

# Terminological unit

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# Points to discuss

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- Definition
- Types of terms
- Term formation



# Term

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A terminological unit (term),  
is a conventional symbol  
that represents a concept  
defined within a particular field of knowledge

# Term

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- its expression is a symbol
- it results from a convention
- its content is its most important trait
- the concept it represents is explicitly defined
- the description of a concept leads to the field of knowledge in which it occurs



# Term

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- occupy at a specific level (that of lexical units) within linguistic system
- are related to the other units on the same level
- are related to the units on the other levels with which they build the discourse

# Term

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can be analyzed from three points of view:

- **the formal** (the designation)
- **the semantic** (the concept)
- **the functional** (grammatical category and distribution)



# Designation

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Formally terms are phonological units  
that can be articulated phonetically  
(and represented graphically)

with an internal structure made up of morphemes

# Concept

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Semantically terms are units of reference to objects  
of the real world

and, as such, have a meaning

that can be described as a set of distinctive features



# Grammatical category and distribution

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Functionally terms are distributional units requiring a certain linguistic environment, and in discourse they are often found combined with other terms

# Term

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From the point of view of linguistic theory,  
terms are base-level phonological representations  
which have a phonetic form



# Term

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Morphologically,  
terms are structures of constituent morphemes  
which form the basis of their meaning

# Pronunciation and written form

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- the form of a term is considered a sequence of sounds or letters representing a phonological base form, in accordance with the rules governing the phonetics of the language
- a written form is represented in accordance with the orthographic conventions of each language



# Pronunciation and written form

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- **thermometer**

phonetic form [θə'mɒmɪtə]

written form thermometer

- **keystroke**

phonetic form [kiːstroʊk]

written form keystroke

- **bronchitis**

phonetic form [brɒŋ'kaɪtɪs]

written form bronchitis

# Pronunciation and written form

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- Phonetically, terms are not obviously different from words
- The written form of terms does not differ from that of words



# Morphology

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A term is a unit  
that can be broken up into separate elements  
and may be made up of smaller,  
identifiable and meaningful units  
known as morphemes

# Morphology

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lexical units are:

- simple if they contain only one morpheme
- complex if they have more than one morpheme
- The meaning of a compound unit is in principle the combination of the meanings of its constituent morphemes but this is not always the case



# Morphology

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Stems and affixes usually have one form;  
they may occur with variants  
(allomorphs or written variants)

# Types of terms

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Terms are generally classified by the criteria of

- form
- function
- meaning
- origin



# Form

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Terms are classified according to the criteria, which are not mutually exclusive:

**a. The number of constituent morphemes.**

- simple: *acid, molecule, niter, nimbus, enzyme, cell*
- complex: *acidification, intramolecular, nitrify, nimbostratus, enzymologist, cellular*

# Form

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terms are classified according to the following criteria, which are not mutually exclusive:

**b. The types of morphemes that play a role in forming a complex term.**

- derived words (formed by adjoining an affix to a lexical base): *ulcerous, illness, receiver, emotional,*
- compounds (combining lexical bases or a combining form and a lexical base, to which affixes can then be adjoined): *telephotography, transmission, antibody, Afro-Caribbean, countercyclical, inhuman, afterburner*



# Form

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terms are classified according to the following criteria, which are not mutually exclusive:

**c. Complex terms can be made up of a combination of words that follow a syntactic structure.** These structures - terminological phrases - are more frequent in terminology than in the general language lexicon:

*batch processing*

*optical character recognition*

*cardiopulmonary resuscitation*

*dilation and curettage*

# Form

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terms are classified according to the following criteria, which are not mutually exclusive:

d. Finally there are terms that appear to be simple, but upon further examination turn out to be complex: initialisms, acronyms, abbreviations, and short forms, all of which are examples of truncation processes



# Initialisms

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units made up of the combination of the initials of a longer expression

- **MIT** Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- **CIA** Central Intelligence Agency
- **WHO** World Health Organization

# Initialisms

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can be phonetically realized in different ways:

- it can be pronounced as a word:

**GUI** ['gu:i:] (graphical user interface)

**RAM** [ræm] (random-access memory)

**PET** [pet] (positron emission tomography)



# Initialisms

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- it can be pronounced by reading the letters:

**UFO** (unidentified flying object)

**AC** (alternating current)

**UPI** (United Press International)

# Initialisms

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- the above two possibilities may be combined:

**CD-ROM** (compact disc read-only memory)



# Acronyms

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words formed by combining segments  
from a developed phrase  
which are pronounced syllabically

# Acronyms

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- they can combine the initial segments of the first and second elements of the phrase:

**Amex**      American stock exchange

**hazmat**      hazardous material

**FORTRAN**      formula translator

**COMSAT**      communications satellite



# Acronyms

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- they can combine the initial segment of the first element and the final segment of the second:

**bit**      binary digit

# Abbreviations

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Forms that are usually established by consensus. They reproduce a part of a word and practically act as a symbol for the word:

**vol** volume

**l** liter

**3rd** third



# short forms / clippings

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Used to make discourse more economic. They are based on using the first part of a longer word, or the first word of a phrase:

**super**          superintendent

**hypo**          hypodermic syringe

**hyper**          hyperactive

**macro**          macroinstruction

# Function

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Terms can be classified  
into various functional groups:  
nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs



# Meaning

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Terms can be classified by the class of concepts they designate.

Concepts can be grouped into classes and subclasses in accordance with the features they share and the relationships they have with one another.

