All About Language

BARRY J. BLAKE

All About Language

Barry J. Blake

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries

Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York

First published by Oxford University Press 2008

Contents

List of figures

List of tables

List of maps

Abbreviations and conventions

1. Introduction

What is language?

Writing and signing

Speech sounds

Words and meanings

Variation

How many languages are there?

All languages are created equal

Part I*Words*

2. Word classes

Parts of speech

Open and closed classes

Lexical words and function words

Beyond English

Sources and further reading

Problems

3. Forming new words
The word and its parts
Compounds
Prefixes and suffixes
Back formation
Zero Derivation
Blends
Shortening
Alphabetisms and acronyms
Reduplication
Proper names to common noun
Taboo and euphemism
Other methods of dealing with new content
Sources and further reading
Problems

4. Meaning of words
Words and meanings
Hyponyms and hypernyms
Synonyms
Antonyms
Polysemy
Homonyms (homophones and homographs)
Homophony and polysemy: profit and loss
Deictic expressions
Set phrases: idioms and clichés

Conscious connections between morphemes
How do the vocabularies of languages differ?
Linguistic determinism: the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis
Sexist language
Arbitrary relationship between form and meaning
Dictionaries
Sources and further reading
Problems

Part II *Syntax and Discourse*

5. The simple sentence
Ideas of grammar
Predicate and argument
Phrase structure
Grammatical relations
Inflection
Questions
Negatives
Passives and other valency changes
Summary
Sources and further reading
Problems

6. Compound and complex sentences
Compound sentences

Complex sentences
Nominalization
'Correct' grammar
Sources and further reading
Problems

7. Using language
Types of communication
Given and new information
Discourse
Co-operative principle
Speech Acts
Conversation
Sources and further reading
Problems

Part III *Speech and Writing*

8. Phonetics
Syllables
Vowels
Consonants
More speech sounds
Markedness
Sources and further reading
Problems

9. Phonology
The phoneme
Putting the sounds together
Connected speech
Stress and intonation
Morphophonemics
Underlying forms
Sources and further reading
Problems

10. Writing
The Egyptians
Cuneiform
Towards an alphabet
Beyond the Mediterranean and Near East
Writing in general
Spelling English
Sources and further reading
Problems

Part IV *Variation and Change*

11. Varieties
Variation
Languages and dialects
Social varieties

Styles
Identity and solidarity
Sources and further reading
Problems

12. Language change
General
Sound change
Morphological change
Syntactic change
Semantic change
Loan words
Linguistic areas
Motivation and direction of change
Sources and further reading
Problems

Part V*The Brain*

13. Language acquisition
Basic requirements
Acquiring phonology
Acquiring syntax
Acquiring function forms
Acquiring semantics
Further stages

Sign language and its acquisition
Theories of acquisition
Second-language acquisition
Sources and further reading
Problems

14. Language processing: brains and computers
Brains
Computers and language
Sources and further reading
Problems

15. The origin of language
Animal communication
Pidgins
The origin of language
Sources and further reading

Glossary of terms
References and further reading
Index

Figures

5.1 Phrase structure

5.2 We discussed the snakes in the office

8.1 The vocal tract

8.2 The vocal cords

8.3 Tongue positions

8.4 English diphthongs

9.1 bit, beet, bid, and bead

10.1 Egyptian pictograms

10.2 Egyptian phonograms

10.3 Egyptian determinatives

10.4 Egyptian phonograms and determinatives

10.5 Disambiguating hieroglyphs

10.6 Development of cuneiform

10.7 Pictograph to alphabet

10.8 Mayan writing

10.9 Gothic script

11.1 RP and Cockney diphthongs

12.1 Indo-European language family

14.1 MRI scan of author's brain

14.2 Areas of the brain, left hemisphere

14.3 Garden

14.4 Sound spectrogram: *Pass me my boots*

Tables

2.1. Word classes in English

5.1. Turkish cases

5.2. English personal pronouns

5.3. Number and gender marking in Italian

5.4. Italian verb inflection

5.5. Italian auxiliaries

8.1. The vowels of British English

8.2. The vowels of American English

8.3. The consonants of English

9.1. Initial consonant clusters in English

9.2. Sibilant–sonorant clusters in English

11.1. Javanese speech levels

12.1. Some Germanic cognates

12.2. Latin roots and Romance reflexes

12.3. English–Latin cognates

12.4. The Great English Vowel Shift

12.5. Old English present and past verb inflection of *timbran* 'to build'

Maps

11.1. Some isoglosses in England

11.2. US dialects

Abbreviations and conventions

Examples in single quotes are from movies or literary works, or they are ones I have collected from the media or from everyday conversation. Examples not in quotes are made up for the purposes of illustration, though single quotes are also used for translations from other languages.

From chapter two onwards all important technical terms are introduced in bold. These terms also appear in the glossary.

Small capitals are used to represent *lexemes* and *predicates*.

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
abl	ablative
acc	accusative
act	active
adj	adjective
ASL	American Sign Language (Ameslan)
ben	benefactive
BSL	British Sign Language
caus	causative
CHILDES	The Child Language Data Exchange System
dat	dative
erg	ergative
fem	feminine

gen	genitive
GEVS	Great English Vowel Shift
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
masc	masculine
MRI	Magnetic Resonance Imaging
NP	noun phrase
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
perf	perfect
phr	phrase
pl(ur)	plural
prep	preposition
pres	present tense
RP	Received Pronunciation
sg	singular
TOT	Tip of the tongue
UG	Universal Grammar
VP	verb phrase
1	first person (I, we)
2	second person (you)
3	third person (he, she, it, they)
[ ]	phonetic transcription is enclosed in square brackets

/ / phonemic transcription is enclosed in slashes (obliques)

* The asterisk is used to mark examples that do not occur, e.g. the asterisk on */bsan/ in a discussion of possible words in English would mark this form as outside the range of possibilities. The asterisk on a phrase or sentence indicates it is ungrammatical as with **I is mad.* In historical linguistics the asterisk marks a reconstructed form.

The following diacritics are illustrated with letter 'a':

ā1. long vowel	2. high level tone in Chinese
á1. primary stress	2. high tone, rising tone in Chinese
ãnasalized vowel as in French	
ă1. short vowel	2. rising tone, fall-rise tone in Chinese
à1. secondary stress	2. low tone, falling tone in Chinese
âfalling tone	

1. Introduction

What is language?

