16 Lexical variation and change

Variation in language is multi-dimensional. In sections 3 and 4, we have looked at how variation in social structure is reflected in the sound patterns of language and how this variation is often indicative of language change in progress. We have also seen how geographical variation in language is caused by different levels of contact between different peoples at different times. In this section we are interested in variation in words and in their origins, meanings and contexts of use. We'll also examine change in both the choice of words and the meanings of those words.

Borrowing words

What is the origin of words like shampoo, pizza, alcohol and curry? When did they enter the English language? And why? Almost certainly, you will be able to answer these questions for at least some of these words, but we can ask the same questions with respect to words which are much less 'exotic'. According to published counts of word frequencies, the items listed in (208) are among the most frequently occurring nouns in English:

(208) people, way, water, word, man, day, part, place, things, years, number, name, home, air, line

All these words have been part of the English language for centuries, and while most of them date back to Germanic languages which preceded the separate development of English, some had their origins in Latin (part, place and air, for example). Throughout its history, English has been adding to its lexicon by acquiring new words from other, often unrelated, languages. Risotto and pizza come from Italian, vodka from Russian, goulash from Hungarian, coffee and yoghurt from Turkish, alcohol and sherbet from Arabic, sago from Malay, ketchupcatsup from Chinese and tomato from Nahuatl (a
central American language and the language of the Aztecs). These new words are known as **borrowings**. Of course, as well as having borrowed thousands of words, English has been a great provider too, much to the annoyance, for example, of language purists in France who strive to find native French words to replace *le parking, le hamburger* and *le walkman*.

Why do speakers borrow words from other languages? Perhaps the most obvious reason is sheer necessity. People need to develop words for new and unfamiliar concepts – new technology, new plants and animals, and in the examples above, new and unfamiliar foods. Note that the model of lexical representations discussed in section 14 supposes that there is a distinction between concepts and lexical entries, and from this perspective, there is nothing odd about the suggestion that we have concepts for which we lack words. Another reason is prestige. If certain cultures are associated with particular prestigious activities, it is common for the words associated with that activity to come from the language of that culture. Continuing with the food theme, France was at one time considered the centre of world gastronomy, and hence English has words like *cordon bleu, gourmet, cuisine, restaurant, menu, mousse* and *soup* which it has borrowed from French.

When a word is borrowed, it is often gradually changed so that it fits the phonological and morphological structure of the borrowing language or dialect. So whilst Françoise and Ricardo might go to a café [kafɛ] for a croissant [krɛ̃swa] and a cappuccino [kaputʃino], Mavis and Vic, in London, would go to the [kef] for a [kwasm?] and a [kaputʃinu]. Similarly, whereas the plural of *pizza* is *pizze* in Italian, English now applies its own plural morpheme to the borrowed word, hence *pizzas*.

Sometimes when new concepts are introduced from other societies, the speakers of a particular language may use their own native linguistic resources to coin a new word. These are known as **calques**. Let’s look at some examples of this. Comanche, an American language of the southern USA, has a word *t̲h̲aʔaʔiʔaʔa-taka-sikikamatl*, which literally means ‘orange’s brother tastes sour’. It is the word used for a lemon! In Irish Gaelic the words *sciath fearthanna* translate as ‘rain shield’, and refer to an umbrella. In New Zealand, it is the job of the Maori Language Commission to create new words by using words already in the language. As a consequence, we find examples such as those in (209):

(209) New Word: papa patopato wai mangu roro hiko
Literal Meaning: board knock water black brain electric
Idiomatic Meaning: keyboard ink computer

English tends to resort to Latin and Greek when new words are devised, particularly for referring to new technology. Examples appear in (210):
television: Greek tele (‘far’) + Latin visio (‘sight, thing seen’)
microscope: Greek mikros (‘small’) + Greek skopein (‘observe closely’)
photograph: Greek photo (‘light’) + Greek graphos (‘written’)

Borrowings, then, are words which originated in one language (or dialect), but which have come to be used in another, even by people who don’t speak the ‘lending’ language. These borrowings are very often assimilated to the phonological and morphological structure of the new host language (exercises 1, 2 and 3).