# Meaning

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four major conceptual classes are identified:

- objects or entities
- processes, operations, actions
- properties, states, qualities
- relationships



# Meaning

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Each one of these classes of concepts is expressed by a particular functional class

- objects or entities - nouns
- processes, operations, actions - verbs, nominalizations of verbs
- properties, states, qualities - adjectives
- relationships - adjectives, verbs, prepositions

# Meaning

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Each conceptual system is a structure that can cover several classes of concepts:

- objects (*car, airplane, helicopter, ferry, etc.*)
- properties of these concepts (*visual, auditory, perceivable, material, shared, etc.*)
- relationships (*equivalent, subordinate, derived, etc.*)
- operations (*weld, solder, dissolve, etc.*)



# Linguistic origin

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terms can be

- created by means of applying the rules of the language itself (derivation and conversion)
- borrowed from another code or subcode

# Linguistic origin

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different types of borrowing, depending on the code from which the borrowed units comes:

- loan words from Greek or Latin, often called **neoclassical borrowings**
- loan words from another, contemporary language, i.e. **true borrowings**
- loan words from other geographic or social dialects, or other subject fields from the same language, which are usually not considered borrowings



# Linguistic origin

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We often find

- neoclassical words consisting of formatives from both Latin and Greek: *bigamy, pluviometer, tripod, mammography*
- words combining a neoclassical formative with an English formative: *infrared, lumpectomy, microwave*

# Linguistic origin

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In English blending of the first syllable(s) of one term and the final syllable of another is used to create terms that sound neoclassical:

- *ballute* (*balloon*+*parachute*)
- *electrocute* (*electro*+*execute*)
- *tangelo* (*tangerine*+*pomelo*)



# Linguistic origin

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Scientific and technological transfer is the most frequent cause behind the high number of borrowed terms from a language in which the product or idea was created.

English terms widely used in other languages: *camping*, *cashflow*, *compact disc*, *mouse*

# Linguistic origin

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Once a borrowing has been fully accepted by the importing language, it can generate derived words that follow the morphological rules of this language:

- **Blitzkrieg** (from German) blitz(verb)
- **Karate** (from Japanese) karateist
- **Machine** (from French) machinist, machine(verb)



# Linguistic origin

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In many cases borrowings are unnecessary because most languages have enough resources to create their own terms.

- **hoi polloi** - (common people)
- **terra incognita** (uncharted territory)
- **opus** (work)

# Term formation

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New terms that are the result of a formation process are usually classified according to the strategy speakers have used to create them.

These strategies can be formal, functional, or semantic in nature.



# Formal methods

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- the combination of morphemes and words, including derivation, compounding, and creation of phrases
- the formal modification of existing units by means of truncation processes, including initialisms, acronyms, and clipping

# Formal methods

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**Derivation** - addition of affixes to lexical bases to form new words

Prefixing, suffixing, and mixed cases in which both a prefix and a suffix are added to the same base:

- - prefixation: *reopen, untie*
- - suffixation: *processor, transmitter*
- - prefixation + suffixation: *unconstitutional, disarmament*



# Formal methods

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**Compounding** – combination of two or more lexical bases for creation a new lexeme. Three types of combination are used:

- combination of native contemporary forms: *greengrocer, roadsweeper*
- combination of neoclassical forms: *electrolyte, lysosome*
- combination of contemporary and neoclassical forms: *bio-science, megacity*

# Formal methods

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**The use of phrasal units** – formation of a new unit from the organized syntactic combination of words

- *random access memory*
- *magnetic resonance imagery*



# Formal methods

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**Truncation** – reduction of a unit to one of its parts. It includes the formation of initialisms, acronyms, and clippings.

- - **initialisms** are abbreviated complex terms made up of the first letters of the term element:

**FBI** (Federal Bureau of Investigation)  
Union)

**EU** (European

**IOC** (International Olympic Committee)

# Formal methods

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**Truncation** – reduction of a unit to one of its parts. It includes the formation of initialisms, acronyms, and clippings.

- - **acronymy**: ALGOL(algorithmic language); bit(binary digit)
- - **clipping**: jumbo(jumbo jetliner), narc(narcotics agent)



# Functional methods

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**Conversion or zero derivation** - changing the category of an existing word without changing its form

- *record* (verb)    *record* (noun)
- *pigeon hole* (verb)    *pigeon hole* (noun)

# Functional methods

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**Lexicalization** – conversion of one of the inflected forms of a lexeme into a new word with a different grammatical category

- VERB            NOUN
- *harden*        *hardening*
- *weld*            *welding*



# Semantic methods

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modify the meaning of a term

# Semantic methods

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Two prime criteria are used to classify the terms that result from this kind of formation process:

- provenance of the base form
- type of semantic modification produced in the process



# Semantic methods

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By provenance of the base form,  
the two most frequent sources are  
the general language lexicon and  
the terminology of other special subject

# Semantic methods

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b. **Modification** takes one of three forms:

- extending the meaning of the base form
- **pin** (straight piece of wire with a sharp point)
- **pin** (pegs on a printer platen engaging holes at the edges of paper)



# Semantic methods

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b. **Modification** takes one of three forms:

- narrowing the meaning of the base form
- **printer** (one or something that prints)
- **printer** (the part of a computer system that produces printed matter)

# Semantic methods

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b. **Modification** takes one of three forms:

- changing the meaning of the base form
  - **washer** (one who washes, extended to appliances)
  - **washer** (flat disk used to relieve friction, prevent leakage, or distribute weight)



# Term formation

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Beside the formal, functional, and semantic methods, all languages also have other ways of creating new terms

Borrowing and

loan translation or calquing incorporate units that belong to one language code into another

# Term formation

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- Borrowings - taking over a word or expression with its spelling: *hors d'oeuvre, coup d'état*
- Loan translations - translating the components of a foreign word:
  - *wintergreen* (English, from Dutch *wintergreen*)
  - *rascacielos* (Spanish, from English *skyscraper*)