Categorization

- Categorization in its most general sense can be seen as a process of systematization of acquired knowledge. Each time we come across something new in our worlds—concrete entities, as well as abstract concepts—we try to accommodate it by assigning it to some category or other. This phenomenon is especially common in early childhood when children progressively acquaint themselves with the world around them.

- However, knowledge systematization in fact occurs throughout the lives of all human beings. Conceived in this way, as knowledge systematization, categorization is a cognitive process which allows human beings to make sense of the world by carving it up, in order for it to become more orderly and manageable for the mind.

category

- A class or division of people or things regarded as having particular shared characteristics (Oxford Dictionary).

- In linguistics categorization is of paramount importance. Language in its spoken form is no more than a stream of sounds, and traditionally linguistics has been concerned with the mapping of these sounds on to meaning. This process is mediated by syntax which is concerned with the segmentation of linguistic matter into units, namely categories of various sorts, and groupings of one or more of these categories into constituents. In present-day linguistics, it is safe to say, no grammatical framework can do without categories, however conceived.

- Categorization is no trivial matter. There is very little consistency or uniformity in the use of the term "category" in modern treatments of grammatical theory: different linguists have used wider or narrower definitions of what they regard as linguistic categories.

Conceptions of categorization in the history of linguistics

Throughout the history of grammar-writing, from antiquity onwards, the problem of setting up an adequate system of parts of speech has been paramount. For the Greeks the noun and the verb were primary. Adjectives were regarded by Plato and Aristotle as verbs.

- The word category (from Greek kate´goria) derives from Aristotle, and originally meant 'statement". Perhaps the oldest ideas on categorization were those of Aristotle, as expounded in his Metaphysics and The Categories. Aristotle held that a particular entity can be defined by listing a number of necessary and sufficient conditions that apply to it.

- As an example, consider Aristotle' s well-known definition of man as a 'two-footed animal":

Therefore, if it is true to say of anything that it is a man, it must be a two-footed animal; for this was what "man" meant; and if this is necessary, it is impossible that the same thing should not be a two-footed animal; for this is what being necessary means—that it is impossible for the thing not to be. It is, then, impossible that it should be at the same time true to say the same thing is a man and is not a man.

- In other words, a particular entity cannot at the same time be inside and outside a category. Associated with this view is what has been called *the all-or-none principle of categorization*, or The Law of the Excluded Middle, which holds that something must be either inside or outside a category, i.e. a particular entity must be either a man or not a man, it cannot be something in between.

- As has often been observed by many writers, the influence of the classical theory of categorization has been pervasive and long-lasting.

The linguistic tradition

- There has been a long tradition of classifying the elements of language into groupings of units, such as word classes, phrases and clauses. Indeed, for grammarians the concern has always been to set up taxonomy of the linguistic elements of particular languages, and to describe how they interrelate. Linguistic categorization, especially as far as the word classes, has been heavily influenced by the thinking of Aristotle.

APPROACHES

H. Sweet is a prominent English grammarian. His "New English Grammar, Logical and Historical" (1891) is an attempt of a descriptive grammar intended to break away from the canons of classical Latin grammar and to give scientific explanation to grammatical phenomena. His classification of parts of speech makes distinction between:

1) declinables:

- noun-words: nouns, noun-pronouns, noun-numerals, infinitives, gerunds;

- adjective-words: adjectives, adjective-pronouns, adjective-numerals, participles;

- verbs: finite verbs, verbals (infinitive, participle, gerund);

2) indeclinables (particles): adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjections.

- **Decline**
- *with object* (in the grammar of Latin, Greek, and certain other languages) state the forms of (a noun, pronoun, or adjective) corresponding to case, number, and gender.

- H. Sweet could not fully disentangle himself from the rules of classical grammar (Greek, Latin). That is why we can see that adjectives, numerals and pronouns, which in English have but a few formal markers, get into the group of "declinables".

- Ch. Fries's book "The Structure of English" (1952). Ch. Fries belongs to the American school of descriptive linguistics for which the starting point and basis of any linguistic analysis is the distribution of elements. In contrast to other representatives of that school, who excluded meaning from linguistic description, Fries recognized its importance. He introduced the notion of structural meaning as different from the lexical meaning of words. In his opinion, the grammar of the language consists of the devices that signal structural meanings.

- This principle is illustrated by means of linearly arranged nonce-words, the structural meaning of each evident from the form. As an example, Ch. Fries gives a verse from "Alice in Wonderland" (the signals are underlined):

  Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

  Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

  All mimsy were the borogoves,

  And the mome raths outgrabe…

Twas brillig, and the slithy toves

 Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;

 All mimsy were the borogoves,

 And the mome raths outgrabe…

- Any speaker of English, says Fries, will recognize the frames in which these words appear. So a part of speech, according to Ch. Fries, is a functional pattern. All the words which can occupy the same 'set of positions' in the pattern of English utterances must belong to same part of speech.

