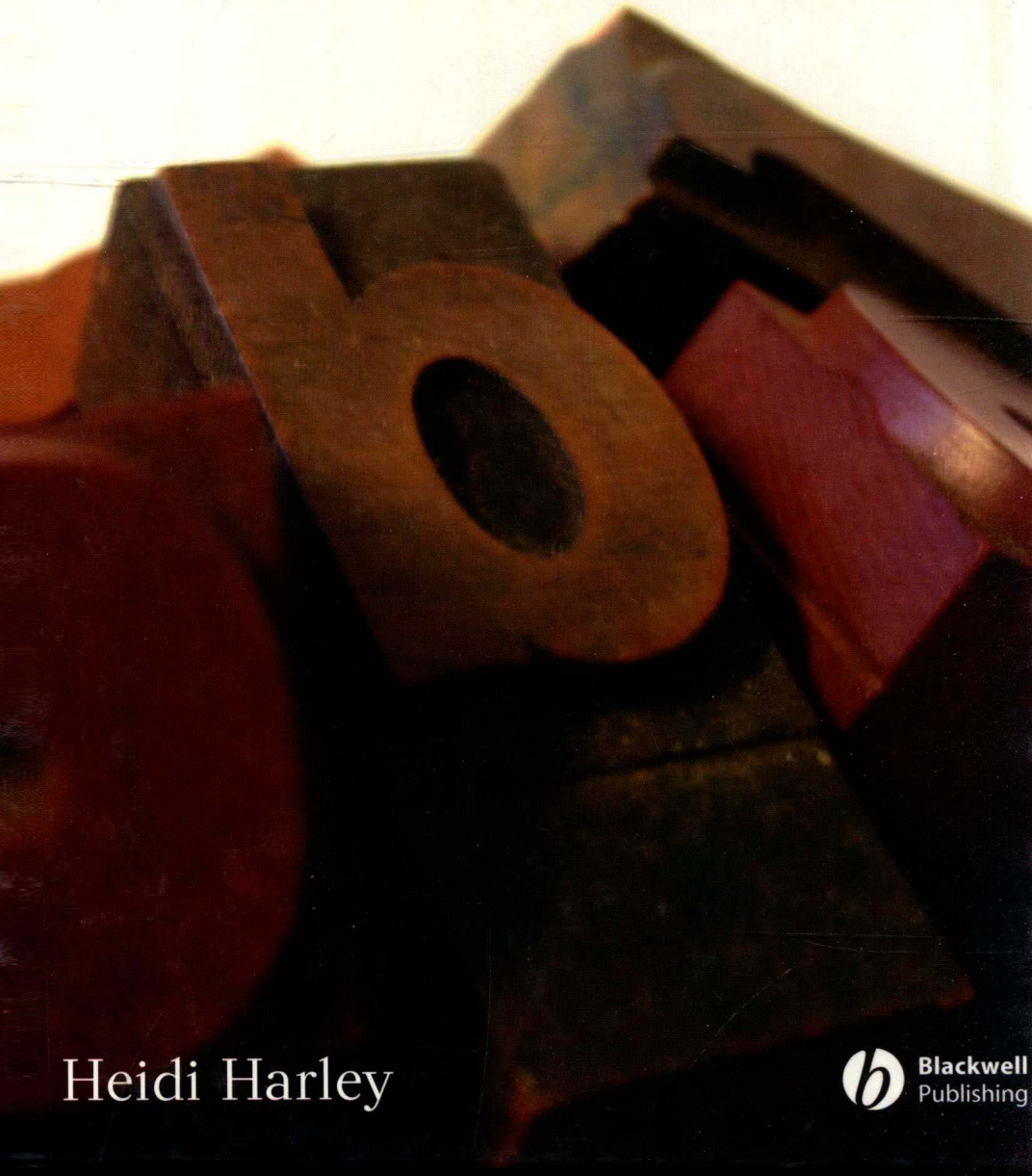
English Words

A Linguistic Introduction



Heidi Harley

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A Linguistic Introduction

Heidi Harley

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Preface

This textbook is intended as a thorough introduction to the study of English words from a linguistic perspective. It introduces students to the technical study of words in several areas: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, language acquisition and historical linguistics, in that order. Some introductory material is covered in each section, to give students the theoretical tools they will need to proceed, and then those tools are employed to analyze the English vocabulary.

This book will be of interest to students who have a general interest in words – people whom Richard Lederer smilingly calls "verbivores." They enjoy reading tidbits of word facts in language mavens' columns, word games and etymologies, but have never taken a linguistics or structure of language course.