Register: words for brain surgeons and soccer players, hairdressers and lifesavers

A register is the specialised vocabulary common to a particular trade, occupation, topic or activity. Hairdressers, soccer players, brain surgeons and undertakers all have specialised words or uses of words which refer to concepts particularly common or specific to their activity or profession. As a soccer player you might nutmeg your opponent (kick the ball between their legs) or play a one-two; you might ask a hairdresser for a flat top or a bob, or need a surf lifesaver to rescue you from a rip (a dangerous backcurrent on a surf beach), but you are unlikely to ask a brain surgeon for a lobotomy. It is of some interest that occupations, interests, etc. can have some impact on the important idea of a basic level of categorisation introduced in section 13. Thus, whereas for many of us, dog corresponds to a basic level category, for those of us preoccupied with dogs, the basic level shifts down to that of particular breeds. Similarly, while all of us are familiar with such words as beech, ash and elm, many of us are not in a position to distinguish these different types of tree. For those of us who are arboreally challenged in this way, it is plausible to suggest that tree appears at the basic level in our categorisation systems. However, this is not the case for botanists and tree surgeons. For them, the basic level of categorisation will be that of beech, ash and elm or, indeed, the more specific level of copper beech, mountain ash, etc.

Often, people consider that the registers of doctors and lawyers (and even linguists) hinder communication and understanding. The term ‘jargon’ is sometimes used to refer to the confusing registers of particular occupations. In some senses, registers are ‘in-group’ varieties, which lead to accurate and speedy communication of information among those that know and use them, but confuse those who don’t. It is obviously important that the doctor tells the nurse that you have had a coronary infarcture or a stress fracture of your left tibia, but what you want to know is that you’ve had a heart attack or broken
your left leg. In this medical example, the use of a special register is clearly a necessity—the leg, for example, has several major bones and it is vitally important for the nurse to know which one you've broken. Some registers, however, are deliberately confusing so as to hinder understanding by outsiders. This may be because the group speaking the particular register wants to maintain a sharply contrasting identity, or maybe has something to hide (exercise 4).

Biscuit or cookie? Variation and change in word choice

Consider (211):

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{Concept} & \textbf{Word to refer to concept} \\
Britain: biscuit & U.S.A.: cookie \\
America: biscuit/cookie & \\
\end{tabular}

The thin flat, often round, usually sweet, hard but crumbly thing we eat during our coffee break is called different things in different English-speaking areas. In Britain it is usually referred to as a biscuit and in the USA it is a cookie. Australia is experiencing the initial stages of language change with the word biscuit gradually losing out to the word cookie.

Such geographical differences in word choice are well known. Most people are familiar with the US-UK contrasts between sidewalk and pavement, gas and petrol, pants and trousers, elevator and lift, vacation and holiday. Just as borrowing is frequent in situations of language contact, as we saw earlier, it is also very common when dialect contact arises. In the past century, within the English-speaking world, most interdialect borrowings have come from American English, with the newly borrowed words pushing out or beginning to push out older words, usually of British English origin. Thus, we find examples such as those in (212), where in each case, the American English form is replacing or has replaced the British English equivalent:

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{British English} & \textbf{American English} \\
housey & bingo \\
bakery & baker's shop \\
melons & soft drinks \\
pictures & movies \\
lorry & truck \\
chips & fries \\
crisps & potato chips \\
\end{tabular}
An interesting study of lexical shift from older 'British'-type words to American borrowings has been conducted by Miriam Meyerhoff in New Zealand. As is indicated in figure 39, she found that while some 'British' English words were being retained, many Americanisms were being borrowed, a finding which reflects both the increase in sociocultural contact between the US and New Zealand, and the reduction in such contact between New Zealand and the UK.

A number of studies have suggested that people are able to acquire new lexical items rather more quickly than they can acquire new phonological features. For instance, Jack Chambers has compared the rate at which a group of Canadian children whose parents had moved to southern England adopted British English lexical and phonological features (see section 3, exercise 7). He selected twenty-five British/Canadian lexical pairs (including nappy/diaper, pushchair/stroller and boot/trunk) and five pronunciation pairs (including [bɒnə]/[bənə] and [tʌmətʃə]/[tʌmətrʃə]) and analysed the extent to
which the Canadian youngsters adopted the British forms. The graph in figure 40 presents the findings for three of the children he studied. Each child had acquired more of the lexical items than of the pronunciation features. We have therefore seen two examples of dialect contact leading to change in lexical choice: sociocultural contact with North America has led to the adoption of American English words in other English dialects, and contact with British English has led a number of Canadian children to shift away from their indigenous lexical patterns to those of their new home. This dialect contact also has a considerable effect on lexical variation within individual English speaking countries. In England, the urbanisation of rural areas has had a devastating effect on the survival of traditional rural dialects. Urban varieties are increasingly being diffused into the surrounding rural areas, the effects of which are particularly visible in the lexicon. Traditional dialect words are losing ground in competition from words from urban or standard dialects. An example of such lexical attrition is presented in the map below. A century ago, the word *dwile* (meaning ‘floorcloth’) was widely used in the Eastern Counties of England. Today it is restricted largely to the adult populations of Norfolk and parts of Suffolk. In a recent study, as indicated in figure 41, the word *dwile* was barely recognised by any of the children surveyed, which strongly suggests that it is unlikely to survive long into the twenty-first century (*exercise 5*).
Lexical variation and change

