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# LEXICOLOGY:

A TEXTBOOK FOR TEFL STUDENTS



TECHNICKÁ UNIVERZITA V LIBERCI

# Lexicology

*A Textbook for TEFL Students*

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## *Prologue*

The purpose of this book is to give a scientifically rigorous introduction to English lexicology in an informal tone. The informal and personal tone is hoped to make the sometimes complex and abstract concepts of linguistic analysis more accessible to novices. The book is meant for master's students of English, but I hope that it can prove useful to anyone who is interested in English lexicology. It is not meant to be yet another dry treatise for the sole benefit of my fellow linguists.

Since this book has been conceived in the context of educating teachers of English at the Department of English of the Technical University of Liberec, it is constrained by the curriculum of this program. It is specifically a textbook for the course on English lexicology in the first semester of the master's program.

Because these students will have had separate courses on phonetics/phonology, morphology, syntax and practical English skills, I try to avoid encroaching on the territory of these courses as much as possible. However, it is expected that the readers are familiar with these disciplines. Nevertheless, repetitions in the content of the book do occur on purpose in order to ease the understanding of the complex concepts of lexicology, which can be described in various ways from various perspectives. Each chapter is accompanied by a number of exercises to facilitate self-studying.

Linguistic nomenclature is notoriously complicated. Different authors may use the same term for different phenomena, and different terms are often used for the same phenomena. Therefore, I duly explain the terminology I use. This book is, however, not meant to be encyclopedic and does not purport to cover every aspect of English lexicology or linguistic terminology. Therefore, you are cordially encouraged to read other works on lexicology and semantics as well.

Since English is a pluricentric language having many more or less different varieties and no one Standard variety, I attempt to describe a kind of common denominator. I don't favor any of the varieties, except for using American spelling, and only seldom refer to differences between them.

I use both authentic examples and examples created on the fly to illustrate certain points. I don't insist on using authentic examples alone because lexicology is not about what has been said or written but about what can be said or written. Should my own examples be found inadequate, I'm open to suggestions. The authentic examples are both from classical and modern authors, but mostly from the latter.

I also employ examples of informal or even non-standard language in order to show that these varieties too are legitimate object of linguistic study and can be analyzed in the same way as any standard and formal expressions. I focus on describing English, not on prescribing how it is to be used.

Besides my many students, the following published scholars have inspired me especially: Hans Arndt, Bernard Comrie, Östen Dahl, Charles Fillmore, William Foley, Michael Halliday, Christian Lehmann, Geoffrey Leech, Edith Moravcsik, Robert Van Valin Jr. and Terence Wilbur.

I am especially thankful to Doc. dr. Naděžda Kudrnáčová, CSc. for her review of

the draft and useful comments, which have improved it substantially.

### *Notational conventions*

- *Italics* indicate examples and that I focus on the form of a linguistic expression.
- A word form followed by an asterisk, e.g. *be\**, denotes all the possible inflectional forms of that word that are useable in the given context.
- 'Single quotation marks' indicate the meaning of a linguistic expression.
- <pointy brackets> indicate lexemes.
- "Double quotation marks" indicate direct citations.
- Underlining is used to draw attention to particularly relevant parts of examples.
- **Bold** signifies important technical terms where they are used for the first time.
- ~~Strike-thru~~ shows examples which are considered wrong. From time to time, I also give examples of incorrect use of English in order to draw attention to common pitfalls.
- [Brackets] indicate elements in an example which can be left out.
- Various colors are used in some examples to highlight various points.
- **Highlighting** indicates very important points.

