



Algeo, Chapter 1

The Key Concepts of Language Study

How do we approach language study?

- This class will use “descriptive” methods—that is, we will attempt to describe language as it is (or was) used and practiced by native speakers. Essentially thinking like linguists—new frame of reference for many of you.
- There can also be a “prescriptive” approach—that is, saying how language SHOULD appear, sound, be used, etc. When we get to chapters 7 and later, you’ll learn more about it.

Key Terms part 1: Systems, Signs, & Signals

Language	Phonology	Morphology	Orthography
Speech	Phoneme	Free vs. bound	Graphemes
Script		Lexical (lexis, vocabulary)	Allographs
Descriptive vs. Prescriptive	Duality of patterning (Meaning-ful vs. meaning-less)	Grammatical (elements & signals): parts of speech & inflectional signals	Glyphs, signs, characters, letters, majescale (capitals), miniscule (lower-case), logographs (e.g. numbers), punctuation
Whorfian Hypothesis	Allophones	Allomorphs	Syllables
Openness	Homophones		Homographs
Displacement			Transliteration

What do we mean by phonemes?

- The smallest recognizable unit of sound in a language
- Different ways of pronouncing that same unit are called “allophones” (there’s a range in which they can occur before we recognize them as different sounds): ‘potato’ vs ‘po-tah-to’ but ‘fire/far’...

What do we mean by phonemes?--2

- Phonemes are in *free variation*—we can leave a phoneme out and still know it's there: “truckin’” or “car-mel” for “caramel”
- Sometimes the same sound can be used for different signals. (See chapter 2)

Phonemes are about **sounds**...

- Some of those sounds are meaning-less (like the /ər/ in “color”)
- Some of the sounds are meaning-full (like the /əs/ in a word like “waitress”)
- But when we talk about sounds, we’re generally not talking about meaning—
homonyms, homophones

What do we mean by morphemes?

- The smallest recognizable unit of meaning—may be composed of more than one sound
- Again, there may be different ways of representing a morpheme—allomorphs for plural, for instance

Morphemes are about **meaning**

- We talk about *free* morphemes (those that have meaning and stand on their own) like “wait” and *bound* morphemes (those that can’t stand on their own, like the –er in “waiter”)
- Some morphemes are *lexical* (sometimes called “roots”), while others are *inflectional* (prefixes, suffixes, infixes) (See chapter 2)

What do we mean by inflections?

- Phoneme or morpheme used to convey semantic information (gender, number, case, tense)
- Modern English has multiple **allomorphs** for a small number of inflectional morphemes; don't get confused!

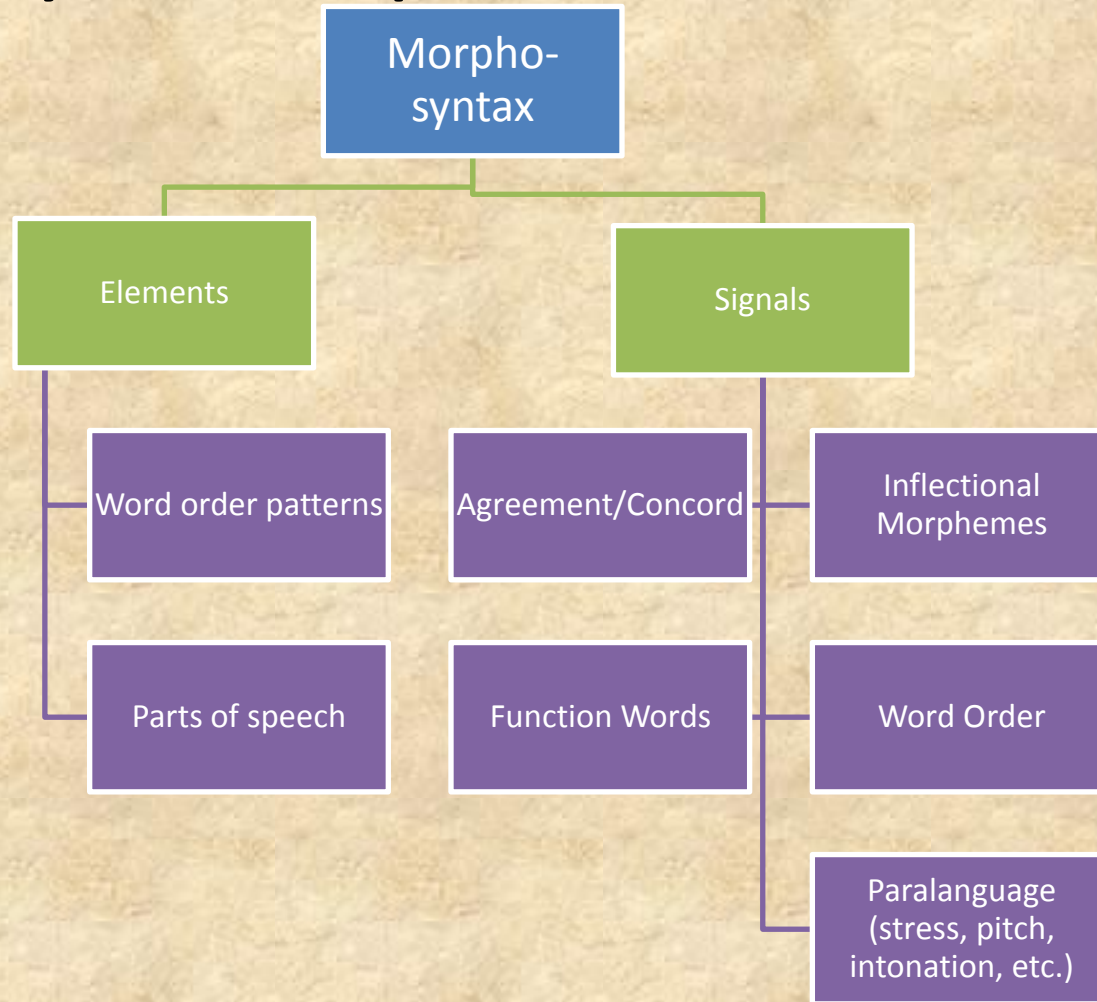
ModEng only has 8 inflectional morphemes....

