

# Understanding English Grammar: A Linguistic Introduction

## *Additional Exercises for Chapter 3: Lexicon*

### 1. Shiftiness of word classes

In chapter 3, the words *television*, *door*, *desk* and *window* were used to illustrate the "shiftiness" of the classes of noun and verb in English. Think of five more nouns that don't seem to lend themselves for use as verbs. Then, search for these nouns in a verbal context using your favorite Internet search engine. For example, if your word is *dirt* (please choose different words!), you might search for the past tense form (*dirted*), and/or the present participle form (*dirting*). Report your results for each stem. If the stem is used as a verb, describe its verbal meaning.

Here are the results for *dirt* used as a verb:

"to dirt" someone means to slander someone's reputation. From <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=dirted>.

1. You were dirted hardcore. 2. Suzy and I were going strong until she up and dirted me one day. I never saw it coming. I'm gonna dirt her to everyone she knows.

"to go dirting" is an expression used among off-road motorbikers referring to riding around in the dirt.

"I'll make it full time street with the ability to go dirting if a bud needs a bike or such." <http://www.thumpertalk.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-805207.html> (45 independent examples of this usage on Google).

## 2. Meaning features

Think about the following words in terms of the form-meaning composite introduced in the Introduction. Each group of three words share at least one meaning feature (or component). The X and Y groups in each row differ according to at least one meaning feature.

A. For each group, identify one or two semantic features that all three words share.

B. For each pair of X and Y groups, identify any features which they share and any features by which they differ.

The first pair is done for you:

	X	Y
a.	table, chair, desk	hammer, screwdriver, scissors
	A. Furniture, manufactured goods	tools, items used with hands
	B. Both sets refer to concrete items that are used by people. Group X are furniture, while group Y are tools.	
b.	beauty, sincerity, truth	evil, bad, ugliness
c.	daughter, niece, sister	girl, woman, lady
d.	fall, drop, descend	rise, ascend, go up
e.	swim, fly, run	arrive, leave, enter
f.	teach, show, feed	drink, kick, wash
g.	see, hear, sense	watch, listen, look at
h.	animal, vegetable, furniture	dog, spinach, chair
i.	lion, leopard, cheetah	hyena, frog, eagle

### 3. Lexical features of English verbs

The following pairs of English verbs express similar ideas, but differ in at least one component of meaning. Identify the similarities and differences in the typical scenes associated with these verbs, and give a pair of examples that illustrate the difference. The first pair is done for you:

a. fall, drop      Similarity: movement in a downward direction. Difference: For an event of "falling," the thing that moves in a downward direction is the only required participant. For "drop", there may be two participants -- something that causes the motion, and something that moves. The participant that causes the motion is the Subject of the verb, and expresses the "source" (or the beginning point) of the downward motion. Examples: The cup fell to the floor. Frida dropped the cup on the floor.

"Drop" can also involve just one participant. In that case the difference between "fall" and "drop" is that "drop" is more forceful, or more agentive. Examples: The cup fell to the floor. The children dropped to the ground and began to do their exercises.

- b. watch, look at
- c. drift, float
- d. flow, spew
- e. fly, soar
- f. go, come
- g. speak, say
- h. talk, converse
- i. flash, shine
- j. buy, sell
- k. stop, cease
- l. constitute, consist
- m. deem, ascribe
- n. perspire, sweat
- o. imply, infer

#### 4. Lexical features of English modifiers

The following pairs of English adjectives or quantifiers express similar ideas, but differ in at least one component of meaning. Identify the similarities and differences in the prototypical meanings of these pairs of words, and give a pair of examples that illustrate the difference. The first pair is done for you:

- a. long, tall      Similarity: Both describe spatial extension in a certain direction. Difference: "Long" prototypically describes extension in a horizontal direction, while "tall" describes extension in a vertical dimension. Examples: That was a long journey. That is a tall building.
- b. smooth, soft
- c. new, young
- d. dark, obscure
- e. transparent, clear
- f. fewer, less
- g. many, much
- h. deep, profound
- i. ancient, old
- j. fuzzy, furry
- k. fat, plump
- l. pretty, beautiful
- m. cute, pretty

## 5. Lexicalization and Language Learning

Think of two or three "power tools" related to each of the following common situations. Indicate blanks with CAPITAL LETTERS (as in section 3.1 of *Understanding English Grammar*), and give one or more possible examples of the tool in use. The first situation is done for you:

a. Introducing someone to someone else: Tool: This is my RELATIONSHIP, NAME. Examples: This is my friend Jane. This is my sister Frida. This is my father, Dr. Lee.

Tool: I'd like to introduce NAME. Example: I'd like to introduce Jesse James.

b. Getting someone's attention:

c. Agreeing with someone:

d. Disagreeing with someone:

e. Clarifying a misunderstanding:

f. Arriving at someone's home:

g. Party conversation:

h. Shopping:

i. Ordering food at a restaurant:

j. Complaining about service at a restaurant:

## 6. Lexical properties of locational prepositions

Fill in the blanks in the following examples with a reasonable preposition. Then describe the spatial relationship involved as precisely as possible (Hint: Sometimes the relationship may refer to metaphorical, rather than physical "space"):

- a. The meaning of a word is its use \_\_\_\_ the language.
- b. You can be a little ungrammatical if you come \_\_\_\_ the right part of the country.
- c. During thunder storms we children sometimes hid \_\_\_\_ the bed.
- d. Let's stop \_\_\_\_ Brighton Beach.
- e. The Ring is trying to get back \_\_\_\_ its master.
- f. Merry and Pippin are leading the orcs away \_\_\_\_ Frodo.
- g. Wait! Take a couple practice swings \_\_\_\_ there.
- h. A shadow and a threat have been growing \_\_\_\_ my mind.
- i. The other car just came \_\_\_\_ nowhere.
- j. Look out! There's a huge spider \_\_\_\_ the ceiling!
- k. You've just crossed \_\_\_\_ into the Twilight Zone.
- l. You don't by any chance happen to have six fingers \_\_\_\_ your right hand?
- m. At 2,000 meters we were well \_\_\_\_ the tree line.
- n. He was called a dunce \_\_\_\_ school.
- o. The children wandered \_\_\_\_ the forest for hours.