## Contents

List of tables.....	8
List of exercises .....	8
List of figures.....	9
1. Introduction.....	10
1. 1. English .....	11
2. Lexemes .....	13
2. 1. Words .....	13
2. 2. Signs.....	14
2. 3. Simple and complex lexemes.....	14
2. 3. 1. Compositionality / predictability of meaning .....	15
2. 4. Lemma .....	16
2. 5. Denotation vs connotation .....	16
2. 6. Register .....	17
2. 7. Exercises .....	17
3. Making lexemes .....	19
3. 1. Creating lexemes.....	19
3. 1. 1. Borrowing .....	19
3. 1. 2. Calque .....	19
3. 2. Conversion .....	20
3. 3. Change of root.....	20
3. 4. Derivation .....	21
3. 4. 1. Circumfixes.....	22
3. 5. Compounding.....	22
3. 5. 1. Endocentric compounds.....	23
3. 5. 2. Exocentric compounds.....	24
3. 5. 3. Coordinate compounds .....	25
3. 5. 4. Group derivation .....	25
3. 6. Backformation.....	25
3. 7. Abbreviations .....	26
3. 7. 1. Clipping.....	26
3. 7. 2. Initialism .....	26
3. 7. 3. Acronyms .....	27

3. 7. 4. Contractions .....	27
3. 8. Blending.....	27
3. 9. Idioms .....	28
3. 10. Exercises .....	29
4. Relations between lexemes .....	30
4. 1. Synonymy .....	30
4. 2. Homonymy and co.....	31
4. 2. 1. Homonymy proper .....	31
4. 2. 2. Homophony.....	31
4. 2. 3. Homography .....	32
4. 2. 4. Polysemy.....	32
4. 3. Antonymy.....	32
4. 3. 1. Binary antonyms .....	32
4. 3. 2. Multiple antonyms .....	32
4. 3. 3. Polar antonymy .....	33
4. 3. 4. Converse lexemes .....	33
4. 3. 5. Auto-antonymy .....	34
4. 3. 6. Oxymora .....	34
4. 4. Hyper-hyponymy .....	35
4. 5. Mero-holonymy .....	36
4. 6. Common set .....	36
4. 7. No relation .....	36
4. 8. Cross-linguistic relations .....	37
4. 8. 1. Cognates.....	37
4. 8. 2. Translation equivalents .....	37
4. 8. 3. Faux amis .....	38
4. 8. 4. Folk etymology .....	38
4. 9. Exercises .....	39
5. Structure of lexemes .....	40
5. 1. The structure of polymorphemic lexemes.....	40
5. 2. The relation between the elements of compounds.....	41
5. 3. The structure of monomorphemic lexemes.....	42
5. 3. 1. Activities .....	42

5. 3. 2. Component analysis .....	43
5. 3. 3. Natural primes.....	44
5. 4. Exercises .....	45
6. Combining lexemes .....	46
6. 1. Selection restrictions.....	46
6. 1. 1. Stem and affix .....	48
6. 1. 2. Content word and preposition.....	49
6. 1. 3. Head and modifier.....	49
6. 1. 4. Subject, object, verb, complement.....	49
6. 2. Collocations .....	50
6. 3. Exercises .....	51
7. Changing and expanding lexemes .....	52
7. 1. Amelioration .....	52
7. 2. Pejoration .....	52
7. 3. Euphemism .....	52
7. 4. Generalization.....	53
7. 5. Specialization.....	53
7. 6. Figures of speech .....	54
7. 6. 1. Conversion .....	54
7. 6. 2. Metonymy .....	55
7. 6. 3. Metaphor.....	56
7. 6. 4. Idioms and literal vs figurative sense.....	57
7. 6. 5. Grammaticalization.....	57
7. 6. 5. 1. The expression of future .....	58
7. 6. 5. 2. Contractions .....	58
7. 6. 6. Indirect speech acts .....	58
7. 7. Linguistic variation .....	59
7. 7. 1. Dialects .....	59
7. 7. 2. Sociolect.....	59
7. 7. 3. Aeolect .....	60
7. 7. 4. Ontolect.....	60
7. 7. 5. Ethnolect .....	60
7. 7. 6. Sexolect or genderlect.....	60