The text is designed to give students a command of the basic theory in each area, skill in analyzing and understanding English words, and the grounding needed for more advanced study in linguistics or lexicology. Ultimately, however, the aim is to provide students who will never take another linguistics-related course with a grasp of some of the basic methods and questions of the field, viewed through the window of words.

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help of a great many people. It wouldn't exist had Andrew Carnie not suggested that I submit a proposal for it, building on my lecture notes for the cross-listed Linguistics/English 322 course, "The Structure and

Meaning of Words." My students and colleagues at the University of Arizona provided invaluable feedback and expertise in many moments of uncertainty. I would especially like to thank Michael Hammond, Adam Ussishkin, Diane Ohala and Andrew Carnie for reading and commenting on portions of the manuscript. Several teaching assistants I have had over the years also provided feedback, including Bob Kennedy, Jason Haugen, Sarah Longstaff, Gwanhi Yun and Xu Xu. Thanks especially to Xu Xu for preparing the IPA transcription key. The three anonymous reviewers of the manuscript for Blackwell provided exhaustive comments that improved it considerably and also saved me from many mistakes; I am very grateful to them. The linguistics editors at Blackwell, first Tami Kaplan and then Sarah Coleman and Ada Brunstein, have exhibited a combination of patience, persistence and tact that both reassured and motivated a fairly skittish author. I also have very much appreciated Sarah's and Margaret Aherne's guidance and hard work throughout the publication process.

Last but far from least, both my parents, Carolyn and Peter Harley, read through the entire first draft manuscript and provided detailed comments that have helped me no end. My husband, Art Torrance, read through the manuscript not once, but twice, thinking through each analysis and transcription, paying sharp attention to every comma and apostrophe, and saving future students from a great deal of unnecessary confusion. He also has supported me throughout the process with encouragement, snacks and late-night cups of hot chocolate. I cannot express my gratitude to him and them enough.

Needless to say, the many flaws that doubtless remain are entirely my responsibility!

Heidi Harley
April, 2005

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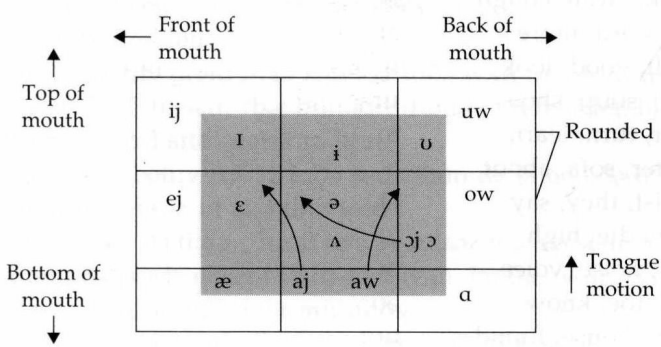
IPA Transcription Key

Consonants of English ☐ voiceless ▨ voiced

place / manner	labial		labio-dental		inter-dental		alveolar		palatal		velar		glottal	
stops	p	b					t	d			k	g	ʔ	
fricative			f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ			h	
affricates									t͡ʃ	d͡ʒ				
nasal		m						n				ŋ		
liquids (lateral)								l						
(non-lateral)								ɹ						
glides		w								j				

Vowels of American English ☐ tense ▨ lax



Transcription of British English

As discussed briefly on page 41, there are many dialects of English with correspondingly many transcription systems. One of the most widely used and taught Englishes is the broadcasting standard of the United Kingdom, called 'Received Pronunciation', or RP for short.

In the text we use a transcription suited to American English, but for the benefit of readers who are interested in using the RP transcription system, the vowel symbols are presented in summary below (the consonants are essentially the same as those presented in the text). Also provided below are RP transcriptions corresponding to all the American English transcriptions in the text, organized by page number.

Most of the differences between the two transcriptions have to do with the different pronunciations of the two dialects, but a few differences are simply notational. For instance, rather than use the upside-down symbol /ɹ/ for the retroflex liquid, the more usual symbol /r/ is used. Similarly, rather than representing the affricates in 'church' and 'judge' with a ligature arc over the two symbols which make up their pronunciation, the RP custom is to print the two symbols closer to one another – that is, rather than /t͡ʃ/ and /d͡ʒ/, the RP transcription uses /ʧ/ and /ʤ/.

