

Howard Jackson & Etienne Zé Amvela

# Words, Meaning and Vocabulary

AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN ENGLISH LEXICOLOGY



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CASSELL

London and New York

Cassell  
Wellington House, 125 Strand, London WC2R 0BB  
370 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6550

First published 2000

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**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-304-70395 8 (hardback)  
0-304-70396 6 (paperback)

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Jackson, Howard, 1945–

Words, meaning, and vocabulary: an introduction to modern English lexicology/Howard Jackson, Etienne Zé Amvela.

p. cm. — (Open linguistics series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-304-70395-8. — ISBN 0-304-70396-6 (pbk.)

1. English language—Lexicology. I. Zé Amvela, Etienne, 1948-. II. Title. III. Series.  
PE1571.J33 2000  
423'.028—dc21

99-31364  
CIP

Typeset by York House Typographic

Printed and bound in Great Britain by The Cromwell Press, Trowbridge

## Preface

This introduction to the words and vocabulary (lexicology) of English arises from courses that Etienne Zé Amvela and Howard Jackson have taught over many years at their respective universities, the former in Cameroon (Yaoundé and Buea) and the latter in Birmingham, UK (Birmingham Polytechnic/University of Central England). The study of vocabulary, by contrast with syntax, has been a rather neglected pursuit in English over recent years, and there are few textbooks in the area. It is our hope that this work will go some way towards redressing the balance.

Etienne Zé Amvela has been responsible for the first four chapters and Howard Jackson for the last four, but we have commented extensively on each other's work, and we hope that the book reads as a seamless whole.

The book is aimed at students of English language/linguistics, taking courses in the analysis and description of the English language, possibly with little prior knowledge of linguistics. However, we do advise students to have a good up-to-date dictionary to hand, preferably of the desk-size or collegiate type. In order to encourage interaction with the material discussed in the book, each chapter is interspersed with exercises, some of which require dictionary consultation. A key to the exercises is provided at the end. .

Howard Jackson  
Etienne Zé Amvela

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# 1 What is Lexicology?

This book is about English lexicology. But before we begin to discuss the various facets of the subject, we need to suggest a definition of the term lexicology (1.1). The rest of the chapter will discuss lexicology as a level of language analysis (1.2), and explore the structure of the English vocabulary (1.3).

## 1.1 Lexicology defined

At this early stage, a definition of lexicology is best considered as a working tool for a better understanding of subsequent chapters. In fact, we believe that this whole book is an answer, or at least a partial answer, to the fundamental question, 'What exactly is lexicology?' We shall not have completed our definition until we reach the end. Even then, we cannot claim to have said everything about lexicology.

For the purpose of an introductory textbook of this nature, lexicology may be defined as the study of lexis, understood as the stock of words in a given language, i.e. its vocabulary or lexicon (from Greek *lexis*, 'word', *lexikos*, 'of/for words'). This working definition shows that the notion of 'word' is central in the study of lexicology. However, 'word' itself needs to be defined and discussed as a technical term. This is done in Chapter 3. Since our main focus in this chapter is on the definition of lexicology, and in order to avoid a lengthy digression, we use 'word' somewhat loosely, in the usual traditional sense of a sequence of letters bounded by spaces. A comparison of the words 'vocabulary', 'lexis', and 'lexicon' would show that the three items may be considered more or less synonymous. However, it must be added that the first is more colloquial, the third more learned and technical, and the second may be situated half-way between the other two. A distinction must, nevertheless, be drawn between the terms 'vocabulary', 'lexis' and 'lexicon' on the one hand, and 'dictionary' on the other. While each of the first three may refer to the total word stock of the language, a dictionary is only a selective recording of that word stock at a given point in time.

Lexicology deals not only with simple words in all their aspects, but also

with complex and compound words, the meaningful units of language. Since these units must be analysed in respect of both their form and their meaning, lexicology relies on information derived from morphology, the study of the forms of words and their components, and semantics, the study of their meanings. A third field of particular interest in lexicological studies is etymology, the study of the origins of words. However, lexicology must not be confused with lexicography, the writing or compilation of dictionaries, which is a special technique rather than a level of language study.

To avoid possible confusion and in order to introduce some of the technical terms we need in our discussion of lexicology, we shall examine the four related fields mentioned above, viz. morphology, semantics, etymology and lexicography. Finally, we shall discuss lexicology as a level of language analysis.

