
The linguistic peculiarities of the English language stratification

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Annotation *This article is aimed to study the concept of language stratification in English from the structural point of view. In this paper, the language system in English is analyzed as a hierarchy consisting of five interrelated levels - phonetics, morphology, lexicology, syntax and pragmatics. Each linguistic level is discussed in detail to provide deeper insights into its special characteristics and units of study. The study follows the structural approach to language stratification, which was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure. This linguistic framework is highly useful to demonstrate the interdependence and interrelationships among the linguistic units.*

Keywords *Structural approach, linguistic strata, language hierarchy, phonetics, morphology, lexicology, syntax, pragmatics*

Ingliz tili stratifikatsiyasining lingvistik xususiyatlari

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Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqola ingliz tilidagi til sathlari tushunchasini strukturaviy nuqtai nazardan o'rganishga qaratilgan. Mazkur maqolada ingliz tili tizimi beshta o'zaro bog'liq - fonetik, morfologik, leksikologik, sintaktik va pragmatik - sathlardan iborat iyerarxiya sifatida tahlil qilinadi. Har bir lingvistik sath uning maxsus xususiyatlari va birliklari haqida chuqurroq tushuncha berish uchun batafsil mohokama qilinadi. Ushbu tadqiqot Ferdinand de Sassyur tomonidan ishlab chiqilgan til sathlariga bo'lgan strukturaviy yondashuvga asoslangan. Bu lingvistik asos til birliklari o'rtasidagi bog'liqlik va aloqalarni ko'rsatish uchun juda foydali hisoblanadi.*

Kalit so'zlar *Strukturaviy yondashuv, lingvistik qatlamlar, til iyerarxiyasi, fonetika, morfologiya, leksikologiya, sintaksis, pragmatika.*

Лингвистические особенности стратификации английского языка

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Аннотация *В данной статье рассматривается концепция языковой стратификации в английском языке с позиций структурного подхода. В работе система английского языка анализируется как иерархия, состоящая из пяти взаимосвязанных уровней: фонетики, морфологии, лексикологии, синтаксиса и прагматики. Каждый лингвистический уровень рассматривается подробно, что позволяет глубже понять его специфические особенности и*

единицы исследования. В исследовании используется структурный подход к языковой стратификации, разработанный Фердинандом де Соссюром. Такая лингвистическая парадигма чрезвычайно полезна для демонстрации взаимозависимости и взаимосвязей между лингвистическими единицами.

Ключевые слова Структурный подход, языковые слои, языковая иерархия, фонетика, морфология, лексикология, синтаксис, прагматика

Introduction

Language is a means of communication that facilitates the process of information exchange and the expression of emotions among people. To understand how language functions in different conditions, one should know about linguistics. Linguistic knowledge entails the knowledge of the sound system, morphemes, words, phrases, sentences and the text, as well as the practical usage of these language units in real-life contexts. As every field of study has specific terminology, linguistics also relies on the *metalanguage* to describe and define its concepts. McCabe (2011) describes the metalanguage as the specific language used to talk about and describe the language.

This study is concerned with the analysis of language levels through the lens of structural linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of structural linguistics, proposed the idea of classifying language using a synchronic approach. Unlike the diachronic approach that analyzes the historical development of language over time, the synchronic one classifies the language at a given time and regards the language as a system of signs (Ferdinand de Saussure, 1959). Structural linguistics emphasizes the hierarchical organization and interconnections among language levels and their units.

Main part

Phonetic and Phonological Level

The initial level or strata of the language is phonetic and phonological. Both of them deal with the sound system of a language.

More precisely, the phonetic level investigates the formation, transmission and perception of speech sounds, whereas the phonological level studies the distinctive features of human speech sounds, like word stress, syllables and intonation.

To begin with, let's discuss phonetics. It has 3 areas of investigation – articulatory, acoustic and auditory.