7. 7. 7. Idiolect .....	61
7. 7. 8. Situationlect .....	61
7. 8. Exercises .....	61
8. Knowing lexemes.....	62
8. 1. Content.....	62
8. 2. Form.....	62
8. 3. Grammar .....	62
8. 4. Derivational potential.....	63
8. 5. Collocations and related lexemes.....	63
8. 6. Connotations .....	63
8. 7. Etymology.....	64
References.....	65
Answer keys.....	66
Index .....	70

## List of tables

Table 1: Derivation in English .....	21
Table 2: Hierarchy of means of transport .....	35
Table 3: Relations between constituents of compounds .....	42
Table 4: Component analysis of living beings .....	43
Table 5: Overview of syntactic constructions for selection restriction.....	47
Table 6: The allomorphs of ad- .....	49
Table 7: Overview of conversion.....	54
Table 8: Overview of metonymy .....	55

## List of exercises

Exercise 2-1: Number of morphemes .....	17
Exercise 2-2: Morpheme types .....	18
Exercise 2-3: Loadedness .....	18
Exercise 3-1: Lexeme creation types .....	29
Exercise 3-2: Compound types .....	29
Exercise 4-1: Semantic relations.....	39
Exercise 4-2: Types of antonymy.....	39

Exercise 5-1: Relations within compounds.....	45
Exercise 5-2: Lexeme structure .....	45
Exercise 6-1: Collocations with prepositions .....	51
Exercise 7-1: Types of figurative speech .....	61

## List of figures

Figure 1: Wheels with herringbone teeth.....	24
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# 1. Introduction

In this chapter, I give an overview of what lexicology is about, and how the book is organized.

The object of this book is primarily lexicology and only secondarily English. This may sound surprising since it is declared in the preface that it is a textbook for students of English. What I want to emphasize is that even though the vast majority of examples are taken from English and thus the book does describe English, my ultimate purpose is to give the students generic tools with which they can describe and analyze any language, not only English. That is why there appear examples from other languages as well.

Lexicology is in many ways an extension of morphology. Its basic unit of study is lexemes, which consist of one or more morphemes. Since morphemes, and thereby lexemes, have forms and thus pronunciation, lexicology cannot be discussed without references to phonology either. Likewise, since lexemes are typically used in combination with other lexemes, syntax too becomes relevant in a lexicological discussion.

Lexicology is also related to lexicography, the study of how lexemes can be presented in a meaningful way, i.e. how dictionaries and lexica can be created. This is touched upon in the last chapter, which also considers briefly what it takes to know a lexeme.

However, the focus of lexicology as presented in this textbook is on the content of lexemes. Hence, lexicology is a subset of semantics, the study of meaning. This book describes

1. what kind of lexemes there are, and how they are built up (Chapter 2),
2. how new ones can be created (Chapter 3),
3. what relations there are between lexemes (Chapter 4),
4. how lexemes can be analyzed, and what relations there are between the components of individual lexemes (Chapter 5),
5. how lexemes interact with each other when used together in phrases and sentences (Chapter 6), and
6. how the meanings of lexemes can be altered or expanded (Chapter 7).

I have organized the content of this book in descending order of presumed familiarity. Therefore, after an introduction to the basic unit of lexicology, the so-called lexemes, I start with concepts, such as e.g. word formation, which are already introduced in the course on morphology, which the primary readership of this book will have followed by the time of taking the course on lexicology.

Then follows a description of meaning relations between lexemes, some of which relations, e.g. synonymy and antonymy, are also likely to be known already. The overarching thread in the book is relations, i.e. various types of relations between and within lexemes.

Hereafter, the structure of lexemes is explored, not only the more or less obvious

structure of complex lexemes, but also some attempts at analyzing simple lexemes with respect to a possible internal structure.

Having discussed various aspects of lexemes "statically", the interaction of lexemes in actual use is also taken up. This represents a connection between lexicology and syntax.

Finally, various ways of extending and changing the meaning of a lexeme is discussed. In this connection, also a little sidetrack is taken to how the grammar of a language can be extended with the help of lexemes, and how figures of speech are also exploited in the pragmatic use of entire utterances.