Writing and signing

Speech sounds

Words and meanings

Variation

How many languages are there?

All languages are created equal

Language is the means of getting an idea from my brain into yours without surgery.

Mark Amidon

What is language?

It is easier to think about particular languages than about language in general, so let's start with one language, English. English consists essentially of a lot of words, tens of thousands of words in fact, some rules for making up new words, and some rules for putting words together into phrases and sentences. Each language is like English in these essentials.

When we talk about 'language', we mean what is common to all the languages of the world.

Language enables us to describe a situation, including one that happened somewhere else at a previous time. It enables us to ask questions. It enables us to direct people to do things. In the world of large mammals humans are among the weakest and slowest. It is through mental capacity that we have managed to survive and flourish, a capacity manifest in our ability to use language. Language enables humans to convey complex information about a variety of topics from kinship to astronomy and to pass on such information to the next generation, a cumulative process that results in all the wonders of modern science and technology. However, language is not just a practical tool, it also serves important social functions. It is the principal means of maintaining social relations and the main medium of entertainment. Moreover, the variety of language we use is an important marker of identity.

A language is like a computer program plus a set of computer files where words and meanings are stored, but the program and the files are located in our brains. Communication with the computer consists of input via the keyboard and output via the screen. Communication between brains must be via the senses. Obviously the senses of smell and taste are not much use in communication, and touching, although a possibility, would be limited to close contact. This leaves seeing and hearing. We can make signs with our hands, and we can make facial expressions. These can be seen, but only in the light, and only with line of sight. We can make sounds with our vocal apparatus and these can be heard by night and day, and it is this mouth-to-ear channel that has been the basis for almost all language communication for thousands

of years. However, sign language, that is language using signs made with the hands, does exist, and may be older than speech. It is used in some societies as a secondary means of communication in circumstances such as hunting where quiet is essential, and it is used in deaf communities as the primary means of communication.

Writing and signing

Humans have been speaking and signing for tens of thousands of years, perhaps hundreds of thousands of years, but writing is a comparatively recent invention. It was first developed by the Sumerians in Mesopotamia (the area between the Tigris and Euphrates in modern Iraq) and by the ancient Egyptians in the fourth millennium BC. The first attempts at writing were pictographic representations, but not everything can be represented pictographically. However, eventually some symbols came to be used for their phonetic value and this allowed any word to be written. The Sumerian word *lugal* for 'king', for instance, came to be represented by a symbol for *lu-* and one for *gal*. Writing was developed independently by the Chinese in the second millennium BC and by the Zapotec and others in Mexico some time in the first millennium BC (see chapter ten). At the beginning of the Modern Era only a few dozen languages were written, and the situation did not change much until comparatively recently. Even today only a few hundred of the 5,000-odd languages of the world are regularly committed to writing. These tend to be the 'big' languages, mostly national languages, the ones with millions of speakers. This gives the impression that writing and speaking are

alternative ways of communicating in language, and so they are, but it is important to recognize that speech is basic, natural, and universal, while writing is derivative. Writing is based on speech. Children learn to speak by exposure to speech. All children learn to speak effortlessly whatever languages they are exposed to when they are young. Writing on the other hand is a conscious process that requires specific teaching and not everyone becomes proficient.

While writing is derivative and represents an attempt at making a record of spoken language, sign language is a primary, natural mode of communication. It is commonly thought that sign language is a means of encoding spoken language, and spoken language can in fact be represented by signs, but sign languages, and there are more than 100 such, are languages in their own right. The evidence for this lies in the fact that where deaf children have been placed in regular contact they have developed sign language. Interestingly where deaf children are exposed to sign language, they learn it without specific instruction just as hearing children pick up spoken language.

The remainder of this book will mainly deal with language in its spoken form, the form familiar to almost everyone, but it needs to be remembered that practically every feature of spoken language mentioned in this book has its parallel in sign language.

Speech sounds

Any language needs thousands of words, but humans cannot make thousands of separate sounds. What we do is we

represent each word by a sequence of sounds. The English word *man* has three sounds, represented in writing by *m*, *a,* and *n*; the word *list* has four sounds, and the word *frost* has five. English has over forty speech sounds; the exact number depends on which variety of English we are talking about and on some points of interpretation. In chapter eight mainstream British English is described as having forty-two speech sounds.

It might come as a surprise to find there are over forty speech sounds in English since there are only twenty-six letters in the alphabet, but many sounds are represented by digraphs (pairs of letters). For instance, *sh* in *shut* represents a single sound as does *ng* in *sing.*

Humans can make well over 100 different speech sounds. Each language has its own selection, usually between a dozen and three score. Most languages have sounds such as the *m*-sound and *n*-sound and all languages have a vowel sound like the one in words like *cut* or the longer one in *calm.* Some languages have relatively unusual sounds. English, for instance, has the *th*-sound in *thistle, theology,* etc. It is also found in Greek and Castilian Spanish, but not many languages have that particular sound.

Each language has rules about which speech sounds can go where. Most people can recognize the 'look' of Italian words as opposed to German words, or Japanese words as opposed to Chinese words on the basis of their characteristic word shape. A visitor to New Zealand quickly recognizes place names of Maori origin such as *Rotorua, Wanganui,* and *Timaru.* And as the evidence piles up the visitor might reasonably conclude that Maori words have a number of syllables, lack consonant clusters, and end in a vowel. The visitor is likely to come across personal names such as *Ngaire* and *Ngaio,* as in *Ngaio*

Marsh, the name of a New Zealand novelist, and realise that Maori has the *ng*-sound at the beginning of words.

English is unusual in having lots of consonant clusters, including long sequences such as the one as in *sixths.* These present a difficulty for second-language learners, and even for some native speakers!