The area of 'dwile' use in late twentieth century

Map 3 The lexical attrition of the word dwile in East Anglia

The area of 'dwile' use in late nineteenth century

Figure 41 The lexical attrition of dwile in East Anglia

Same word – new meaning

A 'nice' example to begin our discussion of the way word meanings change is presented by the word nice itself. This word entered the English lan-
guage around the thirteenth century from Old French, a descendent of the Latin word *nescius* meaning 'ignorant'. By the fourteenth century its meaning had already changed to mean 'silly' or 'wanton': a nice person was one from whom favours might easily be obtained. In the fifteenth century, *nice* came to mean 'coy' or 'shy', by the sixteenth it meant 'subtle', and only in the eighteenth century did it reach its present meaning of 'agreeable' or 'good'. Nowadays, the meaning of *nice* appears to be weakening: it has such a bland, general, quality of 'goodness' that in some contexts, such as that illustrated in (213), it means little more than 'OK':

(213) [conversation between father and daughter]

**HEIDI:** Hey, dad, I've just bought a new Golf GTi convertible. What do you reckon?

**ALBERT:** Mm. It's nice.

For a more contemporary example of semantic change, consider the word *gay*. Originally, *gay* meant 'full of joy and mirth, light-hearted'. In the middle of the twentieth century, however, it also came to mean 'homosexual', and now this later meaning has almost completely taken over from the former one. Just like linguistic change in phonology, which we discussed earlier (section 4), semantic change is always preceded by semantic variation - in other words, at some stage in the shift from meaning A to meaning B, both meanings will be current within a community. At one time, therefore, both 'joyful' and 'homosexual' were meanings of the word *gay*. Gradually, over time, one meaning has begun to be used much more than the other to such an extent that the older meaning is dying out.

If we look back into the history of English, many thousands of words have changed their meaning in the same way that the word *gay* is changing today. In an attempt to establish regularities of semantic change, historical linguists tend to classify meaning changes according to the nature of the semantic shift.

Some changes are due to **semantic broadening**: here the word takes on a wider, more general meaning than it had previously. The word *thing* is a classic example of such broadening. In Old English and Old Norse, this word meant 'a public assembly'. In present-day Icelandic, a language with similar Germanic roots to English, it still does. In Modern English, however, it has now been extended so much that it simply means 'an entity of any kind'. The word *companion* provides another example. It used to mean 'someone who eats bread with you' (see Italian *con* 'with' + *pane* 'bread'); now it means 'someone who is with you'. The word *broadcast*, which only a couple of centuries ago meant 'to sow seeds', has now, in this technological age, been extended to include the spreading of information on television and radio.
Pudding, which today is usually sweet and eaten for dessert, comes from the French word *boudin* which means a sausage made with animal intestines.

The opposite of semantic broadening is **semantic narrowing**, with the word taking on a more restricted meaning than before. In Middle English, a girl was a young person of either sex, a boy was a male person of any age and *lust* simply meant 'pleasure'. A number of words with similar meanings have undergone shifts in different directions of generality. For example, the word *hound* was once the generic word for a canine. This word's meaning has narrowed and the generic canine term is now *dog*, which once referred to a particular breed of dog.