### **EXERCISE 1/1**

Examine the following definitions of 'lexicology'. What do they agree on as the scope of lexicology? And where do they disagree?

1. An area of language study concerned with the nature, meaning, history and use of words and word elements and often also with the critical description of lexicography. (McArthur, ed. 1992)
2. The study of the overall structure and history of the vocabulary of a language. (*Collins English Dictionary* 1998)
3. A branch of linguistics concerned with the meaning and use of words. (*Longman Dictionary of the English Language* 1991)
4. The study of the form, meaning, and behaviour of words. (*New Oxford Dictionary of English* 1998)

#### **1.1.1 Morphology**

Morphology is the study of morphemes and their arrangements in forming words. Morphemes are the smallest meaningful units which may constitute words or parts of words. They are 'smallest' or 'minimal' in the sense that they cannot be broken down further on the basis of meaning, as Katamba (1994: 32) puts it: 'morphemes are the atoms with which words are built'. They are 'meaningful' because we can specify the kind of relationship they have with the non-linguistic world.

Consider the following items: *cat*, *child*, *with*, *sleeping*, *armchairs*, *farmer*. A close examination shows that *cat*, *child* and *with* cannot be analysed further into meaningful units. However, *sleeping*, *armchairs* and *farmer* can be analysed as 'sleep + ing', 'arm + chair + s', and 'farm + er'.



The items *cat*, *child*, *with*, *sleep*, *-ing*, *arm*, *chair*, *-s*, *farm*, and *-er* are all morphemes. Some are simple words such as *cat*, *child*, *with*, *sleep*, *arm*, *chair*, and *farm*, while others are only parts of words such as *-ing*, *-s*, and *-er*. But both types meet our definition of morpheme. On the one hand, they are minimal, since they cannot be broken down into further meaningful units; on the other hand, they are meaningful, because we can establish a stable relationship between each item and the non-linguistic world of experience. For example, the references of *cat*, *farm* and *chair* can be explained by pointing or acting out the meaning as in 'This is a chair', or 'That is a farm', 'It is a domestic animal that goes "miaow", "miaow"'. The meaning of *with* may be given as 'in company of', 'in antagonism to'; that of *-s* as 'plural'; while that of *-er* may be expressed as follows: '*-er* combines with the preceding lexical item to designate things or persons with a function describable in terms of the meaning of the preceding morpheme'. For example, the meaning of *-er* in *farmer* and *dreamer* is describable in terms of those of *farm* and *dream* with which the morpheme *-er* is combined.

Morphemes that can occur alone as individual words are 'free' morphemes. Those that can occur only with another morpheme are 'bound' morphemes. Thus, the morphemes 'cat', 'chair', 'farm' are free, while '-ing', '-s', and '-er' are bound, indicated by the hyphen (-). Any concrete realization of a morpheme in a given utterance is called a 'morph'. Hence, the forms *cat*, *chair*, *farm*, *-ing*, *-s*, and *-er* are all morphs. Morphs should not be confused with syllables. The basic difference between the two is that while morphs are manifestations of morphemes and represent a specific meaning, syllables are parts of words which are isolated only on the basis of pronunciation.

An examination of a number of morphs may show that two or more morphs may vary slightly and still have the same meaning. For example, the indefinite article may be realized either as *a* or as *an*, depending on the sound (not the letter) at the beginning of the following word. Morphs which are different representations of the same morpheme are referred to as 'allomorphs' of that morpheme (from Greek *allo* 'other' and *morph* 'form'). For example:

*a* context vs. *an* index  
*a* battle vs. *an* apple  
*a* union vs. *an* onion.

The last pair of words deserves some comment. Its members begin with *u* and *o*, which are classified as vowel letters. However, while *union* begins with the same sound as *yes* which is treated as a consonant, *onion* begins with the same sound as *onwards*, which is a vowel; hence '*a* union' vs. '*an* onion'.

The use of 'vs.' (versus) highlights the point that where the allomorph *an* occurs, its counterpart *a* cannot occur and vice versa. They are therefore mutually exclusive and are said to be in complementary distribution. It should be pointed out that as a descriptive term, 'distribution' refers to the total set of distinct linguistic contexts in which a given form occurs,

sometimes under different morphological shapes. For example, the distribution of the indefinite article described above may be defined as: *a* before consonant sounds (e.g. *a* battle) and *an* before vowel sounds (e.g. *an* apple).