Words and meanings

Since words are represented by sequences of sounds, it follows that there is no connection between the form of words and their meaning. This can be seen in the well-known fact that for the most part different languages have different words for the same thing. What we call a bird is *tori* in Japanese, *manumanu* in Fijian, and *Vogel* in German. (In German all nouns are spelt with an initial capital, not just proper names as in English.) There are a few exceptions. Some words are onomatopoeic, that is, the sound echoes the sense. English *gong* is an example as is Thai *meeu* 'cat' or Mandarin Chinese *māo* 'cat', but note that neither *gong* nor *meeu* and *māo* are found in a great range of languages. In some languages there seems to be an association between certain sequences of sounds and particular meanings. In English the sequence *-ump* recurs in words to do with a rounded or thick-ended protuberance as in *hump*, *lump*, *rump,* and *stump.* This is called sound symbolism. It is a fascinating aspect of language and is discussed on pages 53 and 54.

Variation

When we speak, we inevitably reveal something about ourselves. Suppose you hear someone on the phone, you can normally tell whether you are listening to a young child, older child, young adult, mature adult, or old person. Except with young children, you can normally pick out the sex of the speaker. People from different areas speak differently, as do people from different levels of society. Suppose you are at Heathrow Airport and you overhear someone behind you say, in a deep voice, *Oi never done nuffingk!* Without looking around you will be able to conclude from the words, the voice quality, and the accent something about the speaker, perhaps that the speaker is a young, uneducated male from the London area expressing indignation at what he sees as a baseless accusation.

People can vary the way they speak. Children soon learn that there's one way to speak among their friends and another to talk to parents and teachers. A primary school child might ask a companion for a look at something by saying *Give [u]s a geek* (or a *squiz* or a *dekko* or whatever slang term happens to be current), but they know to say something like *Give me a look (please),* when talking to a parent or teacher. Most people have a repertoire or range of styles, in particular they can choose a formal style or an informal one. They can talk baby-talk or doggy-talk, they can use rousing rhetoric or indulge in playful banter. They can choose language so as to avoid offence and be conciliatory, or they can choose language that is blunt, coarse, aggressive, or abusive.

All of this means that when someone speaks there is not just a message, a question, or a request in the words, but there

is information about the speaker and the speaker's attitude in the voice and the style.

How many languages are there?

Reference books indicate there are about 5,000 languages in the world. That's a ball-park figure. It is hard to come to a definite figure since that involves the awkward question of how different the speech of two communities must be before we would say they speak separate languages. Where a language is spoken over an area large enough for all the speakers not to be in regular contact (the normal situation) different changes occur in different places so that over time local varieties or dialects develop and these may become so different from one another that they are not mutually intelligible and we would have to recognize separate languages. This happened with Latin, the language of the Roman Empire. Eventually the speech of various areas in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Romania developed into different dialects and eventually into separate languages such as Spanish, French, and Italian. Such a development is gradual, and as we look at the languages of the world there will be borderline cases where it is hard to decide if we have different dialects or different languages. Anyway, 5,000 is a reasonable estimate. But whatever the figure is, we can be certain that it was greater in the past and is falling rapidly. If we could go back 10,000 years we would find more than 5,000 languages, mostly spoken by small populations. Where empires have sprung up, numerous languages have been lost, partly because of the slaughter of the defeated, and partly because there is pressure on the conquered to learn the

language of the conquerors. The most recent example of this kind of thing was the colonial expansion of European powers from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. This resulted in the loss of scores of languages, with scores more reduced to very small numbers of speakers and not likely to survive much longer.

While the growth of large-scale societies or civilizations results in the loss of languages, it means that some languages come to acquire vast numbers of speakers. Chinese has over a billion speakers. The term 'Chinese' covers a range of different languages such as Cantonese, Hokkien, and Hakka, but most Chinese have some familiarity with Mandarin or Putonghua ('common speech'), the standard form of the language based on the Beijing dialect, and can read the distinctive Chinese writing system in which the symbols or characters represent words rather than component sounds. (Though in many instances there is also an indication of the pronunciation. See chapter ten.) Some of these characters retain something of their pictographic origins as with  representing *mén* 'gate'.

Over 350 million people have English as their first language, another 500 million have it as one of their languages, and another 500 million or so have at least a smattering or an ability to read a little English. English is currently the dominant language in business, science, and entertainment, and numerous people around the world find that they have to learn it to gain access to knowledge and employment. There is one other language with a vast number of speakers and that is Hindi-Urdu, which has over 300 million first-language speakers and about 300 million second-language speakers. Hindi is the national language of India and is written

in a form of Indian (Devanagari) script; Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and is written in a form of Arabic script adopted from Persia, but the two are essentially different dialects of the same language, to which the term 'Hindustani' was often applied before the partition of India into India and Pakistan. Other languages with large numbers of speakers include Spanish and Bengali (Bangla), both of which have over 200 million speakers, and Arabic, French, Japanese, Indonesian, Portuguese, and German, which have over 100 million.

All languages are created equal

Some years ago students taking my first-year linguistics class had to fill in some administrative form or other, so I took the opportunity to ask them to write on the back of their forms what they would expect to find if they studied one of the native languages of Australia. Some said the sounds would be as the sounds of nature, some said there would be no grammar, and a large number said there would be very few words. These views reflect a widespread notion that some languages are 'primitive', in particular the languages of people living a traditional lifestyle. While it is true that such people have not been caught up in the growth of civilization and have not acquired a host of inventions ranging from telephones to television, it is not true that their languages are less sophisticated than languages like English and Japanese. All these languages have a set of speech sounds and they all have rules for making up words, and rules for putting words together in phrases and sentences. All these languages have words for

whatever they want to talk about in their experience. Naturally they don't have words for radios, television, and mobile (cell) phones, but when they are introduced to new artefacts and ideas, they immediately acquire appropriate words. The Hmong of southern China made up a word *tsheb tuam* for 'bicycle' by combining *tsheb,* a word for vehicle, with *tuam,* which means to push with the foot. Some languages have extended words for 'bird' or 'eagle' to cover aeroplanes, and a number have borrowed words such as *motor car* and *town* from English.

A recent newspaper article about the Sentinelese from one of the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal noted that they are hunter-gatherers and have no word for numbers higher than two. The facts are correct, but the article was unfortunate in that it suggested having no numbers higher than two is a sign of inadequacy. The fact is that many hunter-gatherer societies do not feel the need to count. When speakers of these languages are introduced to mainstream civilization, they have no trouble with numbers. They sometimes make up number-words in their own languages. For instance, a word for 'hand' will be used for 'five', so 'six' will be 'hand plus one', 'seven' will be 'hand plus two', and so on. This results in number words that are too big to use quickly, but they also learn numbers from English, Spanish, or whatever language they come into contact with and they have no trouble learning to handle money and play cards, and their children show the same mastery of numbers as children from societies with numbers.