Cognitive linguistics

- Langacker (1987, p. 189) has the following to say about grammatical categories: Counter to received wisdom, I claim that basic grammatical categories such as noun, verb, adjective, and adverb are semantically definable. The entities referred to as nouns, verbs, etc. are symbolic units, each with a semantic and a phonological pole, but it is the former that determines the categorization. All members of a given class share fundamental semantic properties, and their semantic poles thus represent a single abstract schema subject to reasonably explicit characterization.

- Thus, a noun is regarded as a symbolic entity whose semantic characteristic is that it represents a schema, referred to as [THING]. Verbs designate processes, whereas adjectives and adverbs are said to designate a temporal relations (Langacker, 1987, p. 189).

- Combining the results from a large number of subjects allows the identification of the best examples of categories: these are typically referred to as the prototypes or prototypical members of the category.

- So, for instance, if the category was VEGETABLE, the ratings of various items (by British subjects) might be as follows:

- LEEK, CARROT 1
- BROCCOLI, PARSNIP 2
- CELERY, BEETROOT 3
- AUBERGINE, COURGETTE 4
- PARSLEY, BASIL 5
- RHUBARB 6
- LEMON 7

CATEGORIAL STRUCTURE OF THE WORD. GRAMMATICAL CLASSES OF WORDS.

- 1. The basic notions concerned with the analysis of the categorial structure of the word: grammatical category, opposition, paradigm. Grammatical meaning and means of its expression.

- 2. The theory of oppositions, types of oppositions: privative, gradual, equipollent; binary, ternary, etc. Oppositions in grammar.

- 3. The notion of oppositional reduction. Types of oppositional reduction: neutralization and transposition.

1. Notion of Opposition. Oppositions in Morphology

- The most general meanings rendered by language and expressed by systemic correlations of word-forms are interpreted in linguistics as categorial grammatical meanings. The forms rendering these meanings are identified within definite paradigmatic series.

- The grammatical category is a system of expressing a generalized grammatical meaning by means of paradigmatic correlation of grammatical forms. The ordered set of grammatical forms expressing a categorial function constitutes a paradigm. The paradigmatic correlations of grammatical forms in a category are exposed by grammatical oppositions which are generalized correlations of lingual forms by means of which certain functions are expressed.

- There exist three main types of qualitatively different oppositions: "privative", "gradual", "equipollent". By the number of members contrasted, oppositions are divided into binary and more than binary.

- The privative binary opposition is formed by a contrastive pair of members in which one member is characterized by the presence of a certain feature called the "mark", while the other member is characterized by the absence of this differential feature. The gradual opposition is formed by the degree of the presentation of one and the same feature of the opposition members. The equipollent opposition is formed by a contrastive group of members which are distinguished not by the presence or absence of a certain feature, but by a contrastive pair or group in which the members are distinguished by different positive (differential) features.

- The most important type of opposition in morphology is the binary privative opposition. The privative morphological opposition is based on a morphological differential feature which is present in its strong (marked) member and is absent in its weak (unmarked) member. This featuring serves as the immediate means of expressing a grammatical meaning, e.g. we distinguish the verbal present and past tenses with the help of the privative opposition whose differential feature is the dental suffix "-(e)d": "work II worked": "non-past (-) // past (+)".

- Gradual oppositions in morphology are not generally recognized; they can be identified as a minor type at the semantic level only, e.g. the category of comparison is expressed through the gradual morphological opposition: "clean//cleaner//cleanest".

- <u>Equipollent oppositions</u> in English morphology constitute a minor type and are mostly confined to formal relations. In context of a broader morphological interpretation one can say that the basis of morphological equipollent oppositions is <u>suppletivity</u>, i.e. the expression of the grammatical meaning by means of different roots united in one and the same paradigm, e.g. the correlation of the case forms of personal pronouns (she // her, he // him), the tense forms of the irregular verbs (go //went), etc.

1. Oppositional Reduction

In various contextual conditions, one member of an opposition can be used in the position of the other, counter-member. This phenomenon should be treated under the heading of "oppositional reduction" or "oppositional substitution". The first version of the term ("reduction") points out the fact that the opposition in this case is contracted, losing its formal distinctive force. The second version of the term ("substitution") shows the very process by which the opposition is reduced, namely, the use of one member instead of the other.

- *Man* conquers nature.

The noun *man* in the quoted sentence is used in the singular, but it is quite clear that it stands not for an individual person, but for people in general, for the idea of "mankind". In other words, the noun is used generically, it implies the class of denoted objects as a whole. Thus, in the oppositional light, here the weak member of the categorial opposition of number has replaced the strong member.

- Consider another example: Tonight we *start* for London.

The verb in this sentence takes the form of the present, while its meaning in the context is the future. It means that the opposition "present - future" has been reduced, the weak member (present) re placing the strong one (future).