We now turn our attention to the relation between morphology on the one hand, and simple, complex and compound words on the other. Simple words such as *door*, *knob*, *wild*, *animal* are all free morphemes. They are therefore morphologically unanalysable. Complex (or derived) words such as *spoonful*, *wildish*, *reanimate*, *mentally*, *farmer* are formed from simpler words by the addition of affixes or some other kind of morphological modification. The limiting case for complex words is that of zero modification or conversion as in *answer*, *call* and *question*, which may be either nouns or verbs, or *clean*, *dirty*, and *dry*, which may be either adjectives or verbs, without the addition of further sounds/letters. Compound words, or simply compounds, are formed by combining two or more words (free morphemes) with or without morphological modification, e.g. *door-knob*, *cheeseburger*, *pound saver*, *wild-animal-tamer*. It should be pointed out that the distinction between word compound (solid and hyphenated) and phrasal compound (open) is not very clear in English. This fact is reflected by the inconsistency with which spaces and hyphens are used with compounds in written English.

This brief discussion shows the importance of morphology in lexicology. In fact, the construction of words and parts of words, and the distinction between the different types of words are all based on morphological analysis. As will be seen later in Chapter 4, morphology is particularly relevant in the discussion of word formation.

### 1.1.2 Semantics

Semantics is generally defined as the study of meaning. Its aim is therefore to explain and describe meaning in natural languages. The term 'meaning' is used here in the ordinary, non-technical sense, without reference to any particular theoretical framework. Most linguists agree that meaning pervades the whole of language. However, they are not always unanimous on the terms to be used in the discussion of semantics. For our purpose in this book, we adopt the terminology presented and the theoretical distinctions made by Jackson (1988: 244-7) in his brief treatment of semantics.

To highlight the pervasive nature of meaning, Jackson states that if we are to talk about semantics at all, then we should identify several kinds of semantics: pragmatic semantics, which studies the meaning of utterances in context; sentence semantics, which handles the meaning of sentences as well as meaning relations between sentences; lexical semantics, which deals with the meaning of words and the meaning relations that are internal to the vocabulary of a language. Semantics is usually approached from one of two perspectives: philosophical or linguistic. Philosophical semantics is concerned with the logical properties of language, the nature of formal

theories, and the language of logic. Linguistic semantics involves all aspects of meaning in natural languages, from the meaning of complex utterances in specific contexts to that of individual sounds in syllables.

Consequently, since semantics covers all aspects of human language, it must be considered not only as a division of lexicology, but also as part of phonology, syntax, discourse analysis, textlinguistics, and pragmatics. But for our purpose in this book, it is enough to assume that lexical semantics is relevant to lexicology.

It will also be useful to introduce two terms which belong more to the area of sentence semantics, but which are equally relevant to our discussion of lexicology, viz. 'acceptability' and 'meaningfulness'.

'Acceptability' and 'meaningfulness' are distinct but related concepts. They are important in our discussion of lexicology because we may have utterances that are meaningless but acceptable, while others may be meaningful but unacceptable. Consider the following:

That woman is a man.

That doll is a bomb.

That walking-stick is a gun.

They may be considered meaningless in the sense that a human being cannot be both 'a woman' and 'a man' at the same time. Similarly, it may be argued that an object cannot be 'a doll' and 'a bomb', just as the same object cannot be simultaneously 'a walking-stick' and 'a gun'. But with a bit of imagination, one can think of contexts where such utterances, and others like them, can be considered acceptable. For example, in a play, a character may be a man biologically and play the role of a woman; in a film, an actor could be carrying a doll or a walking-stick which in fact could be deadly weapons such as a bomb or a gun. To paraphrase Leech (1969: 13), the 'effective message' in all such utterances is: 'What appears as an "x" is in fact a "y".'

There are other types of meaningless utterance that may be acceptable for various reasons. Some may involve 'slips of the tongue', 'typographical errors', 'sarcasms', 'different figures of speech', etc. Others may be considered deviations from the norm of the language under study. Still others may have different origins or justifications. For example, if a person who has a bad cold and a completely blocked nasal cavity says 'It's *dice* beeting you', after he/she has just been introduced to someone, this utterance may be considered meaningless, strictly speaking. However, the 'effective message' it conveys in this context would be something like 'It's nice meeting you but I have a bad cold.'

The important point here is that there are several factors that contribute to the meaningfulness and the acceptability of utterances. As opposed to utterances that are meaningless but acceptable, others are meaningful but unacceptable. The latter category includes assertions that are false because of our knowledge of the real world, rather than for purely semantic reasons. Consider the following:

*Crocodiles can fly.*

*The basket ate the vegetables.*

John's behaviour pleased the *bananas*.