## 1. 1. English

English, a global language, may hardly need introduction. However, it is not necessarily clear-cut what English is when it comes to describing it in a textbook. The usual approach is that a textbook describes the standard variety of a given language, which is the one that is taught in schools in the given country and used in public communication such as national television, national news outlets and suchlike.

However, English does not have one such standard variety. English is, as mentioned in the prologue, a pluricentric language. It is obvious from the fact - among other things - that MS Word offers 19 different grammar/spell checker varieties within English: Australia, Belize, Canada, Caribbean, Philippines, United Arab Emirates, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Jamaica, Malaysia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, UK, South Africa, Trinidad and Tobago, Zimbabwe, United States of America.

Moreover, English does not have regulating bodies. In other words, unlike French, which is regulated by the Académie Française and by the Office québécois de la langue française in Canada, or Czech, which is regulated by the Ústav pro jazyk český, there is no legal institution that defines how English must be. English is not even an official language of the USA.

Hence, what is usually considered "standard" varieties, i.e. Received Pronunciation (BBC English) in the UK, and General American in the US, are only de facto, not de jure, standards. They are "codified" in the Oxford English Dictionary and Webster's dictionary, respectively. But in principle, each publisher has its own style guide as to how works published thru it are to be written.

It is of course a heavy simplification only to consider RP and GA standard varieties. But it's understandable in a European context since these are arguably the major varieties of English in terms of RP representing the birthplace of the English language and GA representing the variety with most native speakers, and since most Europeans have no clue how say Australian English is or how Canadian English differs from US English.

Another thing that makes it difficult to define English is that it has spawn a range of languages that may not resemble English very much to the layman, but which have

inherited numerous features from English. Such so-called creole languages are the result of English blending with local languages in colonial areas.<sup>1</sup> One well-known example is Tok Pisin, one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea.<sup>2</sup>

Last but not least, the fact that English is used as a (or the) global lingua franca also makes it difficult to provide a unified and concise definition of it. English is actually unique in that it is used by more nonnative speakers than by native speakers.<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps only a matter of time until this Globish is considered the standard variety...

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<sup>1</sup> Not only English has served as a base for creole languages. Haitian Creole and Mauritian Creole are e.g. French-based creoles.

<sup>2</sup> Its name, meaning 'talk Pidgin', alludes to its origin as a pidgin language, a very simplified mixed language typically used in commerce between colonized locals and colonizing merchants.

<sup>3</sup> Lingua franca is a language that is common to both parties in a communication but which is the native language of neither.

## 2. Lexemes

Recall that morphemes are the smallest, i.e. indivisible, units of language that have content, i.e. they have some meaning or function.

Lexemes are the basic units of lexical meaning. All lexemes are made up of one or more morphemes, but not all morphemes are lexemes by themselves. The reason for this is the common distinction between the grammar of a language and the vocabulary or lexicon of a language. As the names suggest, lexemes make up the lexicon (vocabulary) of a language.

The morphemes that express grammatical functions, e.g. the markers of number, case, tense, aspect, etc. are part of a language's grammar and therefore do not partake in the formation of lexemes (see, however, Section 2.4). Morphemes that express grammatical constructs are called grammemes (or gramemes). This book does not deal with grammemes in depth, but they are obviously described by all grammar books even if only few books actually use the term gram(m)eme.

It's not easy to demarcate the border between the lexicon and the grammar exactly. Morphemes belonging to the so-called content word classes (nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives, some adverbs) are clearly lexemes, and inflectional affixes are clearly grammemes.

However, morphemes belonging to the so-called function word classes (prepositions, conjunctions, articles, pronouns, infinitive marker, auxiliary verbs etc.) balance on the border of lexicon and grammar. Derivational affixes produce new lexemes, so they are naturally an important object of study for lexicology even though they are not lexemes by themselves.