RP vowel	**Transcription**
sea, feet, me, field	iː
him, big, village, women	ɪ
get, fetch, head, Thames	e
sat, hand, ban, plait	æ
sun, son, blood, does	ʌ
calm, are, father, car	ɑː
dog, lock, swan, cough	ɒ
all, saw, cord, more	ɔː
put, wolf, good, look	ʊ
soon, do, soup, shoe	uː
bird, her, turn, learn	ɜː
the, butter, sofa, about	ə
ape, waist, they, say	eɪ
time, cry, die, high	aɪ
boy, toy, noise, voice	ɔɪ
so, road, toe, know	əʊ
out, how, house, found	aʊ

deer, here, fierce, near	ɪə
care, air, bare, bear	eə
poor, sure, tour, lure	ʊə

RP transcriptions corresponding to American transcriptions in text, indexed by page number:

1 wɒt ɪz ə wɜːd

21 saʊnd ən 'fjʊərɪ 'ɪŋglɪʃ fə'nɒlədʒɪ

33 'nʌʧel, 'ʧeləʊ

43 'teɪkn̩, lɪtl̩

44 'pəʊlɪʃ, 'pɒlɪʃ

44 Exercise 2.7
ðə 'bændɪʤ wəz wɑʊnd ə'rɑʊnd ðə wuːnd

45 Exercise 2.7, continued
ðeɪ wə tuː kləʊs tə ðə dɔː tə kləʊz ɪt
ðə bʌk dʌz 'fʌnɪ θɪŋz wən ðə dəʊz ɑː 'prɛzn̩t
tə help wɪð 'plɑːntɪŋ ðə 'fɑːmə tɔːt ɪz saʊ tə səʊ
ðə wɪnd wəz tuː strɒŋ tə waɪnd ðə seɪl
'ɑːftər ə 'nʌmbə əv ɪn'ʤekʃn̩z maɪ ʤɔː gɒt 'nʌmə
ə'pɒn 'siːɪŋ ðə teər ɪn maɪ kləʊðz aɪ ʃed ə tɪə
aɪ hæd tə səb'ʤekt ðə 'sʌbʤɪkt tuː ə 'sɪəriːz əv tests

51 – Study Problem 1

a. 'preʃəs, ə'bɪlɪtɪ, 'waɪəlɪs, ɪn'telɪʤəns, pə'laɪt, 'kɑʊəd, saɪ'kɒlədʒɪ, ɪn'kredəbl̩', 'neklәs

b. nʌm, kəm'pjuːtə, ʃæm'peɪn, 'nɒlɪʤ, æŋ'zaɪətɪ, ʤuː'dɪʃəs, 'pɪkpɒkɪt, 'sɪzəz, jʌŋ

c. 'rɪstwɒʧ, waɪnd, fən'ɒlədʒɪ, trɑʊt, 'ʧɪlɪŋ, bɪ'jɒnd, dɪ'leɪ, 'deɪlɪ, 'θɑʊzn̩d, fʌʤ

d. naɪf, ˌrepɪ'tɪʃəs, 'plaɪəz, raid, 'æŋkə, 'dɪfθɒŋ, krʌm, 'pɑːθweɪ, ˌkɒmplɪ'mentrɪ, 'eksəsaɪz

52 – Study Problem 3
lɪtl̩ bɪliːz fɪfθ greɪd tiːʧə kɔːld ɪz fɑðə wʌn iːvnɪŋ. "aɪm sɒrɪ tə tel juː ðɪs," ʃiː sed, "bət bɪliː ʧiːtɪd ɒn ɪz kwɪz tədeɪ. hiː kɒpiːd frɒm ðə gɜːl sɪtɪŋ nekst tə hɪm."
"aɪ dəʊnt bəliːv ɪt," ɪz fɑðə sed. "hɑʊ də jə neʊ ðə gɜːl dɪdn̩t kɒpɪ ðiː ænsəz ɒf əv bɪliːz test?"
"wel," sed ðə tiːʧə, "bəʊθ sets əv ɑnsəz wɜː ðə seɪm ɔːl ðə weɪ daʊn ðə peɪʤ, eksept fə ðə last wʌn. fɔː ðæt wʌn ʃɪ reʊt aɪ dəʊnt nəʊ, ən bɪliː rəʊt miː niːðə"