PART I
Words

2. Word classes

Parts of speech

Open and closed classes

Lexical words and function words

Beyond English

Sources and further reading

Problems

They've a temper, some of them—particularly verbs: they're the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs.

Humpty Dumpty in *Alice through the Looking Glass*

Parts of speech

Nouns and verbs

As mentioned in chapter one, all languages contain thousands of words, but these words are not all of the same type. They fall into different classes or **parts of speech**, as they were traditionally called. All languages will have two major classes of word called **nouns** and **verbs.** Nouns include words for types of human (*woman*, *mother*, *baby*), various creatures (*fish*,

frogs, *ants*), and various inanimate entities (*water*, *thunder*, *cloud*, *stone*). In English, nouns are distinguished by the fact that they when they refer to anything that can be counted, they can usually take a suffix spelt *-s* or *-es* to mark **plural**, i.e. more than one (*boys*, *churches*). A majority of verbs refer to actions and processes and in English the class includes *to yawn*, *to cough*, *to urinate*, *to bite*, *to spit*, *to scratch*, *to chase*, *to burn*, and *to melt.* Verbs are distinguished by the fact that they can be marked to indicate past time, or, to use the grammatical term, past **tense.** With most verbs past tense is shown by the addition of a suffix spelt *-ed* or *-d* (*yawned*, *melted*, *chased*) though with some common verbs, there is a change of vowel (*bite/bit*, *spit/spat*).

We use language to make statements, ask questions, and direct people to do things. Let's confine ourselves to making statements for the moment. A typical statement involves taking at least one noun and one verb:

Birds fly.
Flowers die.
Jane coughed.
Rome burned.
Blackbirds eat worms.
Serena defeated Maria.

These sentences can be described in terms of a **subject** (the first noun in each of these sentences) and a **predicate.** The subject represents what is being talked about (think of the use of 'subject' in expressions such as 'the subject of their talks') and the predicate expresses what is predicated or stated about the subject. The notion of subject will be described more

precisely in chapter five, but for the moment we just need to note that the subject precedes the predicate. We also need to note that in these sentences the verbs *to eat* and *to defeat* are followed by nouns. Verbs like these are called **transitive verbs** since the action is thought of as transferring from the subject to the **object** (the noun following the verb). The word **transitive** is derived from the Latin verb *transire* 'to go over' and this Latin verb is also reflected in the words *transit* and *transition.* Verbs like *to fly, to swim,* and *to die* are **intransitive.**

The sentences given above illustrate two differences between nouns and verbs. One is that nouns can be marked for plural and verbs for past tense. This kind of marking is called **inflection.** The other is that nouns and verbs occupy different positions in sentences. These formal differences are important in distinguishing nouns and verbs, for although it is true that in any language the words for *man, dog,* and *head* will be in the noun class, words can move from one class to another. We need to look at how a word functions in a particular context to see which **word class** it belongs to. The words *man*, *dog,* and *head* can be verbs in English as in *The women manned the lifeboats, The conviction for fraud dogged his career,* and *Maradona headed the ball past the keeper.* Similarly with words such as *like* and *hit*. We can expect them to be in the verb class in any language, but we need to allow for the possibility of them being used as nouns as in *Naomi has likes and dislikes,* and *Jake scored several hits.* I should add that English is unusual in allowing so much movement from one word class to another. Most languages allow much less shifting from one word class to another and when they do allow it, they mark the change of word class, usually by a suffix. English marks change of word class by using a suffix in

some instances, as with a noun like *delivery* where the suffix *-y* marks the derivation of the noun from the verb *deliver*.

Determiners

In the example so far all the nouns have been in the plural or they have been **proper nouns (proper names)** such as *Rome, Serena,* and *Maria.* If we want to form a sentence using a **common noun** (a non-proper noun) in the singular, we need to use a word from the class of **determiners** in front of it, words such as *the, a(n), this, that, his,* and *their*.

Her sister wanted a girl.
An agent bought this house.

Within the general class of determiners *the* is known as the **definite article** and *a* or *an* as the **indefinite article.** Sequences such as *the woman* or *an agent* are noun phrases. A **phrase** is a group of words that forms a unit within a larger structure. A **noun phrase** has a noun as its **head** and there can be **modifiers** such as the, *this, or their.*

Adjectives

Words like *big, little, fast, slow, mighty, conclusive, temperamental,* and *invincible* are **adjectives.** They describe properties, qualities, or characteristics, so they often appear in the predicate.

Snails are slow.
Cheetahs are fast.
The baby became ill.
The child grew strong.

In English these **predicative adjectives** normally need to be used with a verb, either a form of the verb 'to be' such as *is*, *are*, *was*, or *were,* or a more specific verb such as *become* or *grow,* but in many languages the adjective on its own suffices to form a predicate. In Indonesian, for instance, one can say 'Ali is big' by simply using the adjective *besar*: *Ali besar* 'Ali is big'.

Adjectives can also be used **attributively,** that is, to modify nouns as in *her long speech, his short shorts,* and *conclusive evidence.* If one says *Her speech was long,* then one asserts that the speech was long, but if one says *Her long speech bored even her admirers,* one does not assert the length, it is taken as given.

