

Words

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Definition of "Word"

That the word is a genuine linguistic unit is scarcely questioned, and everyone seems to know what it is. Teachers have no difficulty in making up spelling lists, which consist of words. Lexicographers produce dictionaries, whose entries are mainly words. When we read, we recognize words by the white spaces between them. Occasionally, however, we are puzzled by printed forms of words that are inconsistent one with another. Here are several examples from one page of a scholarly desk dictionary, Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (eighth edition). This book on the same page lists woodchuck and woodcock as one word and wood duck and wood louse each as two words. All four words have the same stress pattern, and no formal criteria are evident for differences in the printed form. Such moot cases apart, however, we commonly have no doubt about the identity of words.

But all these instances are concerned with written words, whereas in linguistic analysis our main interest is in the spoken word. Here again the isolation of the unit called a word appears easy. If one asks "What does mean?" or "How do you pronounce?" the blank usually represents a word. And there is a high correlation between the written and the spoken forms of words. Yet the task of devising an exact definition of word is a prickly one that has engendered much controversy.

Let us begin with the act of speech. When people are speaking, they often pause--formulating their thoughts, getting the sentence structure in order, and groping for the right word, Such pauses do not occur within words, but between words. This is our cue, and it leads us to a useful definition of word, that of Professor Charles F. Hockett: "A word is ... any segment of a sentence bounded by successive points at which pausing is possible." This pausing can be either silent or vocalized by "u-u-u-h." The following sentence will illustrate: |

p p p p p p p p p^s
Since the streetlamp is out, I must call up our councilman.

In this sentence the positions of possible pauses are marked by p's, and every segment between two p's is a word. Note that call up is considered a word. Call up belongs to a special class of two-part verbs-like keep on (continue), take off (depart), butt in (interrupt), and show up (appear) -that speakers of English seem to sense as single words. Hence there would normally be no pause between the two parts.

Simple and Complex Words

English words may be classified on the basis of the kinds and combinations of morphemes of which they are composed. We shall adopt a classification of three main classes: simple, complex, and compound words.

1. Simple words consist of a single free morpheme.

Examples: slay, flea, long, spirit

2. Complex words contain, as their immediate constituents, either two bound forms or a bound and a free form.

Examples of two bound forms as IC's:

<u>matri</u> <u>cide</u>	<u>tele</u> <u>vise</u>
<u>ex</u> <u>clude</u>	<u>cosmo</u> <u>naut</u>

Examples of bound and free forms as IC's:

<u>dipso</u> <u>mania</u>	<u>lion</u> <u>ess</u>
<u>tele</u> <u>phone</u>	<u>eras</u> <u>er</u>

Compound Words

The third class of words is compound words. These have free forms, usually two, as their immediate constituents.

Examples: green | house out | side no | show
under | go over | ripe attorney | general

A small number of compound words have three or four free forms as coordinate IC's.

Examples: happy | -go | -lucky spic | and | span

Compound words resemble grammatical structures in that they imply, though they do not state, a grammatical relationship. Here are a few of the structures implied:

<i>Implied Grammatical Structures</i>	<i>Examples</i>
1. subject + verb	éarthquake (. . . earth quakes) crýbaby (. . . baby cries)
2. verb + object	kílljoy (. . . kills joy)
3. verb + adverbial	stópovert (. . . stops over) dównpour (. . . pours down) stáy-at-home (. . . stays at home) underéstimate (. . . estimates under)
4. subject + <i>be</i> + adjectival	hígh chair (. . . chair is high)
5. subject + <i>be</i> + nominal	gírl friend (. . . friend is a girl)
6. subject + <i>be</i> + adverbial	íngróup (. . . group is in)
7. prepositional phrase	extrasénsory (beyond the senses)
8. adjective modified by prepositional phrase	treetop (. . . top of tree)
9. coordination	give-and-take

Compound words can be distinguished from grammatical structures in three ways.

1. Compound words cannot be divided by the insertion of intervening material between the two parts, but grammatical structures can be so divided. As illustration, let us compare two sentences:

- a. She is a sweetheart.
- b. She has a sweet heart.

In the first the compound word sweetheart is indivisible: you cannot insert anything between sweet and heart. But in the second sentence you could say

She has a sweeter heart than her sister.

She has a sweet, kind heart.

She has a sweet, sweet heart.

2. A member of a compound word cannot participate in a grammatical structure.

It was a very hard ball,

But one cannot say

*It was a very baseball,

as baseball is a compound word. Ambiguous cases can occur in sentences like

He is fond of sparkling water.

When sparkling water refers to ordinary water that sparkles, the first member, sparkling, can participate in a grammatical structure, e.g., brightly sparkling water. So sparkling water with this meaning is a grammatical structure. But when the expression refers to carbonated water, such participation cannot occur and we have a compound word.

3. Some compound nouns, you may recall, have the stress pattern ("), as in bluebird, that distinguishes them from a modifier plus a noun, as in blue bird, which structure carried the stress pattern ("). For the same reason a swimming teacher is different from a swimming teacher. You should also remember that you cannot depend on the printed form of words to reveal this distinction. For example, the compound noun high chair (a chair for children) and the modifier plus noun high chair (a chair that is high) are both written as two words.