We may use different criteria to account for such utterances. For example, they may be explained by logical argument to highlight the contradictions, inconsistencies or incompatibilities in the message. From a syntactic point of view, such utterances are treated as errors in predication, meaning that the subject or object noun phrases are syntactically unsuitable to the corresponding verb phrases. Hence, the subjects *crocodiles* and *the basket* are syntactically unsuitable to the verb phrases *can fly* and *ate* respectively. Such examples point to the fact that all of syntax, semantics and lexicology contribute to a comprehensive study of language.

### 1.1.3 Etymology

A third field which should be of particular interest in lexicological studies is etymology, which may be defined as the study of the whole history of words, not just of their origin. The term 'etymology' was coined by the Stoics, a group of Greek philosophers and logicians who flourished from about the beginning of the fourth century BC. They noticed a lack of regularity in the correspondences between the forms of the language and their respective contents. In other words, they found no necessary connection between the sounds of the language on the one hand and the things for which the sounds stood on the other. Since they were convinced that language should be regularly related to its content, they undertook to discover the original forms called the 'etyma' (roots) in order to establish the regular correspondence between language and reality. This was the beginning of the study known today as etymology.

One of the difficulties faced by etymological studies is that some words are not etymologically related to ancient forms. It is therefore difficult to establish and indicate their origins. Consequently, the forms from which such words are said to derive can only be produced by analogy. Another difficulty is that while it is possible to specify the exact time when some terms entered the language, for example through borrowing, it is clearly impossible to say exactly when a form was dropped, especially since words can disappear from use for various reasons.

The most crucial difficulty faced with etymological studies is that there can be no 'true' or 'original' meaning, since human language stretches too far back in history. To paraphrase an example given by Palmer (1981: 11), one may be tempted to say that from the etymological point of view the adjective *nice* really means 'precise' as in 'a *nice* distinction'. But a study of its history shows that the word once meant 'silly' (Latin *nescius*, 'ignorant'), and earlier, it must have been related to *ne*, 'not' and *se*, probably meaning 'cut'. The form *se* is also used in the Modern English words *scissors* and *shears*. But at this level of analysis, one would still be left with the Latin items *ne*,

'not' and *se*, 'cut', the origins of which are still unknown. In other words, no matter how far back one goes in history, one cannot expect to reach the beginning of time. So, the Stoics' quest has proved fruitless.

As suggested in our definition, etymological information goes beyond the origin of the word. It also makes reference to cognates (i.e. words related in form) in other languages. Furthermore, in the case of borrowed words, it gives the source language, together with the date when the borrowing took place. Finally, it supplies any other information on the previous history of the word. In dictionary entries, such information is contained traditionally in square brackets. The amount of detail provided in etymologies varies from one dictionary to another. But in spite of its potentially wide range of coverage, etymological information is generally scanty in most monolingual dictionaries. In fact, it is totally absent from both bilingual and learners' dictionaries, presumably on the grounds that it is not helpful to language learners. However, as pointed out by Jackson (1988: 175), it could be argued that 'knowledge of etymology may help some learners to understand and retain new vocabulary items'.

Before we close this brief discussion of etymology, we should mention the expression 'folk etymology'. It is a historical process whereby speakers who cannot analyse an obscure form replace it with a different form which is morphologically transparent. Gramley and Pätzold (1992: 31) give good examples of this process with the noun 'bridegroom' and the verb 'depart'. In Middle English, the original spelling of the first word was 'bridegome' (*bride*, 'bride'; *gome*, 'man'). But the second element ceased to be understood and was altered to *groom* to make *bridegroom*. The etymology of *depart* is more complex. Initially, its use was restricted to wedding ceremonies to mean 'separate' in the expression 'till death us *depart*'. Later, the verb became obsolete and was analysed as *do* and *part*, hence the corresponding Modern English expression 'till death *do* us *part*'. Although a few other examples could be given, it must be acknowledged that folk etymology is not a very productive process in Modern English. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the origins of English words; and Chapter 4 for the various word-formation processes.

### EXERCISE 1/2

Etymology can be a fascinating area of study. Look up the etymology of *bridegroom* in your dictionary. Does it mention the folk etymology, i.e. the change from 'gome' to 'groom'?

Now look up the etymology of *adder*. Is there any folk etymology at work here?

