

## Form and Function—or—How to think like a linguist

The main job that a linguist does is to look for patterns in language and then to find ways of describing them. You notice that linguists love to use specialized terminology to speak to each other about their observations and discoveries. They document the language by asking Elders to help them by laying down words, phrases, and texts. And then they analyze them. This is called language documentation and analysis and the main goal is to write a grammar of the language.

When you write a grammar of a language, one job is to find each meaningful piece of the language and give it a descriptive label (e.g. *noun*, *verb*, *prefix*, *suffix*, *person marker*). These analyses are like breadcrumbs for others to follow when they are trying to make sense out of the language—whether they are learners or fluent speakers.

Here's an example of how a linguist thinks

Observe the following words:

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
qwal	speak, talk	sqwal	word, language
t'ilum	sing	st'ilum	song
yaays	work	syaays	work, job
'ulhtun	eat	s'ulhtun	food
t'i'wi'ulh	pray	st'i'wi'ulh	prayer
ts'uy'hw	dry	sts'uy'hw	dry, smoked salmon
pun'um	plant, sow	spun'um	seed, something planted

Linguists think in terms of *same* and *different*. We need to study the words in Column A and see if they are the *same* in some way. Ditto with Column B. And then we need to compare the words in Column A and Column B and see if they are *different*.

By observing the words in column A and column B you can figure out that the words in column B have an extra piece that the words in Column A lack. In particular, you see that each word in Column B starts with an *s*. That is your observation. Now let's make an analysis.

Linguistics like to think in terms of FORM and FUNCTION. In terms of *form* (how it looks), we see that the piece in question is *s*, and more over it comes at the beginning of the word. So in terms of form, we say that it is a **prefix**.

To understand its *function* (what effect it has on the meaning; what role it plays), we need to compare the meanings of the words in Column A and Column B. Looking down Column A, we see that all of these words express actions a person does. In linguistic terms, these words are VERBS. In contrast, the words in Column B all refer to things (either concrete objects or abstract entities). These are NOUNS (name of a person, place, or thing). And in particular, we see that the words in Column B are the nouns that are related to the actions in Column A, usually the noun results when the verb is performed, or it is the thing you need in order to do the action.

So the linguistic analysis of *s-* is:  
 FORM: *s-* is a prefix that can be attached to a verb.  
 FUNCTION: *s-* forms the noun that relates with the action of that verb.  
*s-* is a *noun prefix* or a *nominalizer*.

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Now it's your turn to try. Describe what you learn by observing the following words:

**PROBLEM SET 14: practicing–form and function**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
kwumluhw	root	tskwumluhw	get roots
tl'uxwtl'uxw	oyster	tstl'uxwtl'uxw	get oysters
poukw	book	tspoukw	have a book
mun'u	child, offspring	tsmun'u	have a child, give birth
huy'qwoon'	lamp, light	tshuy'qwoon'	have lights
situn	basket	tssitun	make a basket
sta'lus	spouse	tsta'lus	get a spouse, have a spouse
syalh	firewood	tsyalh	gather firewood
swetu	sweater	tswetu	make a sweater
snuhwulh	canoe	tsnuhwulh	make a canoe

**PROBLEM SET 15: time for a break**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
chumux	pitch, chewing gum	lhchumux	chew gum
qa'	water	lhqa'	drink water
ti	tea	lhti	drink tea
kapi	coffee	lhkapi	drink coffee
suplil	bread	lhsuplil	eat bread
sp'atl'um	smoke, cigarette	lhp'atl'um	to smoke a cigarette

**PROBLEM SET 16: time for a change**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
kw'am'kw'um'	strong	hwukw'am'kw'um'	get strong
hwutus	heavy	hwuhwutus	get heavy
q'aq'i'	sick	hwuq'aq'i'	get sick
'uhwin'	small	hwu'uhwin'	become small
swiw'lus	young man, teenage boy	hwuswiw'lus	become a young man
si'em'	respected	hwusi'em'	become important
shne'um	shaman	hwushne'um'	become a shaman