- **Articulatory phonetics** explores the production of speech sounds in the human speech apparatus. Being a complex process, the formation of speech sounds requires scientists to rely on direct and indirect observation methods. In the direct method, the movement of lips, teeth and tongue positions are observed. Indirect observation, however, requires special tools like X-ray photography to track the movement of other internal vocal organs during speech production.
- **Acoustic phonetics** deals with the acoustic or physical properties of sounds, which entail the pitch, voice quality, and intensity, vibration frequency, etc.
- **Auditory (Perceptual) phonetics** is concerned with how speech sounds are perceived in the listener's ears and brain. McMahon (2020) mentions that this branch of phonetics is closely connected with physiology, anatomy and acoustic phonetics.

As for the phonological strata, it focuses on the functions of sounds and how they are arranged in specific structures to form

meaningful units of a language – morphemes. Word stress, sentence stress, syllable and its types as well as the intonation types are the study elements of this strata. A phoneme is regarded as the main unit of this language level. It is meaningless and the smallest language unit. To make them meaningful, several phones should be attached to each other according to the pronunciation and semantic rules.

Ex: [c], [t], [a] – phonemes (meaningless)

Cat – a morpheme (meaningful)

As was noted by Fromkin et al. (2014), linguistic knowledge encompasses the understanding of “what sounds are in that language and what sounds are not”. Therefore, language learners must be aware of the phonemic inventory of the target language. The phonemic inventory of English includes 44 phonemes – 20 vowel and 24 consonant phonemes. Considering the greater number of consonants, English is categorized as a consonantal language.

Morphological level

The second level in the language hierarchy is the morphological level. It primarily focuses on the study of word formation, morphemes and their types and relationships among the words in the language. The main unit of this language level is a morpheme. In linguistics, a morpheme is known as the smallest unit of a language. It differs from a phoneme in a way that it carries and denotes a lexical or grammatical meaning, whereas the phonemes are meaningless. Morphemes are classified into free and bound according to their ability to stand alone in a sentence.

A free morpheme does not require any other forms to be attached to it to become meaningful, and thus, it can stand alone as an independent unit in a sentence.

Ex: *student, current, dust, furniture, happy, because, but*, etc. Free morphemes are, in turn, divided further into free-lexical and free-grammatical. Free-lexical morphemes express the lexical meaning in the sentences. They

include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Free-grammatical morphemes, on the other hand, carry grammatical meaning and serve grammatical functions in the sentence, like connecting and sequencing words within the sentence. Articles, conjunctions, prepositions and pronouns are regarded as the free-grammatical morphemes.

When it comes to bound morphemes, they cannot be used independently in discourse. Payne (2011) notes that a bound morpheme necessitates other form(s) to be attached to it to make it meaningful. In English, bound morphemes consist of affixes. An affix is the umbrella term for a prefix, a suffix and an infix. English has only one infix (-in-), which is used in words like *father-in-law, sister-in-law*, etc. Like free morphemes, bound morphemes are also subdivided into bound-derivational and bound-inflectional. The main distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes is that the former can create a new word by changing its parts of speech, while the latter only changes the form of a word with no change being made to its meaning.

Ex: build – builder (**-er/** changing verb into noun)

meaning – meaningless (**-less /** changing noun into adjective)

Most of the English prefixes and suffixes are of a derivational nature. Only the following eight suffixes are considered as inflectional morphemes. They exist in nouns, adjectives and verbs and they only change the form of words.

Verb	Noun	Adjective
<p>1. -ed (<i>played, watched, studied</i>)</p> <p>2. -en (past participle verb form – <i>broken, forgotten, fallen</i>)</p> <p>3. -ing (present participle verb form – <i>Sarah is reading a book now</i>)</p> <p>4. -s/-es (3rd person singular in verbs – <i>She loves cooking</i>)</p>	<p>1. -s/-es (plural form in nouns – <i>pens, articles, birds</i>)</p> <p>2. - 's (possessive case/ <i>Tom's book, Simon's bicycle</i>)</p>	<p>1. -er (comparative degree/ <i>fast – faster, slow – slower</i>)</p> <p>2. -est (superlative degree/ <i>the biggest, the smartest</i>)</p>

Table 1.