Since lexemes can consist of several morphemes, lexicology is also related to syntax, which studies phrases and clauses. A part of the job of lexicology is to determine what counts as a lexeme consisting of several morphemes and what counts as "ordinary" phrases consisting of several morphemes.

### 2. 1. Words

Interestingly, the common notion *word*, which is typically the only lexicological term used by laymen, has defied a rigorous and universal definition. The probably most commonly cited definition, i.e. a sequence of letters demarcated by spaces or punctuation signs has little cross-linguistic applicability and doesn't hang together with spoken language either.

For one thing, there are writing systems that simply don't have letters such as Chinese and don't use spaces either. This is perhaps easy to deal with, as one can simply declare that one sign equals one word. However, there are also writing systems, e.g. Arabic, that do use letters but not spaces. Thus, what appears to be one sequence of letters can correspond to several words in say English. The same was the case with the classical languages Latin and Ancient Greek. In fact, space is a relatively recent development in the history of writing.

Then, even closely related languages may have differing traditions for how to use spaces. E.g., the German *Jugendschutzgesetz* must be written like this in one word whereas its English translation, *youth protection law*, appears to be three words. It adds to the confusion that three parts of the German word can be used as words by themselves, *Jugend*, *Schutz*, *Gesetz*. See also the section on compounding, 3.5.

Finally, even the spoken variety of the same language doesn't completely agree with the spelling conventions. For one thing, space in writing doesn't necessarily and doesn't usually represent a pause in speech – contrary to popular belief. Nor does it necessarily coincide with the boundaries of so-called intonational or stress units. E.g., *with Charles* would be one such pronunciation unit because the preposition "melts" together with the following noun; nonetheless, a space is required between *with* and *Charles*.

Because of the vagueness of words sketched above, I shall not use this notion in the book.

## 2. 2. Signs

It's worth noting that the vast majority of morphemes belong to the type of signs that are called symbols. It means that the relation between a morpheme's content and its form is arbitrary. One cannot deduce the meaning of a morpheme from its form.

It is evident from the fact that different languages have assigned different forms to the same content, e.g. *book*, *libro*, *kniha*. Of course, the relation must at the same time be conventionalized or else the speakers of a language couldn't possibly understand one another. A language community must agree on which forms are assigned to which meanings.

Exceptions are onomatopoeia like *bum*, *bang*, *buzz*, *hiss*, whose meaning can be inferred from their pronunciation, and emoticons or emojis like ☹, 😊, 😄, 😞, whose meaning can be inferred from their visual form. Such signs are called icons and are characterized by the fact that their form somehow reminisce of their content.

The third type of signs, the so-called indices, is not found in languages. An index embodies a causal relation between a sign's form and its content, e.g. smoke indicates fire. Hence, smoke is an index of fire; smoke points to fire.

However, there do exist elements in a language that have a pointing function, but without a causal relation between the element pointing and the element being pointed at. Such so-called deictic expressions point at elements in the communication situation, and are, in spoken communication, often accompanied by actual physical pointing. Such linguistic expressions are the demonstrative proforms *this* and *that*, and certain adverbs such as *here*, *there*, *now*, *then*.

## 2. 3. Simple and complex lexemes

As mentioned above, lexemes can be simple or complex depending on how many morphemes enter into them. If a lexeme consists of only one morpheme (*train*, *chair*, *girl*, *fly*, *high*, etc.), then it's simple or **monomorphemic**. If a lexeme consists of two or more

morphemes (*train driver, chairman, girlish, flight, highness, etc.*), then it's complex or **polymorphemic**.<sup>4</sup> Chapter 3 discusses how to make new lexemes, which are typically complex.

### 2.3.1. Compositionality / predictability of meaning

Since the relation between form and content is arbitrary (cf. 2.2), the meaning of morphemes, and therefore the meaning of monomorphemic lexemes as well, is generally unpredictable.

However, the meaning of complex lexemes is often deducible from the meanings of the participating morphemes. When this is the case, the complex lexeme is said to be compositional or transparent. The opposite situation is called non-compositional or opaque.