These changes in word meaning have often obscured the Germanic roots of the English language, with many originally Germanic words either changing in meaning or dying out. Consider table 30 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern English</th>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Frisian</th>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meat</td>
<td>flesh</td>
<td>fleis</td>
<td>vlees</td>
<td>Fleisch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>animal</td>
<td>deer</td>
<td>dier</td>
<td>dier</td>
<td>Tier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dog</td>
<td>hound</td>
<td>houn</td>
<td>hond</td>
<td>Hund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cloud</td>
<td>wolcen</td>
<td>wolk</td>
<td>wolk</td>
<td>Wolke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>die</td>
<td>steorfan</td>
<td>stjerre</td>
<td>sterven</td>
<td>sterben</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bird</td>
<td>fugol</td>
<td>fugel</td>
<td>vogel</td>
<td>Vogel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>smoke</td>
<td>reek</td>
<td>rijke</td>
<td>roken</td>
<td>rauchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>earm</td>
<td>earm</td>
<td>arm</td>
<td>arm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>air</td>
<td>lyft</td>
<td>lucht</td>
<td>lucht</td>
<td>Luft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>niman</td>
<td>nimme</td>
<td>nemen</td>
<td>nehmen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this table, note the similarities between the Old English words and the equivalents in the modern day varieties of the closest cousins of English. Words such as *steorfan* (Modern English: *starve*) and *reek* have been semantically narrowed in the transition from Old English to Modern English, and many of the other words have died out in the face of competition from other English words, or from words borrowed from other languages. For example, *poor* is a word borrowed from Old French.

It is also common to contrast changes involving **amelioration** with those due to **pejoration**. Pejorations involve the development of a *less favourable* meaning or connotation for a particular word. Villains were formerly farm-
dwellers, but are now criminals; people who were crafty and cunning in medi-

eval times were strong (see German Kraft) and wise, but now are deceitful and
evasive. Grotesque meant 'resembling a grotto or cave', but now means 'dis-
torted and ugly'. The word dance is taken from the name of a thirteenth-
century scholar, John Duns Scotus, whose thinking was discredited long after
his death. Ameliorations, or the development of more favourable meanings for
words, are fewer in number. Some of the more notable examples are constable,
the meaning of which has shifted from 'an attendant at the stable' to 'a police
officer' and knight which in Old English referred to a boy or servant but now
has a much more prestigious meaning.

We have now seen a number of examples of semantic changes. But what is
it about 'meaning' that allows such changes to take place? How is it possible
for the meanings of words to alter so radically? April McMahon has suggested
three possible reasons:

a. Most words are polysemic – they have a range of meanings – and over time
marginal meanings may take over from central meanings (possibly because a
borrowing has invaded the semantic space of the central meaning). Note that
polysemy must be distinguished from ambiguity. An ambiguous word such as
match or bank corresponds to two (or more) distinct lexemes and normally has
two (or more) distinct entries in a conventional dictionary. A polysemous word
has only a single lexical entry with a range of closely related meanings. An
example illustrating the takeover of central meaning is the word sloth, which
once had a central meaning of 'lacking in speed'. This central meaning was
taken over by the word slowness and so the central meaning of sloth shifted to
what was formerly a more peripheral meaning, namely 'laziness'.

b. Children do not receive a fully formed grammar and lexicon from their
parents, but, with help from Universal Grammar, have to figure it out for
themselves. The child may therefore acquire a slightly different meaning for a
word than that understood by its parents. Earlier we saw that children, in the
very early stages of language acquisition, sometimes seem to use certain
words with broader meanings than the adults around them e.g. dog to mean
'any hairy animal with four legs' (see section 13). As the child gets older, it
gradually restricts the meaning of the word more and more. It is not too diffi-
cult, however, to imagine that slight semantic shifts may emerge at the end of
this restriction process. We did, of course, express some reservations about
the extent of such overextended lexical use by small children in section 13, but
these reservations need not rule out what we are contemplating here.
Consider, for instance the broadening of Old English dogge, referring to a
specific breed of dog to the current situation where dog is the generic term for
canines. We suggested in section 13 that children are ‘tuned in’ to the basic level of categorisation, and we can suppose that for the case in question this is the level of Modern English dog. All we need to suppose, then, is that for whatever reason at some point a child was exposed to examples of dogge and interpreted them as referring to the basic level generic category. For such a child at this point, the semantic broadening has occurred. Of course, it is still necessary to understand how such a child’s ‘non-standard’ interpretation became established and spread throughout the community, but we do at least have a plausible account of the first important step in semantic change. Overall, the suggestion that children are crucially involved in language change is a very attractive one.

c. The relationship between concepts and the words which conventionally refer to those concepts is arbitrary (see section 14) and so either can vary or change fairly freely through time and across space. Just as different geographical areas may have different words to represent different concepts (lexical variation), so also different words may, through time, evolve so as to be associated with different concepts (semantic change) (exercise 6).

