 of the text.

Question 1

a. Discuss two different functions of Part 1 of the text.

2 marks

b. Explain how two different sentence types support these functions of Part 1 of the text. Provide examples.

2 marks

Question 2

'Every day a new idea takes off' (line 13)

Identify this stylistic feature and discuss its role in Part 1 of the text.

2 marks

Question 3

Comment on the linguistic function of at least two different discourse particles in Part 1 of the text.

4 marks

Question 4 relates to Part 2 of the text.

Question 4

Discuss three features which contribute to the formality of Part 2 of the text. You must refer to at least two different subsystems in your response.

6 marks

Question 5 relates to Parts 1 and 2 of the text.

Question 5

Is Part 1 of the text more formal or less formal than Part 2 of the text? Discuss and provide examples to support your analysis.

6 marks

Total 22 marks

END OF SECTION 1
TURN OVER