As seen in the above examples, there is no change in a word's parts of speech if an inflectional bound morpheme is added to it.

Morphology also studies the word and its formation process. In linguistics, the concept of "word" has received several definitions from scholars. According to Payne (2011), a word is "the smallest unit of a language that can be surrounded by pauses and can take primary stress" (p.83). A word may consist of one or several morphemes. A root of the word is called a stem. It is possible to change a word's meaning, parts of speech and form by adding affixes to its stem.

Lexical level

The third strata in the language hierarchy is called lexicology and it studies the words, their meaning, types and etymology. The term "lexicology" is made up of 2 Greek morphemes – "lexis" – "word" and "logos" – "science/study". In short, lexicology is the science of words.

According to their form, words can be simple, compound and derivational.

- **Simple words** are the ones with a single root morpheme.
E.g., *kitchen, crisis, nature, society, dictionary*
- **Compound words** are composed of two or more simple words.
E.g., *ice cream, basketball, mother-in-law, policymaker, sunlight*
- **Derivational words** are formed through affixation – by adding prefixes or suffixes to the root of a word.
E.g., *underscore, development, effectiveness, irrelevant*

Based on their meaning, monosemantic and polysemantic words are distinguished. Words that convey only one meaning are called monosemantic. For example, **notebook, electricity, piano, car, luggage**, etc. In contrast, words with more than one meaning are known as polysemantic words.

E.g.

book	1) a reading material	2) to arrange something	
bank	1) a financial institution	2) a riverside	
head	1) a body part	2) a chief teacher	3) leader of a business

The lexical language level also deals with the etymology (origin) of the words. The English word-stock is composed of native

words, loan words (borrowings), neologisms, archaisms and obsolete words. Borrowings have entered the English vocabulary from other

languages. Most of the English borrowed words are of Latin, French and Norman origin. Due to globalization and technological advancement, many new words – neologisms – have appeared and enriched the language vocabulary. To illustrate, *Wi-Fi, computer, NASA, Zoom, astronaut, internet*, etc.

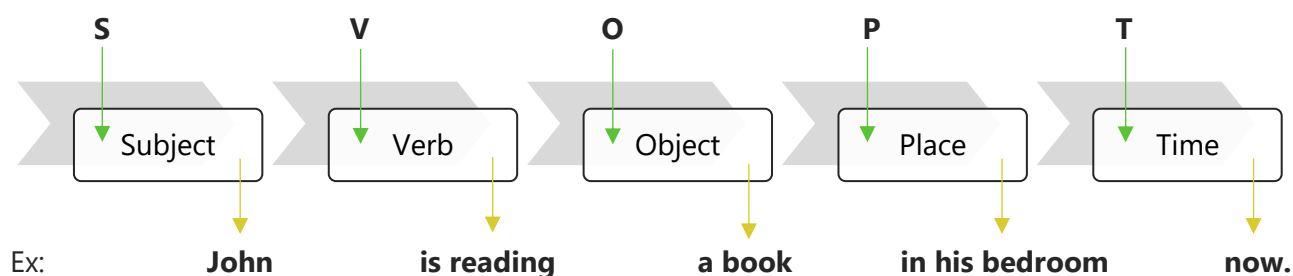
At the same time, some words have fallen out of use as time passed, and thus, their meaning became unclear to many people. They are called **obsolete words**.

E.g., *monsterful* – extraordinary / *beef-witted* – stupid

Along with that, **archaic words**, which have been replaced by modern equivalents, also exist. Archaisms are mostly used in poetry to evoke the sense of past.

E.g., *thou* – you, *thy* – your, *hath* – has, *nay* – no

Syntactic level



Literary genre permits some changes to the word order to achieve a stylistic effect. However, the word order should remain fixed in the academic and formal register. An exception to this rule can be made while using the words that show time. In standard English, time expressions can be used either at the end or at the very beginning of a sentence.