Variation and change in morphology

As mentioned in section 10, English verbs have few inflections, but one which is found is that which marks present tense and agreement with the third person singular subject. This is not the case in all dialects of English, however, and in some dialects this suffix has been lost. Speakers of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in the USA and the English of East Anglia in the UK produce examples such as those in (214):

(214) a. this dog chase rabbits
    b. this cat miaow all night
    c. he spend a lot
    d. she dance well

This contrasts with the situation in southwest England, where people would not only say he spends a lot, but also produce examples such as those in (215):

(215) a. they spends a lot
    b. I dances every night

In this area, the -s suffix does not mark present tense and agreement (with third person singular subjects) but only present tense. Around the English-speaking
world, therefore, there is variation both in the presence or absence of the -s suffix and in its grammatical function.

Older versions of English, and most other Germanic languages (apart from Afrikaans) have far more extensive systems of inflection than present day Standard English. In Old English, there were four different present tense forms (as there still are today in German, although they are distributed differently), in comparison with two in Modern Standard English. This is illustrated for the verb *help* and its equivalents in table 31:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Old English</th>
<th>Modern German</th>
<th>Modern English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ic</td>
<td>help</td>
<td>l</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thu</td>
<td>hilpst</td>
<td>You (sing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he/heo</td>
<td>hilpth</td>
<td>He/She</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>we</td>
<td>helpath</td>
<td>We</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ge</td>
<td>helpath</td>
<td>You (pl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hi</td>
<td>helpath</td>
<td>They</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, Modern Standard English has lost the three noun genders of Old English illustrated in (216):

(216)  
tha stanaz  the stones (masculine)  
tha giefa   the gifts (feminine)  
tha scipu   the ships (neuter)  

Over the centuries, then, morphological change in English has largely been in a direction of radical reduction and simplification of inflections to an extent not seen in most other Germanic languages.

The reduction of two former Old English inflections -inde and -ingel-ynge to Modern Standard English -ing has had a considerable effect on present-day variation in English. In most English speaking countries, there is social variation in the pronunciation of (ing), some pronouncing it [in], which is the standard form, and others [in], the widely used non-standard form. Sociolinguists have found variation in (ing) particularly interesting for a number of reasons.

First, a number of studies from around the English-speaking world have found that, all else being equal, women use a higher proportion of the standard [in] form than men. Some representative results appear in figure 42:
Lexical variation and change

Figure 42 Speaker sex and the use of (ing) in casual speech in three English-speaking cities

Secondly, variation in (ing) appears to be fairly stable over the entire speech community of English. In other words, neither form seems to be replacing the other, but there is a pattern of stable variation, with [tŋ] being the acrolectal form (used in higher social classes and in more formal contexts) while [m], the basilectal form, is used among working class groups and in more informal contexts. Figures 43a and 43b support this assertion.

Finally, research has shown that people use different proportions of [tŋ] and [m] at different stages of their life. A study in Norwich in Eastern England, for example, found that young people predominantly used the non-standard [m] form, but changed their behaviour in middle age to use a greater proportion of the standard form, before reverting to a greater use of the non-standard form again in retirement (see figure 44).

Peter Trudgill, who conducted the Norwich study, has suggested that people come under the pressure of the standard variety more in their economically active years than in their youth or in their retirement and that this would account for the variation in (ing) use across a person's lifespan.

Synchronically, (ing) can be regarded as a phonological variable, the alternation of velar and alveolar nasal realisations of the final segment (ng).
Figure 43a Social class and the use of (ing) in casual speech in Norwich