In some cases a difference of order can distinguish an attributive adjective from a predicative one as in the following examples, though *The pies hot?* is colloquial. A more formal version would be *Are the pies hot?*

A. What are we having for lunch?
B. The hot pies. (attributive)
A. I think we are ready to eat.
B. The pies hot? (predicative)

Adjectives in English have **comparative** and **superlative** forms. The adjective *nice* has a comparative *nicer* (*Today is nicer than yesterday)* and a superlative *nicest* (*Sunday is the nicest day of the whole week*). This is the regular inflection. There are irregular forms such as *better* and *best* instead of **gooder* and **goodest* (the asterisk marks non-occurring forms), and longer adjectives form the equivalent of the comparative and superlative inflection by using *more* and *most*:

more beautiful, most beautiful. On one occasion tennis player Anna Kournikova managed to illustrate all three possibilities in a single sentence addressed to Martina Hingis:

> *You're the betterplayer, but I'mprettierandmore marketable.*

Pronouns

Pronouns are words like *I*, *you*, *she,* and *they.* Traditionally they were described as words that could stand for nouns as in the following short passage where *she* refers to *Brenda,*

> *Brenda is growing up and soon she will be wearing make-up. Next thing you know,*
> *she will be changing her opinion about boys, and wanting to go out on dates.*

It was on the basis of this usage that words like *she* were called pronouns, that is, 'pro-nouns'. This example also illustrates just how useful pronouns are. It would be tiresome to have to keep repeating *Brenda,* even more tedious if the passage had begun with a noun phrase such as *that young girl.* The pronoun *I* stands for the speaker and *you* for the addressee, but not all pronouns can be said to stand for a noun, certainly not *nobody, no one,* and *nothing,* nor *it* in a sentence like *It is raining.* Pronouns occupy the same positions in phrases and sentences as nouns, but they do not take determiners as modifiers. You can't say **this me* or **that you* (there's that asterisk again, this time marking phrases that don't occur). Pronouns normally can't take adjectives as modifiers. You can't say **dull he* or **conclusive it,* though there are a few possibilities such as *Silly me!*

There are various types of pronoun:

personal pronouns: *I saw you with her.*

possessive pronouns: *I want mine. Yours is the best.*

reflexive pronouns: *I hit myself on the finger. Keep yourself nice!*

interrogative pronouns: *Who saw you? What kept you?*

indefinite pronouns: *Somebody loves me. Everyone likes him. I know nothing.*

demonstrative pronouns: *This annoys me. That irritates them.*

There are also relative pronouns. These are introduced in chapter six. Note that *this* and *that* and their plural forms *these* and *those* are demonstrative pronouns in sentences such as *This puzzles me* and *These annoy me,* but they are determiners in sentences such as *This behaviour puzzles me* and *These flies annoy me.*

Preposition

Words such as *along, for, from, in, on, over, through, to,* and *under* as used in sentences like the following are **prepositions,**

We drove from downtown LA along Wiltshire Boulevard to Santa Monica in a convertible.

Prepositions normally precede noun phrases and the sequence of preposition and noun phrase forms a **prepositional phrase.** You can show that these sequences are phrases by trying to move them to different positions in the sentence. The results will be grammatical, but not always felicitous. In the example

above you could move *from downtown LA* to the front of the sentence or *in a convertible* to a position after the verb.

In some languages there are **postpositions** rather than prepositions. As the name implies, these follow noun phrases rather than precede. In Japanese 'in Tokyo' is *Tookyoo ni* and 'to America' is *Amerika e*.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are joining words. The words *and, or*, and *but* are **co-ordinating conjunctions.** They co-ordinate or join constituents of equal status. They can join words as in *bread and butter, right or wrong, and naughty but nice*; they can join phrases as in *out of the frying pan and into the fire;* and they can join sentences to form compound sentences: *Jack Sprat could eat no fat and his wife could eat no lean.*

There are also **subordinating conjunctions** such as *since* in a sentence like *Since she learned how to skate, she spends hours on the ice every day.* Subordinating conjunctions are dealt with in chapter six.

Adverbs

In traditional descriptions of language a category of **adverb** was included. The term did not pick out a well-defined class, but was rather something of a ragbag into which almost every word was put that did not fit into the categories listed above. A more satisfactory classification would include a number of smaller classes of types of adverb, but we will accept 'adverb' for our present purpose. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, prepositions, or other adverbs. These possibilities are illustrated in turn in the following examples where the adverbs are underlined.

Elephants walkslowly.

Pam drinks awfullyweak tea.

Susan walkedrightout the door.

They walkedfrightfully quickly.

Some adverbs such as *very* can modify adjectives (*very good*) and adverbs (*very quickly*), but not verbs. You can't say **He walked very.*

A very large class of **manner adverbs** are formed from adjectives by the addition of the suffix *-ly*. These include *swiftly*, *angrily*, *doubtfully*, and *frightfully*. They have comparative and superlative degrees formed with *more* and *most*: *more rapidly, most frightfully*. A few adjectives have the same form as adjectives and these have an inflectional comparative and superlative:

Brian worked harder last week.

Bev works fastest under pressure.

Interjections

There are a few words that do not play any part in the syntax. They stand outside the sentence. This class includes *ouch! gosh! yuk!* and the old-fashioned *alas!* as well as greeting words like *hello* and *hi*, and *yes* and *no*. These words may be used within a sentence as in *He said, 'yes'*, but so can the sound of a blurt, a hiss (sssss) or a hush (shshsh).

Interjections and conjunctions aside, the word classes are illustrated in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1. Word classes in English

Determiner	Adjective	Noun	Verb	Adverb	Preposition	Determiner	Noun
The	*little*	*puppy*	*ran*	*quickly*	*towards*	*the*	*visitors*
		Pronoun					Pronoun
		It	*ran*	*quickly*	*towards*		*them.*

Open and closed classes

New words can be easily added to the classes of noun, adjective, verb, and adverb. These are **open classes,** open to new membership. The other word classes are **closed classes** in that they do not readily admit new members (like some snooty clubs!). New prepositions, for instance, are unusual but *re* as in *re that matter you mentioned the other day* meaning 'concerning' is a new preposition in English. It derives from the habit of putting the Latin word *re* 'in the matter of' at the head of formal business letters, particularly those from lawyers. Also *post* has gained some currency in English over the last generation, and it occurs in phrases such as *post the game* 'after the game'. Originally a Latin preposition it previously occurred in English in compounds such as *post-war* or *post-natal.*

Lexical words and function words

Besides words that have a clear meaning such as nouns like *lion* or *ticket* or verbs such as *push* or *shout,* there are words that can't really be said to have a meaning, rather they have a function. Consider the following sentence,

The **queen** *will* **meet** *a* **leader** *of the* **delegation**.

