

Introduction to lexicology

Lexicology is a branch of linguistics dealing with the study of the **word** and its **form, behavior** and **functions**. Thus, the lexis or the lexicon denotes the sum of words making up the vocabulary of the language, or the total stock of words contained in the dictionary. Lexicologists are interested in the generalizations and regularities characterizing the forms of words and their relations together.

The first chapter¹ you are requested to read deals with the definition of the “word” in the eye of the lexicologists, as being the central unit of investigation in their field of study. It is important to know about the different criteria adopted to decide what a word is. Do articles ‘a’ / “an”/ “the” constitute words? Are homographs and homophones considered separate words? Are compound nouns considered to be one semantic unit or more? What is a lexeme? What is a dictionary entry? Are inflected forms (cold/colder/coldest) considered separate words or variants of the same word? What aspect of language (written or spoken) is accounted for in the definition of the word? Some words are pronounced the same way and have different meanings (bow/bow); some are written the same way and have different pronunciations (refuse/refuse); some other words have the same spelling and pronunciation (bank/bank), some have the same pronunciation and different meanings (feet/feat). How these words are treated in a dictionary and how much information is needed to define a word in a dictionary? How do lexicographers organize dictionary entries to give meaning of related words and grammatical information pertaining to each word they are defining?

These are some of the question the chapter purports to answer. The chapter will also help you distinguish between orthographic and phonological words, lexemes, single-word lexemes and multi-word lexemes, word-forms, headwords, homophones, homographs, polysemous words, functional (grammatical) and lexical words?

¹ Howard Jackson (2014): Words and their meaning. Taylor and Francis