Figure 43b Speech style and the use of (ing) among upper working class residents of Norwich
Historically, however, it must be considered as a morphological variable since [in] and [ln] come from two different Old English morphemes and still retain signs of their former grammatical roles within present day variation. The relevant changes between Old English and the English of about 1400 are set out in table 32:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes since Old English</th>
<th>Old English -inde (verbal suffix)</th>
<th>Old English -inge/-ynge (verbal noun suffix)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>reduction of final /e/ to /ɔ/</td>
<td>-indo</td>
<td>-iŋo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of final /ɔ/</td>
<td>-ind</td>
<td>-iŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reduction of -nd- cluster</td>
<td>-in</td>
<td>-iŋ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English of about 1400</td>
<td>-in</td>
<td>-iŋ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the mid fifteenth century, -ing had encroached on -ind's territory as a verbal suffix in the south of England, but retained its more restricted role in the north and in parts of East Anglia. In Modern English times, we can see that this geographical variation (-in in the north and -ing in the south) has...
evolved nationwide into social and stylistic variation. The former roles of
-inde and -inge are, however, still reflected in present-day variation. Research
has demonstrated that [n] is much more likely to be found in progressives
(Madonna is singing again) and verbal complements (I don't mind listening to
Madonna) than in nominal -ing forms (I don't like Madonna's singing). The
-inl- ing alternation, therefore, retains morphological importance, as well as
being a salient marker of social and stylistic information around the English-
speaking world (exercise 7).

Finally in this section we shall consider the role of social contact on
morphological variation. In section 4, we saw how the strength of social net-
works in the speech community has a considerable effect on the maintenance
of local dialect forms and susceptibility to language change. In a study carried
out on the speech of the African American and White populations of
Philadelphia, Sharon Ash and John Myhill have found that there is a strong
link between ethnicity, social network ties and the use of certain non-standard
morphological features. We have already noted that one prominent character-
istic of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is the absence of the
suffix -s as a marker of third person singular agreement (see the examples in
(214) above). Additionally, possessive -s is not used in this dialect and we find
examples such as those in (217):

(217)  a. I met his brother wife
       b. His cat name is Peanut

Ash and Myhill's research has revealed that there is a strong relationship
between the use of these AAVE features and the levels of social contact
between whites and African Americans in Philadelphia. Those blacks who
have very little contact with whites use the AAVE features most, while those
with more contact with the white population use them less. Similarly those
whites who have little contact with the African American community rarely if
ever use the AAVE features, while those who have more contact do use these
features, albeit rarely (see figure 45). Network links with other ethnic groups
have led, in this case, to a weakening in the use of the ethnic variety and the
adoption of linguistic features from 'outside'.

In this part of the book, we have introduced a range of concepts which are
necessary for coming to terms with the rich variety of processes on which
different languages rely for forming complex words, focusing on English in
section 10 and taking account of aspects of other languages in section 11. Just
as progress in understanding sound systems requires a way for describing
sounds accurately (the IPA of section 2), so discussion of word formation is
dependent on classification of words into certain types, and we took the first
steps in this direction in section 9 (see also section 18). A parallel aim throughout sections 9 to 11 has been to sketch a view of the lexical representations which are an integral part of a grammar (see the introduction, p. 4), constituting, as they do, the lexicon. Such representations, as well as having phonological and syntactic aspects (see (114)), also encode the meanings of lexical items, and section 12 has examined how such meanings might be described and also raised the issue of how the overall structure of the mental lexicon might be understood in terms of meaning relations; that is, as well as coming to terms with the internal structure of a lexical representation, we proposed that meaning relations such as hyponymy and meronymy are useful in determining the ways in which lexical representations are related to each other.

With basic concepts in place, the next three sections of this part have sought to establish their usefulness in the study of the acquisition of words by small children (13), the processing and storage (in a mental lexicon) of words by adults (14) and the difficulties in perceiving and producing words which can arise as a consequence of brain damage (15).
Finally, in section 16 we have examined variation with respect to two of the principle components of the lexical entries, the semantic representation and the morphological shape of word forms serving particular grammatical functions. We have seen cases where each of these may be subject to variation within the speech of an individual, across social groups, between dialects and at different stages in the historical development of a language or dialect. For a full description of a speaker's behaviour, then, the simple representations we have presented in section 10 are not fully adequate; however, we can be confident that they constitute the basic core or nucleus over which variation can be defined.

Our last major theme is the sentence, to which we now turn in the final part of the book.

Exercises

1. Check the following list of words in a good dictionary and:

   (a) find out the language of origin of each word;
   (b) ascertain when it is claimed the word entered the English language;
   (c) speculate on why the word was borrowed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>origin</th>
<th>date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jojoba</td>
<td>bog</td>
<td>glacier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>banana</td>
<td>cigarette</td>
<td>flamingo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tundra</td>
<td>sauna</td>
<td>curry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jungle</td>
<td>buffalo</td>
<td>orangutan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wigwam</td>
<td>wombat</td>
<td>yacht</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canyon</td>
<td>hashish</td>
<td>pyjama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. The word skyscraper has not been widely borrowed. Instead many languages have used native words to express the notion of 'scrapping the sky'. In Dutch, for example, we find wolkenkrabber, literally 'cloud-scratcher'. Find out how other languages refer to skyscrapers, and what the component parts of the words they use mean.