The nouns *queen*, *leader,* and *delegation* have a clear meaning, as does the verb *meet,* but the words shown in italics, namely *the*, *will*, *a,* and *of* do not have a clear meaning. You cannot pick out anything that they refer to, but they do play a part in how we interpret the sentence. We call these words **function words** as opposed to words like *queen* and *meet,* which are **lexical words** or **content words.** As noted above, *the* is called the definite article and *a* is the indefinite article. *Will* is an auxiliary verb (this is explained on p. 74). The word *of* belongs to the class of prepositions, but unlike prepositions such as *on*, *under*, *over*, *near,* and *through,* which have a clear lexical meaning, *of* is purely functional.

Some prepositions are lexical in some contexts, but purely functional in others. In a sentence like *Barbara stood by the bridge* the preposition *by* is lexical and means 'near', but it was used in contexts such as *She read by candlelight* and it came to be interpreted as not just 'near' but as 'by means of', and then came to be used to mark the demoted subject of the passive. In the following pair of sentences the first is the **active** construction with the **agent,** the doer of the action, as subject. The second is the **passive** in which the **patient** (the entity affected) of the active construction has been made the subject while the subject of the active construction has been demoted and marked by the preposition *by,* which is purely functional in this usage.

A sniper shot Smith.
Smith was shot by a sniper.

Beyond English

Some languages are claimed to have only three word classes, namely nouns, verbs, and **particles,** although one suspects interjections have probably been overlooked. Particles are words that do not fit into the noun and verb classes. They are typically words with a grammatical function. The term 'particle' is not used much in descriptions of English except to describe the second word in combinations such as *take up*, *take in*, *take off*, etc. These combinations function like one word in terms of meaning, but they are not compounds since a noun can come between the two words. We can say *Rob took out therubbish* or *Rob took the rubbish out.* The second part of these combinations is referred to as the **verb particle.**

Readers might wonder how a language can get by without adjectives, determiners, prepositions, and adverbs. Adjective-type meanings can be expressed by words that behave like nouns or they can be expressed by words that behave like verbs. Consider the adjective *ill* in English. We can use *ill* as a noun as in *The ill have nowhere to go* and we have a verb 'to ail', which has pretty much the same meaning as 'be ill'. In some languages the function of the determiner is expressed within the noun. This happens to some extent in the Scandinavian languages. In Swedish, for instance, the definite article can be a suffix to the noun as in *hus-et* 'the house' and *flicka-n* 'the girl'. The function of prepositions and postpositions is expressed via inflection on nouns in many languages including Finnish where 'in Finland' is *Suome-ssa.* Adverbial functions can be expressed by inflection on nouns or verbs, or by particles.

Sources and further reading

In an effort to keep the presentation simple I have omitted numerous details such as what to do with number words such as *two* as in *these two books.* Interested readers can get a fuller account of word classes in English from numerous books such as Huddleston, *English Grammar: an Outline*, or chapter two of Bloor and Bloor, *The Functional Analysis of English*: *a Hallidayan Approach.* The latter uses the descriptive framework of Michael Halliday, as the subtitle indicates. This involves somewhat different terminology from other frameworks, but the presentation is very clear.

Problems

1 Which word class (or part-of-speech) do the underlined words in the following belong to?

We just google it.

The ranger spotted the deer. (So it was a spotted deer!)

For a pretty girl, your dress sense is pretty awful.

He said he had no say in the matter.

Natalie ran the last lap in 62 seconds, but she had left her run too late.

Tonya liked to swim in the lake, but that morning her swim was cut short.

Sharon was being good-nighted by her friends.

Wayne totalled his new car after just two weeks.

The parrot could parrot a few naughty phrases.

We overnighted in Mannheim, but Maria stayed overnight in Ludwigshafen.

2 English is unusual in allowing words to appear in more than one word class without any change in form. This switching from one class to another is most common between verbs and nouns. It happens too, purely by chance, that besides the *-s/-es* suffix that marks the plural of nouns, there is a suffix *-s/-es* on verbs as in *She runs, He watches TV.* All this means that there can be sentences where there are two interpretations according to whether one takes a word with an *-s/-es* suffix to be a noun or a verb. These ambiguities are common in headlines. See if you can find two interpretations for each of the following:

COMMITTEE PLANS WORK

STEEL SPRINGS UP

FEMALE RETURNS HIGH

GOVERNMENT FUNDS INCREASE

VICTIM REMAINS SAFE

3 The distinction between a predicative adjective and an adverb can be tricky. Consider the following example:

' "Early days," Kathy said, evasive.'

Barry Maitland, *The Chalon Heads*

At first glance this looks as if it should be *evasively* and that the author has omitted the *-ly*, as many speakers habitually do, but in fact *evasive* is a predicative adjective and the sentence could be paraphrased *'Early days', Kathy said, being evasive.* Consider the following and label the underlined words as either

(predicative) adjective or adverb, and explain the difference in meaning between the members of each pair.

Michelle returned well.
Michelle appeared well.
Michelle drives well.

Lewis runs fast.
Lewis is fast.

Wendy played hard.
Wendy turned hard.

4 Some words can appear in several word classes. The word *round,* for instance, can be used as a noun, an adjective, a verb, a preposition, and an adverb. Make up a sentence to illustrate each possibility.

5 It was mentioned above that the words *more* and *most* are used with longer adjectives. This implies that the inflections *-er* and *-est* are confined to shorter adjectives. What counts as short and long? You need to think in terms of number of syllables. A **syllable** is the smallest unit one would break a word up into in giving very slow dictation. Words like *cake, rum,* and *push* are monosyllabic, words such as *sugar*, *pretty,* and *promise* have two syllables, words such as *triplicate*, *sensible,* and *fantastic* have three syllables, and so on. But is it just a matter of number of syllables? What about the nature of the final syllable of the adjective? What part does it play in determining the choice between *-er/-est* and *more/most.* Are there words that can form their comparative or superlative in more than one way?

Words are not the smallest meaningful elements in language. It is obvious that *careless* is made up of *care* and *-less.* It is also obvious that words like *books* and *tables* contain a suffix *-s,* which, as we saw in the previous chapter, indicates plural, that is, more than one. The study of how words can be broken down into meaningful constituents is called **morphology,** literally the study of form (Greek *morphē* 'shape', 'form'). The term was used in biology before it was applied to the study of words and probably counts as a learned word, but interestingly the root *morph* has now come into common use as a verb. It can refer to one image in a movie or television programme changing into another before our eyes ('The seed *morphed* into a flower'), it can refer to actors *morphing* into new roles, and in one airline advertisement we are told the business class seats *morph* into beds.

