

Module title: In a Word

Module code: LIN5212

Credit value: 15

Level: 5

Pre-requisite modules:

Content Description

Words are the most natural, accessible units of our language, but when we attempt to make more explicit our knowledge and use of words, we are faced with many important questions. For instance, the average adult knows approximately 50,000 words but how is it possible for to learn so many words in a relatively short period of time? How do we extract words, with their specific meaning, from the acoustic jumble of speech? How do we know when 'strike' is a noun and when it is a verb? How do we know that 'transformationalize' is probably a word in English, even if we don't know what it means, but that 'transformize' is not? And how do young children learn all this? Based primarily on English, we will learn to assign structure to words; we will look at how their meaning interacts with context; and finally, at how children acquire words.

Module Aims

1. Introduce students to the complexity inherent to words, and through that, to gain a scientific understanding of human language and its complexity.
2. Develop in students the ability to analyse complex phenomena in precise terms.
3. Help students recognise the wealth of contextual semantic properties associated with the meaning of words, and by extension, with the important aspects of meaning that are derived by such contexts.
4. Enhance logical reasoning through the study of formal morphological structures.
5. Encourage students to assess the real-world implications of vocabulary choice in approaching contemporary linguistic practices and attitudes.
6. Assess critically the way in which scientific discoveries in various fields can interact to give rise to the understanding of a single phenomenon.

Learning Outcomes

Academic Content:

A1 Demonstrate a broad understanding of theoretical formal explanations for the structure of English words and its development in children.

A2 Develop familiarity with the analytic tools involved in morphological analysis.

A3 Demonstrate a broad understanding of the construction of contextual meaning in English, and by extension in natural language, and its development in children.

Disciplinary Skills – able to:

B1 Reflect critically on linguistic theories and methodologies relevant to the study of words.

B2 Show awareness of the current state of knowledge of linguistic processes underlying word structure and meaning.

B3 Acquire familiarity with developmental processes, as they apply specifically to the acquisition of words by children.

Attributes:

C1 Analytical skills: students will develop and enhance analytic abilities through the use of formal morphological tools to analyze English vocabulary items.

C2 Empirically-based Research Capacity: students will be encouraged to build independent corpora, and to produce analyses that are grounded in such corpora; they will work individually as well as in collaboration with others; they will acquire a substantial body of new knowledge and develop a strong sense of intellectual integrity. As a result, graduates will be able to extend their understanding through academic inquiry.

C3 Engage Critically with Knowledge: through the evaluation of competing models, students will learn to correlate rigorously models of explanation with actual data, and to adapt their understanding to new and unfamiliar corpora.

Activity Hours

Activity Type	Time spent (hours)
Lecture	11
Seminar	11
Guided independent study	128
Total	150

Indicative Reading List

- Aitchinson, J. (2012) *Words in the Mind*, 4th edition. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell (Textbook)
- O'Grady, W., J. Archibald, M. Aronoff, and J. Reese-Miller (2017) "Morphology: The Study of Word Structure", in *Contemporary Linguistics: an Introduction*, 7th edition, chapter 4. Bedford.
- Bowerman, M. "From universal to languages specific in early grammatical development", in Trott, K., S. Dobbinson and P. Griffith, *Child Language Reader* (2004), Routledge.
- Gleitman, L. and J. Gillette "The rold of syntax in verb learning", in Trott, K., S. Dobbinson and P. Griffith, *Child Language Reader* (2004), Routledge.
- Gleitman, L. "Verbs of a feather flock together II: The child's discovery of words", in *The Legacy of Zellig Harris: Language and information into the 21st century. Volume 1: Philosophy of science, syntax and semantics*. Edited by Bruce E. Nevin (2002) , Chapter 11
- Lakoff, G. and M. Johnson (1980), *Metaphors We Live By* (a selection). Chicago University Press.