It is, however, important to realize that compositionality is a matter of degree. The meaning of some complex lexemes is easily deducible from the meanings of their parts, e.g. *train driver, girlish*. Because of this transparency, they may not even be listed in a dictionary. Anyone who knows *train* and *driver* will immediately know what *train driver* refers to.

At the other end of the scale are lexemes like *kick the bucket*, whose meaning is completely opaque. There's no way of knowing from the meanings of *kick, the* and *bucket* that it means 'to die'. Such completely opaque lexemes are called idioms or fixed expressions.

Between these two extremes are the more or less conspicuous lexemes. In these cases, the meaning of the complex lexeme does have something to do with the meanings of the individual morphemes, yet the meaning of the whole is not entirely deducible.

E.g., a *fireman* is a man who works with fire, but his job is not to make but extinguish fire. A *boatman* neither makes nor destroys a boat but works on one. *To get up* involves a movement upwards from a bed, yet the bed is not mentioned. Many compounds and especially phrasal verbs are more or less opaque.

The meanings of sayings and proverbs are also more or less opaque, e.g. *to burn the midnight oil, a bird in the hand is better than two in the bush*. With some fantasy, they can be understood; nevertheless, their meaning is detached from the literal meanings of the individual parts (see also Chapter 7).

The existence of complex lexemes (compounds, phrasal verbs, idioms and sayings) shows the connection between lexicology and syntax. Such lexemes resemble syntactic units. Compounds look like phrases (most often noun phrases); the others look like (partial) clauses. E.g., *kick the bucket* consists of a verb and its direct object.

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<sup>4</sup> Grammmemes too can be simple and complex. E.g. the grammeme of the nominal plural is usually simple in English, just the suffix *-s*. On the other hand, the grammeme of the progressive is always complex as it consist of a form of the auxiliary *be* and the *-ing* suffix of the following verb.



## 2. 4. Lemma

As mentioned above at the definition of lexemes, inflectional elements are outside the realm of lexicology. Nevertheless, a lexeme cannot appear without inflection in actual use, at least not in a language that has inflection. It means that the various inflectional forms of a lexeme are nothing more than various forms of the same lexeme.

Thus *girl*, *girls*, *girl's* and *girls'* as well as *do*, *dost*, *does*, *did*, *done* and *doing* are all different forms of the same underlying lexemes. When one needs to refer to a lexeme regardless of its inflectional forms, various notations are used: \*girl, GIRL, <girl>, GIRL; \*do, DO, <do>, DO. In this book, I use the highlighted notation with pointy brackets (greater-than/smaller-than signs).

For convenience, one of the inflectional forms is singled out to stand for the lexeme and thereby for all its possible inflectional forms. This particular form is called the **lemma**, plural lemmata, or the dictionary form of a lexeme. Which form is chosen as the lemma depends on the lexicographic (dictionary making) tradition of a given language community and is not universal.

For English, the lemma of nouns is the nominative singular (*girl*), the lemma of adjectives is the positive degree (*pretty*)<sup>5</sup>, and the lemma of verbs is the infinitive (*do*)<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. 5. Denotation vs connotation

Since lexicology chiefly concerns itself with the meanings of lexemes, it is important to discuss what kind of meanings there are. A common distinction is that between denotative meaning and connotative meaning(s).

The denotative or conceptual meaning of a lexeme is the meaning that a language community agrees on in neutral terms. It's the core meaning of a lexeme. Connotation is whatever added senses are attached to the lexeme. Connotations can be institutionalized, but they can also be highly individual.

E.g., the denotations of <beginning> and <commencement> are the same. They both refer to the starting point of an activity or event. However, they have different connotations. <Beginning> is a stylistically neutral term, which can be used in virtually any situation. <Commencement> connotes an elevated style and is therefore typically used in official or solemn contexts. Likewise, <find out> and <discover> have the same denotation but different connotations. <Find out> is an everyday, informal term whereas <discover> is more formal.