54 fəʊnə'lɒʤɪkl̩ wɜːdz 'kɔːlɪŋ ɔːl 'skræbl̩' 'pleɪəz

60 hiː, strɪŋ, teksts
62 trʌk, drɒp
63, 64 'meni
65 stɪk, traɪ
66 kaʊ, laɪ
68 læmp, spæmd, dæmz, ruːʒd, bʌzd, ʤʌʤd
70 bɜːpt, bɜːps
71 duː, biː, səʊ
72 siː, aɪsiːðə'dɒgiː, siːð, aɪs
73 'fɪŋgə, 'æŋgə, 'tɪŋglɪ, 'ɪŋglɪʃ,
74 aɪ wɪn geɪmz, θɪn 'gruːəl, paɪn grəʊsbiːk
77 'mʌðə, ə'pɪə
78 ʤɒn ɪz 'ærəgənt, rəgənt
79 bɪl ɪz 'baɪɪŋ ə gɪ'tɑː, tɑː
82 beɪelzəbʌbhæzədevɪlpʊtəsaɪdfəmiː, bɪl ɪz 'baɪɪŋ ə gɪ'tɑː, kɪs ðə skaɪ, kɪs ðɪs gaɪ
87 liːf, kə'lekt, ɪn'heɪł, pə'liːs, 'fɪłtə, səʊłd, læp, 'mɪłkɪŋ, 'letə
88 fiːw, 'teɪbu
Exercise 4 is specifically about the pronunciation of American English, so no RP transcriptions are given.
90 weə duː wɜːdz kʌm frɒm
95 ɒləʤɪ
96 ɪ'lɪzəbəθ, eɪdz, sɑːz, diːəʊei
108 biːnə
111 priː ænd 'sʌfɪksɪz ɪŋglɪʃ mɔː'fɒləʤɪ
112 kæt, kɪk ðə 'bʌkɪt, əd
118 ən 'æpl, ə letə tə ʤɒn, sɪks əv wʌn
119 iːləktr, tɒks, əmfæt
133 wæg, wægɪd, snɪft, 'bɒksɪz, wægd, pæt, weɪdəd, weɪd
134 snɪft, kuːd, pleɪd, weɪvd
136 ɪn griːn, ɪnglɪʃ, ɪn prɪnt, 'ɪmprɪnt
143 'lɪtl̩
144 ˌmɔːfə'lɒʤɪkl̩ ˌɪdiːəʊ'sɪŋkrəsiːz
148 ɪz
151 eɪʃn̩, keɪʃn̩, ɪŋ
152 ə'sɪst, ə'sɪstənt, ə'sɪstənts
154 et, iːt, dʌkt, 'djuːs
157 eɪʤd, eɪʤɪd
159 haʊs, 'haʊzɪz, 'faːðə, waɪvz, naɪvz, wʊlvz, kaːvz
163 ə'fɪʃl̩, əˌfɪʃə'liːz, 'tɒnsɪl, ˌtɒnsɪ'laɪtɪs
164 'kɒmplɪmənt, ˌkɒmplɪ'mentrɪ, kə'neɪdiən, 'kænədə

169 ɪfaɪ, 'sɒlɪd, sə'lɪdɪfaɪ
172 'kju:dɒs
174 ɑ:, wɜ:, ɪz, bi:, gʊd, 'betə, wel, bæd, wɜ:s
179 'ænəlaɪz, ə'næləsɪs, 'eɪnl̩
180 'mædʒɪk, 'ekspɪdaɪt, 'ɑ:tɪfɪs, 'mælɪs, mə'dʒɪʃn̩, 'ekspɪ'dɪʃəs, 'ræʃn̩, ˌɑ:tɪ'fɪʃl̩, mə'lɪʃəs
185 'leksɪkl̩ sɪ'mæntɪks ðə 'strʌktʃər əv 'mi:nɪŋ ðə 'mi:nɪŋ əv 'strʌktʃə
193 'evrɪ, ðə
196 ðæt, 'weðə
199 braʊn
218 'tʃɪldrən 'lɜ:nɪŋ wɜ:dz
222 'ræbɪt, gævəgaɪ
224 'ræbɪt, maʊs
225 maʊs, greɪ, 'ræbɪt, 'rəʊdn̩t, ɪə
226 'ænɪməl, ɪə, fɜ:, 'pi:tə
227 'ræbɪt, 'pi:tə
228 'pi:tə, 'ræbɪt
229 tə'mɒrəʊ
232 fɪə
239 'æksɪdənts əv 'hɪstri: ɪŋglɪʃ ɪn flʌks
270 fi:t, feɪt, faɪt
271 i: aɪ u:
272 ki:n
273 kaɪt, reɪt, kɪt, ræt, 'reɪtɪŋ, 'rætɪŋ
276 'kændl̩, ˌʃændə'lɪə, kæp, ˌʃæpə'reʊn, 'kɑ:sl̩, 'ʃætəleɪn, tʃeə, ʃeɪz lɒŋ, 'tʃerɪ, sə'ri:z, tʃeɪn, 'ʃi:njɒn, kætʃ, tʃeɪs

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1

What Is a Word?