Ex: **He walks to school every day. – Every day, he walks to school.**

The syntactic level is categorized into 2 main branches: syntax-minor and syntax-major. Syntax-minor deals with the sub-sentential and sentential language levels, which are phrases, clauses and sentences. Meanwhile, syntax-major focuses on the supra-sentential level in which the peculiarities of text and discourse are discussed.

The syntactic level of a language studies how sentences are formed according to grammar rules. The sentence, its components and types, and word formation are the main objects of study at this level. According to Van Valin (2001), the word "syntax" derives from an ancient Greek word "syntaxis" and means "arrangement". The knowledge of syntax is important for language learners as it informs them about the formation of grammatically correct sentences, which is crucial for maintaining a meaningful conversation.

The first concept to discuss at this level is the word order. English has a fixed and strict order of words in a sentence. It implies that we cannot change the word order according to our wish or preference, as it can cause ambiguities in sentence meaning. Sentence formation in English follows the traditional SVOPT model.

A deep understanding of the syntactic features of a language enables students to create an unlimited number of sentences in the target language. Fromkin et al. (2014) highlight that "a creative aspect" of a language allows speakers to make sentences that have never been written or spoken before. Chomsky (1965) also agrees, further stating that mastery of the language rules paves the way for the creation of an infinite number of possible sentences through the appropriate assignment of sound and meaning.

Pragmatic level

The pragmatic strata of the language explores the meaning of words and utterances in various contexts. This level is interrelated with all the levels of the language hierarchy. Pragmatic awareness helps students realize the

intricacies and nuances in speech. It is obvious that one and the same sentence can express different meanings depending on the context. To illustrate, let's take the following sentence:

- **"That's the door"** – *not a window or a chair* (while explaining the classroom objects)
- **"That's the door"** – *a place to exit* (when someone wants to leave the building)
- **"That's the door"** – *get out of the classroom* (when a student misbehaves in the lesson)

On the other hand, it is also possible to express one thing in different ways. In such cases, the structure changes, but the meaning remains unchanged. For instance, if you want to express your hunger, you may say:

- *Can I have something to bite?*
- *Would you be so kind to bring me some food, please?*
- *Gosh, I am dying out of hunger!*

From these examples, it becomes clear that the pragmatic language level is aimed to identify the meaning in use in different situations.

Pragmatics is also concerned with speech acts. Austin (1975) distinguishes between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. McCabe (2011) points out that speech acts are performative sentences that are used not only to say or define something but also to cause the listener to take action.

1. **A locutionary** speech act is the simple act of conveying certain information to others.

E.g., *Uzbekistan is a multi-cultural country. / Samarkand is known for its historical monuments*

2. **An illocutionary** act is the "act of doing something by saying something" (McCabe, 2011; 18). The acts of requiring, promising, warning and ordering fall under this category of speech act.

E.g., *The room is getting cold* (hidden warning order or request to close the window or to turn on the heating)

3. **A perlocutionary** act involves persuading or convincing somebody through words. To put it simply, it is the "act of achieving something by saying something" (McCabe, 2011; 18).

E.g., As a speaker, you might say: *"It is getting cold in here"*. If the listener closes the window or turns off the air-conditioner after hearing your utterance, this would be a perlocutionary act of your speech upon the listener.

Conclusion

In conclusion, all the language levels and units are connected and dependent on each other. This study relied on the structural linguistic approach to divide the language into certain strata. The classification of linguistic levels in a hierarchical form turned out to be useful to differentiate each level and comprehend the rules that govern formation of phonemes, morphemes, lexemes and sentences. Awareness of each language strata is crucial for language educators and learners to apply language rules in real-life communication appropriately and promote meaningful communication between the speaker and listener. Further investigations are required to gain deeper insights in how language is used in different social contexts and how language items are collected and stored in corpus databases.

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