

Based on David Crystal *English*

Lingua 1967 (24–56). North-Holland Publishing Co., Amsterdam

major binary divisions in E words: at least 4 *dichotomies*

- a. **Variable** – **Invariable**
- b. **Full** – **Empty**
- c. **Lexical** – **Grammatical**
- d. **Open** – **Closed**

commonly believed:

(1) their definition self-evident, and

(2) – more worryingly – parallelism btw them (b–c–d):

even: **F/L/O** on the one hand, and **E/G/C** on the other, are often treated as synonymous

whereas in reality:

(a) Var vs Invar (= inflectional vs non-inflectional)

clearly *distinct* from others

Var: Ns, Vs, As, Pronouns, a few Advs

problems:

- within Var group: many different types of inflection; many *degrees* of variability
- within Invar group: little *internal coherence*
- within Var group: minor/concrete problems:
Ns as such e.g. are Var, but some not – NC Ns “cut off from the main class”

Var/Invar: neither of the two has coherence supported by *other independent* criteria

(b) Full (content) vs Empty

– empty means “no meaning”? words w/o meaning?

– rigid division: misleading; way to quantify the *degrees* of fullness?

be, to, there, it perhaps empty in *some* of their uses

– if this is to be kept at all, then a scale/cline must be set up between these poles:

how many slots on the continuum?

(c) Lexical vs Grammatical (or form Word / function Word / *functor*)

usu taken to parallel Full vs Empty; are they mutually exclusive?

problem: lexical must be seen as *incompatible* w grammatical – but the dichotomy is *unreal* at both ends

7 criteria usu suggested for definition of grammatical words:

1. phonological: majority have weak stress

problem: such words *do* get str: **I DO like it**; *do* have full form: Prep’s at end of sentences
e.g. **some**: is stressed & unstressed, in 2 mngs:

some people hate music [ironic **some friends!**] vs **give me some bread**

2. grammatical words small, and finite (countable, not open-ended)

Prepositions where?

– are there complex Ps? **on account of, in accordance with** – these shade off into nominal groups
(**on top of** is taken to be P in many sources, but **on the top of** is a Nominal group)

3. relatively permanent, do not have continuous growth

4. meaning of grammatical words only demonstratable by exemplifying their *use* in sentences

5. grammatical words are those about which statements of their use have to be made *individually*: they are *unique* in most respects
6. form words *may often* be omitted with a *slight* change in the form of the sentence – or in translation: **man of honour – honourable man; the earth is round – L. terra rotunda** (i.e. **est**)
7. most of them transcend distinctions in register: *all* varieties of English can exemplify their use

(d) Open class/sets – Closed systems/sets

again, runs partially parallel to **b:** and **c:**

CLASS = ? SET = ? SYSTEM = ? GROUP = ?

system = *organized* complex of finite (small? how small is small?) number of *interrelated* components/members: components have *stability of function* (clearly definable +or– value) which is not found in classes/sets

- in language, “system” seems hold for really small classes:
 - with personal pronouns, articles, determiners, the contrasts are clear
 - no synonymy (!)
 - stability – but in other/bigger group this is not true

open-set words: supposedly

- potentially infinite in number
 - display synonymy
 - can have changes in number (i.e. additions)
 - can have changes in meanings of single/individual words *without* this affecting the whole
- problematic: in open classes there are often also interdependencies between words:
lexical *subsystems* such as: numerals, months, colours, kinship terms etc

conclusion:

these four pairs are not as helpful/valuable/fundamental as has been implied by the frequency of their use

add

BESE

(e) thematic — functional — neither (underspecified)

basis: can be predicate

can be: N **wine, tourist**

cannot be: D **the, some**

N **bottle, group** – underspecified

Try and see where Ps belong under (a)–(d) — or (a)–(e) if you are familiar with *BESE* (Newson et al 2006)