Connotations are also called associative meanings because they are associated with a lexeme's denotative meaning in a subjective manner just as objects can evoke different associations in different people. E.g., <train> evokes a very positive feeling in a railway

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<sup>5</sup> The lemma of Czech adjectives is the positive nominative singular masculine form (*krásný*) whereas the lemma of German adjectives is the positive predicative form (*schön*) even though the positive nominative singular masculine form does exist (*schöner*).

<sup>6</sup> The lemma of Latin verbs is the 1sg present indicative active form (*facio*), and that of Hungarian verbs is the 3sg present indicative active form (*csinál*).

buff but a less favorable feeling in a commuter who constantly has to put up with overcrowded and overdue trains.

A remarkable feature of connotation is loadedness. A lexeme can be neutral, or positively or negatively loaded, i.e. a lexeme can have a positive or negative connotation. In other words, a loaded lexeme can evoke positive or negative feelings in the users of a language. E.g., <man> is a neutral lexeme, <swine> is negatively loaded, and <gentleman> is positively loaded. In many pairs of lexemes with the same denotation but with different connotations, the lexeme of Latinate origin is more formal or has a more positive connotation than the one with Anglo-Saxon origin.

As discussed in Chapter 6, it's not always straightforward to draw a line between denotation and connotation in practice. Nevertheless, the distinction is important for several other concepts, e.g. synonymy (Chapter 4).

## 2. 6. Register

A register is a subset of the vocabulary of a language. It contains the lexemes that tend to appear in the same context, genre or style. Thus, the lexemes used typically in colloquial language form a register, so the lexemes used in academic text, and so do the lexemes used in slang as well. The register used in a specific technical or academic field, e.g. the collection of technical terms in linguistics is also called a jargon. Hence, this book is a description of the jargon of lexicology.

There isn't a fixed number of registers in a language. If one looks close enough at texts, one can even find differences between the vocabularies of various academic fields. E.g., computer scientists use a register different from the register of say linguist. There is of course much overlap, which sets them aside from non-academic registers, but also differences in detail. It is also possible to form intersections or unions of registers.

The term register is here used a cover term for the vocabulary of a certain group of language user regardless how the group of such people is defined or has come about. Section 7.7 explores in more detail how groups of language users and thereby various language varieties arise, and what criteria are typically used for defining more or less homogeneous language varieties.

It is usually considered good writing manners to use lexemes from the same register within the same text. However, writers sometimes deviate from this norm to achieve various effects.

## 2. 7. Exercises

### *Exercise 2-1: Number of morphemes*

Determine how many morphemes the given words contain		
1	<i>shipmate</i>	
2	<i>tables</i>	
3	<i>lazier</i>	

Determine how many morphemes the given words contain		
4	<i>writes</i>	
5	<i>presuppose</i>	
6	<i>cheerleaders</i>	
7	<i>choose</i>	
8	<i>dice</i>	
9	<i>wealthy</i>	

*Exercise 2-2: Morpheme types*

Determine whether the highlighted morphemes are suffixes, prefixes or roots		
1	<i>hard<b>core</b></i>	
2	<i><b>con</b>clude</i>	
3	<i>tire<b>less</b>ly</i>	
4	<i><b>hard</b>core</i>	
5	<i>un<b>lock</b>able</i>	
6	<i><b>sand</b>boxes</i>	
7	<i>the<b>s</b>es</i>	
8	<i><b>w</b>oman</i>	
9	<i>pre<b>sup</b>position</i>	

*Exercise 2-3: Loadedness*

Determine whether the given lexemes tend to be neutral, positively loaded or negatively loaded		
1	<i>lady</i>	
2	<i>bastard</i>	
3	<i>ship</i>	
4	<i>sex worker</i>	
5	<i>whore</i>	
6	<i>swine</i>	
7	<i>bicycle</i>	
8	<i>harass</i>	
9	<i>arrest</i>	