Finally, look up the etymology of *snake*. What does your dictionary say is the origin? And does it give cognates?

### 1.1.4 *Lexicography*

The fourth and last field which is of special interest in lexicological studies is lexicography, which has already been defined as a special technique, the writing and compilation of dictionaries. This definition may be considered rather restrictive. In its widest sense, lexicography may also refer to the principles that underlie the process of compiling and editing dictionaries. Some of those principles are clearly lexical or lexicological in nature, while others stem from the specific domain of book production and marketing. But lexicographical compilation may be considered as derived from lexicological theory (Jackson 1988: 248). It is in this sense that lexicography can be regarded as 'applied lexicology'.

However, it should be acknowledged that it is only in recent years that the link between lexicography and linguistics has been clearly established. For example, the accuracy and consistency in the transcription of words and the adoption of a 'descriptive' as opposed to a 'prescriptive' approach to lexicography are direct applications of linguistic principles. It may be argued that initially, lexicography developed its own principles and tradition independently of linguistics in general; but this is no longer the case. In fact, since current dictionaries are compiled mainly by lexicographers who have been trained in linguistics, one should expect a more direct and more substantial input from lexicology. However, it should be pointed out that lexicology is not the only branch of linguistics which provides an input to lexicography. Clearly, morphology, syntax and phonology do. And sociolinguistics, too, contributes, not only in the study and selection of the language variety to be used in the dictionary, but also in the inclusion of information on style and registers. For a detailed discussion of lexicography as applied lexicology, see Chapter 8.

## 1.2 *Lexicology as a level of language analysis*

Lexicology is only one possible level of language analysis, others being phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Although an attempt may be made at treating any of these levels in isolation, it must be said that none of them can be studied successfully without reference to the others. All these different levels of analysis interact with one another in various ways, and when we use language, we call on all simultaneously and unconsciously. We briefly discussed morphology and semantics in 1.1; here we consider the relation of lexicology to phonology and syntax.

### 1.2.1 *Lexicology and phonology*

It may be thought at first sight that phonology does not interact with lexicology in any significant manner. But a close analysis will reveal that in many cases, the difference between two otherwise identical lexical items can be reduced to a difference at the level of phonology. Compare the pairs of words *pill* and *bill*, *sheep* and *ship*, *meat* and *meal*. They differ only in one

sound unit (the position of which has been shown in each word) and yet the difference has a serious effect at the level of lexicology. As suggested by these examples, the sounds responsible for the difference may occur anywhere in the structure of the word; i.e. at the initial, medial, or final position. In some cases, the phonological difference does not involve discrete sound units but 'suprasegmental' or 'prosodic' features such as stress; and yet, even such differences are enough to differentiate otherwise identical items; e.g. *ex'port* (verb), vs. '*export* (noun). Note that the symbol (') is placed immediately before the syllable which receives primary stress.

Compounds provide another good example to show the relevance of phonology in lexicology. At first sight, the process of compounding may be viewed as a simple juxtaposition of two words. Thus, *green* and *house* may be put together to form *greenhouse*, 'a glass house for growing plants'. But such an analysis would be superficial, since the same items can be put together in the same order to produce *green house*, 'a house that is green'. The major difference between the two utterances is a matter of stress, which is a phonological feature. But this feature is enough to distinguish compounds from noun phrases containing the same words. Compare the stress pattern of the compound nouns in (a) and the corresponding adjective plus noun constructions in (b).

(a) <i>Compound</i>	(b) <i>Noun Phrase</i>
'blackboard	,black 'board
'blackbird	,black 'bird
'greyhound	,grey 'hound
'White House	,white 'house

*Note:* (') = main or primary stress, and (,) = secondary stress.

As a general rule, the primary stress falls on the first word of the compound as in '*blackboard* (a dark smooth surface in schools for writing on with chalk). The same rule applies to the rest of the words in (a). However, in the noun phrases in (b) like ,*black 'board* (as opposed to any board that is painted green, red or yellow) both words can potentially receive stress. All the examples in (b) are phrases, not words. Consequently, they function as units at the syntactic level. They are therefore an indication that stress, which is a phonological feature, has a direct influence on syntax. The relation between lexicology and syntax is further explored in 1.2.2. This is a clear illustration of the interdependence of phonology, lexicology and syntax. However, since language is so complex that it cannot be studied all together, we must consider each level as if it were autonomous. But it must always be remembered that such an approach is only methodological and does not always reflect the way language operates when it is used by its speakers.