The word and its parts

New words can be formed by various processes, mainly by **compounding** (e.g. *tablecloth*) or by adding a prefix or suffix. The word *unhelpful* consists of a **root***help* to which a suffix has been added to form *helpful,* and then a prefix to form *unhelpful. Unhelpful,* then, can be said to contain three meaningful parts: *un-, help,* and *-ful.* These parts are called **morphemes.** The form *help* can occur on its own as a word. It is a **free morpheme.** The forms *-ful* and *un-*cannot occur on their own. They are **bound morphemes.** More precisely *-ful* is a **suffix** since it is a bound form added at the end of a root or stem, while *un-*is a **prefix** since it is added at the front of a root or stem. The **stem** is whatever an affix is added to. With a

word like *helpful,* the stem and the root coincide, but in *unhelpful* the prefix *un-* is not added to the root *help.* There is no word **unhelp.* It is added to the stem *helpful.*

Prefixes like *un-* (*unkind*), *super-* (*superhuman*), and *re-* (*recycle*) and suffixes like *-less* (*friendless*), *-ship* (*friendship*), and *-ise/-ize* (*modernise/modernize*) are **derivational.** They are used to 'derive' or form new words. But the form of words can also be varied to indicate a grammatical notion such as the plural of nouns or the past tense of verbs. This variation is usually in the form of an outer layer of suffixation, as in English. For instance, as we saw in the previous chapter, we have the sibilant suffix, which is written *-s* or *-es,* to indicate the **plural** of nouns, as in *friendships* and *kindnesses.* We also have a suffix written *-d* or *-ed* to indicate past time with verbs as in *modernized* and *solidified.* These changes of form are called **inflection.** If you are uncertain whether a prefix or suffix is derivational or inflectional, ask yourself whether you would put words bearing the form in question as separate entries in the dictionary. It's pretty clear that it would be pointless to put *books* in the dictionary as a separate entry alongside *book,* and it would be equally pointless to put *criticized* in the dictionary as well as *criticize.* Inflectional suffixes are general in their distribution. For instance, the plural suffix can be used with any noun referring to something countable (*Jessica takes three sugars in her coffee*) and the meaning is always 'more than one'. The past tense inflection can be added to any verb and the meaning is always the same. Of course, the form may be irregular. For instance, we say *went* not **goed,* but the past tense notion still applies. Derivation on the other hand is more often than not irregular in its distribution and often inconsistent in terms of meaning. The

The *pre-* in the word *prefix* itself is historically a prefix and it occurs in words like *pregnant, prefer,* and *prepare,* but, as we pointed out earlier in this chapter, it is not much good breaking some of these words of Latin origin into component parts, since the meaning of some of the components is often hard to identify. However, the *pre-* in these words can be identified as meaning 'before' and it was resurrected during the last century and used in formations such as *pre-war*, *pre-school*, *pre-season*, *pre-set,* and *pre-owned.* Note that in the modern formations the prefix is always pronounced [pri:].

De- is another prefix that was introduced into English via words imported from Latin such as *demolish*, *deduce,* and *depend.* Like *pre-,* it has been given a new lease of life and is currently quite productive. Witness *defrost*, *dehumidify*, *delist*, *dehumanize,* and *decentralize.* In parallel with what we noted with *pre-* this prefix is always pronounced [di:] in modern formations.

One type of suffix that is common in some languages, particularly Latin and its daughter languages such as Spanish, Italian, and French, is a **diminutive** suffix. Diminutive suffixes basically mean 'small'. In Italian *libro* is 'book', but with the diminutive suffix *-etto* we have *libretto* 'booklet'. Words with diminutive suffixes tend to develop specialized meanings rather than just 'little so-and-so'. *Libretto* has acquired the meaning of the book of an opera, and it is used in English in this sense. The sister suffix *-ette* in French appears in *cigarette.* A cigarette might be like a small cigar, but is not in fact a small cigar. Words with diminutive suffixes often acquire overtones of endearment or affection on the one hand or scorn on the other. In English there is a productive diminutive found in words like *doggy* and *weepie,* where

doggy is a term of endearment and *weepie,* a rather off-hand colloquialism for a sad movie, a 'tear-jerker'. The spelling of the suffix, incidentally, varies between *-y* and *-ie*. Diminutives are usually informal as in *undies* (female underwear) and the currently fashionable *hottie,* a sexually attractive person.

New prefixes and suffixes are rare, but here's an example of how one can arise. In 1972 supporters of President Nixon broke into the offices of the Democratic Party's National Committee at the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC. They were discovered and the name *Watergate* became synonymous with scandal. In 1980 President Carter's brother was found to be acting on behalf of the Gadhafi regime in Libya and this was dubbed *Billygate.* In 1986 the Reagan administration was found to have been selling arms to Iran and this became *Irangate.* They were found to be using the profits to supply the anti-Communist Contra guerrillas in Nicaragua. This was *Contragate.* Soon every scandal was some kind of *-gate*. We had *Dianagate* (Princess Di had a boyfriend), *Camillagate* (Prince Charles had a girlfriend), and Monica Lewinsky's involvement with President Clinton gave rise to *zippergate* and *fornigate.*

These *-gate* formations are interesting in relation to the distinction between compounds and words with affixes. Is the *-gate* part of these words a compounding element or a suffix? *Watergate* is a proper name, but obviously it is a compound of *water* and *gate* and this second element has been extracted for the new formations. One could argue that *-gate* is a suffix, since it is not really an independent word, but most of the formations seem like compounds, each one being some kind of 'gate' where *gate* means 'scandal'.

reduplication, is 'smoky'. In the Australian language Pitta-Pitta *ngapu* is water and *ngapungapu* is 'wet'.

Flying creatures in various languages sometimes have reduplicated names. 'Butterfly' is *kupu-kupu* in Indonesian, *balam-balam* in Woiwurrung (Australian) and *cho-cho* in Japanese (opera buffs will recall Madame Butterfly was *Cho-cho-san*). This may be iconic, aimed at capturing the flapping of wings. Words for oscillation are sometimes represented by reduplicated roots. In Thai, a language that favours reduplication with a change of vowel, the word for 'oscillate' is *yôok-yêek* (the root is *yôok*). In English we have practically no pure reduplication, but we have a number of examples with vowel alternation, and again the notion of oscillation appears: *criss-cross*, *flip-flop*, *ding-dong*, *ping-pong*, *see-saw*, *tick-tock*, and *wig-wag*. The idea is more abstract in *dilly-dally* and *shilly-shally* where the oscillation is of the *will-I-won't-I* type, and in *mishmash* and *wishy-washy* 'neither one thing or another'.