- s^1 : 3rd person singular
- s^2 : plural
- s^3 : possessive
- ed^1 : past tense
- ed^2 : past participle
- ing : present participle
- er : comparative degree
- est : superlative degree

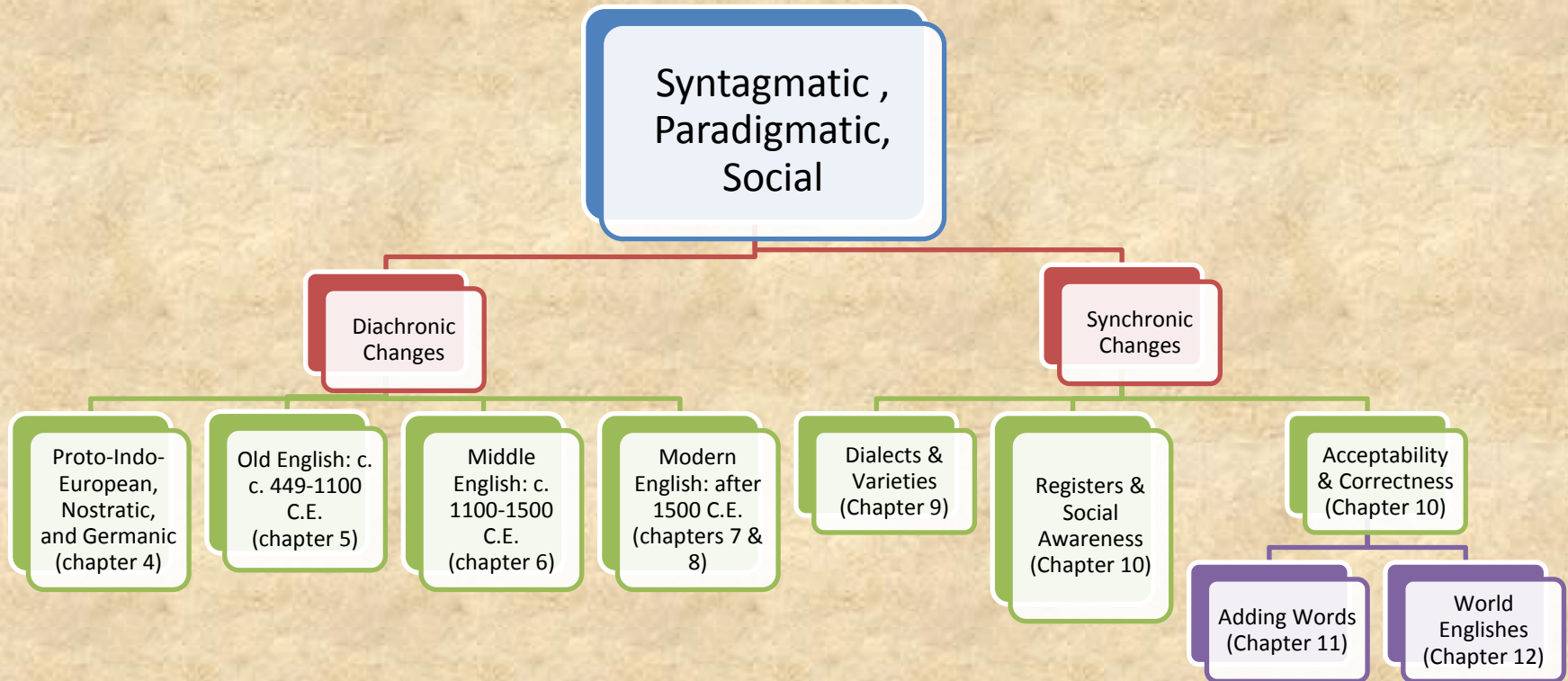
What do we mean by orthography?

- A system for **writing down the sounds** of a language
- Uses a **conventional set** of symbols—pictures, letters, numbers, etc.—to represent that language’s particular sound system
- May be phonetic (represent sounds) or conceptual (representing ideas, things, etc.)—see chapter 3
- We often rely on **context** to determine what a written word means: “Read me a story” vs. “Last night he read me a story.”

Key Terms part 2: Conventions



Key Terms part 3: Patterns of Change (Algeo's organizational structure)



Key Terms part 4: Origins

- **Whorfian hypothesis**
 - “Strong version”: our view of the world is determined by our language
 - “Weak version”: our view of the world is influenced by our language
 - J. Fishman, 1982, “3rd Version”: Language is a key to culture



“We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way—an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language.” — Benjamin Lee Whorf, 1956



Other characteristics of human language

- Language is *open*: we can use it to describe new things
- Language allows *displacement*: we can use it to say things that aren't true



For next time:

- Book club choices due
- Start working on learning International Phonetic Alphabet and ways to describe the SOUNDS of consonants in Edited American English