3. In Malay, the word juru means 'expert'. It can be combined with other words to give labels to particular types of job. So, since the word bahasa means 'language', juru bahasa means 'interpreter'.

What do you think the following Malay words mean?
television: Greek tele (‘far’) + Latin visio (‘sight, thing seen’)
microscope: Greek mikros (‘small’) + Greek skopein (‘observe closely’)
photograph: Greek photo (‘light’) + Greek graphos (‘written’)

Borrowings, then, are words which originated in one language (or dialect), but which have come to be used in another, even by people who don’t speak the ‘lending’ language. These borrowings are very often assimilated to the phonological and morphological structure of the new host language (exercises 1, 2 and 3).

Register: words for brain surgeons and soccer players, hairdressers and lifesavers

A register is the specialised vocabulary common to a particular trade, occupation, topic or activity. Hairdressers, soccer players, brain surgeons and undertakers all have specialised words or uses of words which refer to concepts particularly common or specific to their activity or profession. As a soccer player you might nutmeg your opponent (kick the ball between their legs) or play a one-two; you might ask a hairdresser for a flat top or a bob, or need a surf lifesaver to rescue you from a rip (a dangerous backcurrent on a surf beach), but you are unlikely to ask a brain surgeon for a lobotomy. It is of some interest that occupations, interests, etc. can have some impact on the important idea of a basic level of categorisation introduced in section 13. Thus, whereas for many of us, dog corresponds to a basic level category, for those of us preoccupied with dogs, the basic level shifts down to that of particular breeds. Similarly, while all of us are familiar with such words as beech, ash and elm, many of us are not in a position to distinguish these different types of tree. For those of us who are arboreally challenged in this way, it is plausible to suggest that tree appears at the basic level in our categorisation systems. However, this is not the case for botanists and tree surgeons. For them, the basic level of categorisation will be that of beech, ash and elm or, indeed, the more specific level of copper beech, mountain ash, etc.

Often, people consider that the registers of doctors and lawyers (and even linguists) hinder communication and understanding. The term ‘jargon’ is sometimes used to refer to the confusing registers of particular occupations. In some senses, registers are ‘in-group’ varieties, which lead to accurate and speedy communication of information among those that know and use them, but confuse those who don’t. It is obviously important that the doctor tells the nurse that you have had a coronary infarcture or a stress fracture of your left tibia, but what you want to know is that you’ve had a heart attack or broken
your left leg. In this medical example, the use of a special register is clearly a necessity – the leg, for example, has several major bones and it is vitally important for the nurse to know which one you’ve broken. Some registers, however, are deliberately confusing so as to hinder understanding by outsiders. This may be because the group speaking the particular register wants to maintain a sharply contrasting identity, or maybe has something to hide (exercise 4).

Biscuit or cookie? Variation and change in word choice

Consider (211):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept</th>
<th>Word to refer to concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain:</td>
<td>biscuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.A.:</td>
<td>cookie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia:</td>
<td>biscuit/cookie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thin flat, often round, usually sweet, hard but crumbly thing we eat during our coffee break is called different things in different English-speaking areas. In Britain it is usually referred to as a biscuit and in the USA it is a cookie. Australia is experiencing the initial stages of language change with the word biscuit gradually losing out to the word cookie.

Such geographical differences in word choice are well known. Most people are familiar with the US-UK contrasts between sidewalk and pavement, gas and petrol, pants and trousers, elevator and lift, vacation and holiday. Just as borrowing is frequent in situations of language contact, as we saw earlier, it is also very common when dialect contact arises. In the past century, within the English-speaking world, most interdialect borrowings have come from American English, with the newly borrowed words pushing out or beginning to push out older words, usually of British English origin. Thus, we find examples such as those in (212), where in each case, the American English form is replacing or has replaced the British English equivalent:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(212)</th>
<th>British English</th>
<th>American English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>housey</td>
<td>bingo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bakery</td>
<td>baker's shop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minerals</td>
<td>soft drinks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pictures</td>
<td>movies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lorry</td>
<td>truck</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chips</td>
<td>fries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crisps</td>
<td>potato chips</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>