**PROBLEM SET 17: get it done**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
luxwut	cover it	luxwtun	blanket
xul'ut	write it	xul'tun	pencil, pen
lhulut	bail it out	lhultun	bailer
tth'um'q't	snip the end off	tth'um'q'tun	scissors
lhits'ut	slice it	lhuts'tun	cutter; saw
lhikw'ut	hook it	lhukw'tun	gaff hook
p'etth'ut	sew it	p'utth'tun	needle
shiput	cut along it	shuptun	knife
tth'isut	nail it	tth'ustun	nail
xwaqw'ut	pole a canoe upstream	xwuqw'tun	canoe pole

**PROBLEM SET 18: all for one, and one for all**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
hwulmuhw	First Nations person	ts'lhwmuhw	tribesmen
q'uq'a'tul'	meeting each other	ts'lhq'uq'a'tul'	people attending a meeting
teyuwulh	modern racing canoe	ts'htuyuwulh	crew
xixul'ux	fighting a war	ts'lhixul'ux	comrade in arms
hiw'a'lum'tul'	playing together	ts'lhhiw'a'lum'tul'	playmate
xeem'	weeping	ts'lhxeem'	mourners
yay'us	working	ts'lhay'us	workmates

**PROBLEM SET 19: all year round**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
xuytl'	cold	tum'xuytl'	winter
kw'e'lus	warm	tum'kw'e'lus	summer
kw'a'luhw	dog salmon'	tum'kw'a'luhw	season of dogsalmon/ November
sqw'i'lus	ripe berries	tum'qw'i'lus	time of the ripe berries' (July)
speenhw	camas	tun'peenhw	when camas blooms' (May)
stem	what	tum'tem	when

**PROBLEM SET 20: who's on first?**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
nuts'a'	one	snuts'a's	first place
lhihw	three	slhihws	third, Wednesday
xu'athun	four	sxu'athuns	fourth, Thursday
lhq'etsus	five	slhq'etsuss, slhq'etsusth	fifth, Friday
kw'in	how many?	skw'ins	what day? what place in race

**PROBLEM SET 21: living things**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
smuyuth	deer	smuyuthallh	fawn
mousmus	cow	mousmusallh	calf
spe'uth	bear	spe'uthallh	bear cub
ma'uqw	duck	ma'uqwallh	duckling
swuy'qe'	man	swuy'qe'allh	young man
slheni'	woman	slheni'allh	young lady
sqwumey'	dog	sqwumey'allh	puppy
sqwiqwmi'	little dog, puppy	sqwiqwmi'al'lh	little puppy

**PROBLEM SET 22: working away**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
qwal's	boiling	shqwal's	pot
xut'ukw'	carving	shxut'ukw'	wood-carving knife
tushul'qun'	carding wool	shtushul'qun'	carder
t'umuw'ulh	adze a canoe	sht'umuw'ulh	adze-like mattock
p'ep'utth'ul's	sewing	shp'ep'utth'ul's	sewing machine
qequluts'	spinning wool	shqequluts'	spinning machine
kw'am'kw'um'	strong	shkw'am'kw'um'	something that gives strength

**PROBLEM SET 23: I'm a little teapot.**

Column A	translation	Column B	translation
lem	liquour	shlumelu	bottle
hwayum	sell	shhwimelu	store
sqw'ulesh	bird	shqw'ul'eshelu	bird nest
qa'	water	shqa'elu	water bottle
shoukwu	sugar	shoukwu'elu	sugar bowl
ti	tea	shtihelu	teapot
telu	money	shtulelu	purse, wallet
patun	cloth	shputunelu	mast
sp'atl'um	smoke	shp'utl'umelu	stovepipe
tsmekw'e'	hold a funeral	shmukw'elu	graveyard