/'wʌt ɪz ə 'wəɹd/

In this chapter, we look at the intuitive notion of what a word is and see that there are several perspectives on wordhood. A word has different properties depending on whether you're looking at it phonologically, morphologically, syntactically or semantically. Essentially, we end up with two different notions of word: a *listeme* – a sound–meaning correspondence – and a *phonological word*, a sound unit on which the spacing conventions of written English are based. Finally, we distinguish between necessary and conventional aspects of wordhood.

1.1 Explaining *Word* in Words

Stop. Before reading any further, get out a sheet of paper and a pencil (or fire up a word processor, or just introspect), and try to compose a definition of the word *word*.

Exercise 1.1 Compose a definition of *word*.

Throughout this text, there will occasionally be exercises inserted in the middle of discussion. You should stop and try to answer them before reading on. Answers to the exercises are often given in the text immediately below; you'll be able to compare the response you came up with to the discussion in the text, and think about any differences between the answer in the text and your own answer.

Here's one possible first try:

Definition 1
word: a sequence of letters that we write consecutively, with no spaces.

How does that definition compare with your own? Yours is probably better. One thing that is obviously wrong with this one is that it depends crucially on the conventions of writing. Languages have words before they're written down. Let's try again, trying to eliminate the reference to writing:

Definition 2
word: a sequence of sounds that we pronounce consecutively, with no pauses.

Hang on a minute – when we're talking, there's not usually any pauses between words. (Try listening for a moment to someone talking. Is there a pause before and after every word? Where *are* the pauses?) We do know, though, that it is at least possible to put pauses between words when talking. Imagine you are speaking to someone for whom English is a second language, and who is hard of hearing besides. To give them the best chance of understanding you, you . . . would . . . probably . . . talk . . . rather . . . like . . . this, inserting big spaces between words. (People talk like this when dictating, as well.) You certainly wouldn't insert spaces inside them. No one would say "y . . . ou . . . wou . . . ld . . . pro . . . b . . . abl . . . y . . ." etc. Maybe we can use the *possibility* of spaces in our definition:

Definition 3
word: a sequence of sounds which *can* be pronounced on its own, with pauses on either side.

Hang on again! A word is not just any old sequence of sounds that can be pronounced on its own. According to that definition, *spimble* or *intafulation* or *pag* are words, and so are *raise your arm* or *how are you* (you can pronounce them with space on either side, can't you?). The former, however, are sequences of sounds that don't have any meaning associated with them, and the latter are sequences of sounds that have too much meaning associated with them. Intuitively, the former are not words, and the latter are groups of words.

To help make the text clearer, when we're discussing the linguistic properties of some word, the word will appear in italics. This indicates that the word is just being mentioned – that is, being discussed – rather than being actually used. This mention/use distinction is hard to keep track of when it's not indicated by some distinguishing feature, such as italics.

It seems fairly clear that we have to include meaning in our definition. The sounds that make up, for instance, the word *word* have a certain meaning in combination that they don't have by themselves, or when they appear in other words (like *water* or *murder*). So the *w* sound in *word* doesn't mean anything by itself, nor does the *-ord* sequence, but together, they have a meaning, even if it's a meaning that's hard to pin down. So for our final try, let's look at the relevant definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (**OED**), which is listed as definition number 12a in their entry for the word *word*:

Definition 4 (final)
word: A combination of vocal sounds, or one such sound, used in a language to express an idea (e.g. to denote a thing, attribute, or relation), and constituting an ultimate minimal element of speech having a meaning as such; a vocable.

This is probably fairly close to the definition you came up with, albeit perhaps with a few extra elements. The crucial part that we didn't have in our earlier versions is the bit about the "ultimate minimal unit of speech having a meaning as such."

So consider our example word, *word*. The *w* doesn't have a meaning by itself, nor does any other individual sound. The first three sounds, which we spell *wor* in the word *word*, do have a meaning of their own (spelled *were*, the past plural of the verb *to be*), but that meaning is not a part of the meaning of *word* – that is, the meaning of *word* does not include the meaning of *were*. Other subsets of the sound sequence (*or*, *rd*, *ord*) are similarly unrelated in meaning or meaningless. *Word*, then, is a minimal unit of speech having a meaning.

This definition works to eliminate our counterexamples above from consideration as possible "words." *Spimble*, *intafulation* and *pag* are units of speech that don't express any idea, and *raise your arm* and *how are you* are units of speech that have a meaning, but they aren't

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