### 1.2.2 *Lexicology and syntax*

We use the term 'syntax' to refer to the particular knowledge which enables us to assemble words when we construct sentences. Syntax is also responsible, at least in part, for an appropriate understanding of the sentences we hear and those we read. That is, syntax is concerned with the relationships between words in constructions and the way these words are put together to form sentences.

As a basic assumption, we believe that we might know the meanings of all the words in a large English dictionary and still be quite unable to speak or understand the language. Consequently, to say that someone speaks English, or that they 'know' English, amounts to saying that they have somehow acquired a set of rules, among which are the rules of syntax, that enables them to produce English sentences as needed. The rules also enable them to understand the sentences of another person speaking the language. However, unless they have some special training in linguistics, the speaker and hearer cannot talk confidently about the nature of such rules.

In 1.2.1 above we saw how semantics and phonology are both relevant in any serious study of lexicology. We shall now investigate the relationship between lexicology and syntax. We assume that, although these two levels of language analysis are comparable, they may also be kept distinct. One argument in favour of the distinction between syntax and lexicology is the observation that a given sentence may be syntactic but unacceptable from the lexical point of view. One such example is the famous sentence 'Colorless green ideas sleep furiously', proposed by Chomsky (1957). This sentence is built according to the rules of English syntax but it is unacceptable on lexical grounds. If a sentence can satisfy the rules of syntax but be unacceptable lexically, this is perhaps an indication that the rules of syntax are different from those of lexicology; consequently, the two levels are distinct. In fact, the problem of the distinction between lexicology and syntax may be reduced to the distinction between sentences that are unacceptable on syntactic grounds and those that are deviant from the lexical point of view.

The essential difference between syntax and lexicology is that the former deals with the general facts of language and the latter with special aspects. It is in the main a question of general versus particular. Syntax is general because it deals with rules and regularities that apply to classes of words as a whole, whereas lexicology is particular because it is concerned with the way individual words operate and affect other words in the same context. Although borderline cases do exist in both lexicology and syntax, e.g. in the case of 'grammatical' or 'function' words (1.3.4), the distinction between the two levels is fairly clear.

At first sight, it may be thought that when judged in terms of how deviant they are, lexical restrictions are generally not a matter of well-established rules but of tendencies. In other words, it may be assumed that if asked whether or not a given lexical association is acceptable, one cannot answer



by a categorical 'yes/no'; one is more likely to give an answer of the nature 'more/less', or 'it depends on the context'. Such an assumption is, however, an oversimplification. In syntax as well as in lexicology, there are cases of deviation which may be answered by yes/no, and others that can be answered only by more/less, though a 'yes/no' answer is more likely in syntax than in lexicology. For example, a sentence such as 'Sophisticated mice prefer to eat red elephants', though undoubtedly syntactic is lexically doubtful because it does not correspond to our experience of the world. Judging from our present knowledge of the natural world, the acceptability of this sentence is not a matter of 'more/less' but of a categorical 'no'. However, a sentence such as 'The flower gracefully walked away' may seem odd in the sense that 'flowers' are not normally associated with 'walking' but with some imagination, we can picture a context in which this sentence, which is already acceptable syntactically, is also acceptable lexically.

Similarly, some sentences are clearly ungrammatical, while others are clearly well-formed syntactically. For example, a sentence such as 'Did it he and I' is clearly deviant only on syntactic grounds and it could be corrected simply by changing the word order into 'He and I did it'. But there are also marginal cases such as 'Give it to whomever wants it' versus 'Give it to whoever wants it', where English speakers are not unanimous as to which alternative is grammatical. As a final observation, it should be pointed out that some sentences, such as 'Did it John and the table', are deviant on both syntactic and lexical grounds.

### EXERCISE 1/3

Consider the following 'deviant' sentences. In which of them would an alternative selection of words (lexis) make an improvement, and in which does the arrangement of the words (syntax) need to be adjusted?

1. Visitors are aggressively requested to remove their shoes before leaving the temple.
2. You put can table the the on bread you bought have.
3. All mimsy were the borogroves and the mome raths outgrabe.
4. Anyone lived in a pretty how town, with up so many bells floating down.
5. Off you go, up the apples and pears and into uncle ned.

### 1.3 The structure of English vocabulary

As used in this book, the terms vocabulary, lexis and lexicon are synonymous. They refer to the total stock of words in a language (see 1.1).