Reduplication with verbs can indicate ongoing action, repeated action, intense activity, or a number of actors. In Nama (a Niger-Congo language), for instance, *go* means 'look' and *go-go* means 'scrutinize'. In Motu (Austro-nesian) *mahuta* is 'to sleep' and *mahuta-mahuta* 'to sleep constantly'.

Proper names to common noun

Quite a number of common nouns in English derive from the shifting of names of people or products. *Cardigan* derives from Lord Cardigan (1797–1868) and *macintosh* from Charles Macintosh (1766–1843) the inventor of the waterproofing

The names of units in physics are often taken from the names of scientists: *ohm*, *amp(ère)*, *joule*, and *pascal*, for instance. These words are not confined to English.

Taboo and euphemism

It is typical of human cultures that certain topics or terms are **taboo** in certain circumstances or even in all circumstances. Taboo is borrowed from Polynesian *tabu* and means 'forbidden' or 'untouchable'. It is common for there to be taboos to do with religion, death, and sex.

Certain subject matter can be taboo or just certain words. Until the 1970s the subject of menstruation was under a pretty strict taboo. There were products advertised as giving relief for 'the pain you can't explain'. Sex and excretion were taboo in a variety of situations, but within this area certain words were especially taboo, notably *fuck* and *cunt*. *Fuck* has been emerging from its taboo over the last few decades and is now heard regularly in movies. However, these words are not used in newspapers, and in fact the relevant computers are programmed so that they can't print these words. This prevents naughty staff deliberately omitting the *o* in *count* and claiming it was a typo.

The main significance of taboo in the context of word building is that it gives rise to **euphemisms,** nice-sounding alternatives to existing expressions. Words for things that are unpleasant or thought of as inferior or unattractive tend to acquire unpleasant connotations. This leads to a quest for fresh terms and leads to frequent lexical replacement. Today's euphemism becomes tomorrow's ordinary term. Euphemisms

Names and numbers can be considered to be compounds containing cells where an entry in a particular cell has a certain significance. First cell in a Western personal name is the given name, second position from the right in a number involves multiplying by 10, and so on.

2 Label the affixes in the following words as inflectional [I] or derivational [D].

postage [ ]
wisdom [ ]
delouse [ ]
glamorous [ ]
unwind [ ]
swelled [ ]
criteria [ ]
pancakes [ ]
lionesses [ ] [ ]
engages [ ]

3 In words like *tables*, *chairs,* and *bushes* we have inflection for plural, i.e. for 'more than one'. But what is the function of the suffixes in baby-talk words like *dindins*, *beddiebyes*, *wee-wees,* and *cuddles,* and in colloquial forms like *gramps* (grandpa) and *turps* (turpentine)?

4 As I write this, reports are appearing in the media in Melbourne of men arrested for taking pictures up women's skirts with hidden cameras and the practice is called *upskirting.* Radio presenters refer to it as a new word. Sometimes you come across a word that is new to you, but which is not new in the language. Recently I read, 'The crocodile started to

to be. In what follows I shall be talking about lexemes, but I will simply write 'word'.

Most words **refer** to some entity, process, action or whatever. As we saw in chapter two, these are **lexical** words. They belong in the lexicon rather than the grammar. A minority of words have a function rather than a meaning. We saw some examples in chapter two, words such as *the*, *of,* and *not*, which are typically unstressed. These are function words or grammatical words.

There are also words and phrases that function as **discourse markers.** Some of these, like *please*, *thanks,* and *You're welcome,* play a part in negotiation, while others such as *well (Well, I wouldn't say that exactly.), still (Still, he's good at sport.)* and *anyway (Anyway, I'm still going to go.)* indicate the speaker's attitude and how the following statement is to be taken in relation to the context (see also p. 112).

There are also **deictic** words, words that have variable reference according to the speech situation. Deictic words may be functional such as *this* and *that* or lexical like *yesterday* and *tomorrow*. They are treated on pp. 44 and 45 below.

At first we might think of the meaning of lexical items as whatever they **refer** to, what they **denote**. However, this is not so. There is a well-known example from the philosopher Frege illustrating the difference between meaning and reference. It involves Venus (the planet, not the goddess). A person could learn about the planets at school or from a book on astronomy and be able to tell you that Venus is the planet nearest the sun. The same person might be familiar with a large star that is visible in the eastern sky just before dawn and the western sky just after dark, where it is known as the Morning Star and Evening Star respectively, but not know that the large star is

injured or fall ill in a public place, we might call for *First Aid,* but not *First Assist* or *First Help.*

Synonyms may differ in that one is more formal. *To receive a letter* is more formal than *to get a letter. Pusillanimous* means 'faint-hearted', but *pusillanimous* is a learned word and likely not to be understood by many, whereas *faint-hearted* is common enough.

As mentioned above, words have connotations as well as denotations. *Deferential* and *obsequious* have very similar meanings, but while *deferential* is neutral in its connotations, *obsequious* has negative connotations. It implies criticism.

Antonyms

If two words are opposite in meaning, they are **antonyms**. There are two types of antonym. The first is illustrated by pairs such as *alive* and *dead* or *male* and *female.* In general one is either alive or dead, not somewhere in between. Alive means 'not dead' and dead means 'not alive'. Much the same applies to *male* and *female.* It is true that one can be in a state that is somewhere between life and death, and it is true that some animals, including humans, are not completely male or completely female. However, there is still a contrast between antonymic pairs such as *alive/dead* and *male/female* and antonymic pairs such as *fast* and *slow*, *heavy* and *light*, or *easy* and *hard. Fast* and *slow,* for instance, represent the ends of a scale and there can be degrees of speed in between. Moreover, the estimation of fast or slow depends on whose speed is under discussion. What is fast for a Labrador would be slow for a greyhound. Antonyms of the *alive/dead* type are called