

Defining Things

A few lesson ago, we learned how we can describe things by putting them into groups with other, similar things. This is called an **Indistinct Quality**.

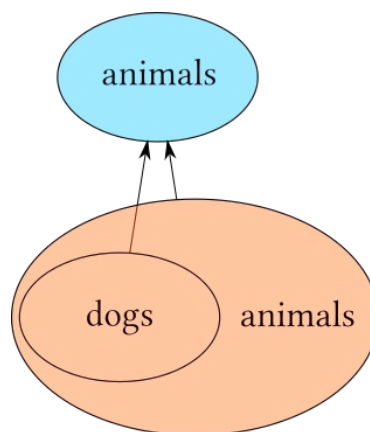
This leads us to another question though. If the different things in a group are similar, exactly *how* are they similar? For instance, we know that English Setters and Golden Retrievers are both “dogs”, but what does it mean *to be* a “dog”?

Well, for any of our **Qualities** to have any meaning at all, they must have some kind of **Definition**. This **Definition** is simply *another* list of **Qualities**, called **Defining Qualities**.

Defining Qualities

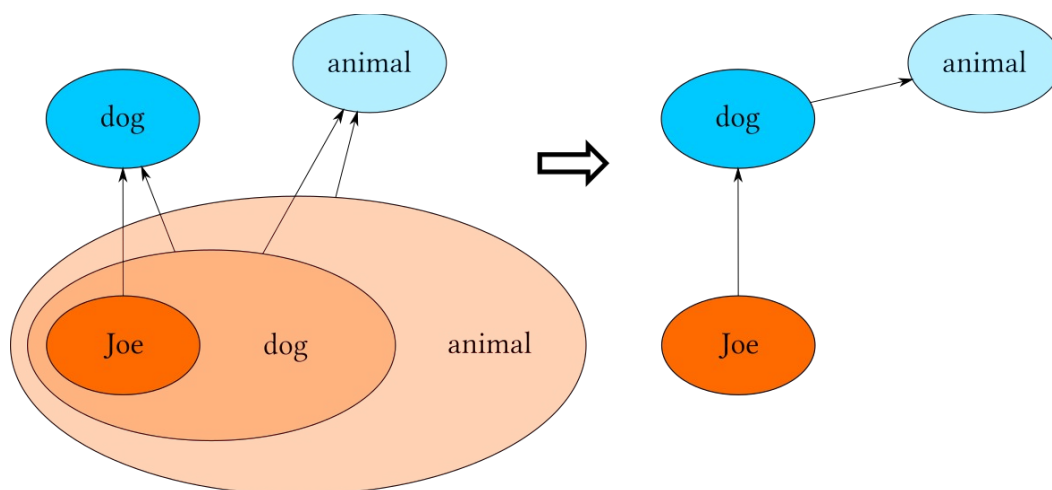
A **Defining Quality** is a special type of **Indistinct Quality** that only connects an **Indistinct Referent** to another **Indistinct Referent**.

Connecting **Indistinct Referents** is an essential part of defining things. For example, if we say that “all dogs are animals, by definition”, what we really mean is that the entire “dogs” **Indistinct Referent** is a part of the larger “animals” **Indistinct Referent**.



This *connection* between the two **Indistinct Referents** is the **Defining Quality**. Just like any other **Indistinct Quality**, we are using it to put something into a group. The thing that makes **Defining Qualities** special is, when we put an **Indistinct Referent** inside another one, we not only giving information about that smaller **Referent**, we are giving information about the **Naming Quality** for that **Referent**. That means anything we can say about the **Indistinct Referent** is also part of the *definition* of the **Indistinct Quality**.

For instance, when you say “Joe is my dog”, we automatically know that Joe is an animal too, because that is one of the Defining Qualities of the “dogs” Indistinct Quality.



The first diagram shows all three Referents, as well as the two Qualities that connect them together. The second diagram Internalizes both Indistinct Referents, simply saying that Joe has the “dog” Quality, which carries the “animal” Quality with it.

We look for Defining Qualities intuitively whenever we learn a new term. Either we get the term’s Definition, which is little more than a list of Defining Qualities, or we can look at examples of things that have the Quality, and try to find further Qualities that are generally true of those things. For instance, when a child sees that “these are dogs” and “those are not dogs”, they will instinctively look for Qualities that are true of dogs, but not true of similar things that are not dogs.

Vocabulary Items & Constructed Items

A language’s Vocabulary includes all the Grammatical Elements (Words, Phrases, Clauses, and Morphemes) that have a specific meaning, which is *not* simply the sum of its parts. One of these Grammatical Elements can be called a Vocabulary Item.

- Ex. I’m cleaning the pigpen, so I’m in deep poo-poo now. <-- Not a Vocabulary Item
 Ex. I didn’t study for the test, so I’m in deep poo-poo now. <-- A Vocabulary Item

The first example of “in deep poo-poo” has a specific meaning, but this meaning comes logically, by combining the words of the Phrase according to regular grammar rules. I call this a Constructed Meaning, and I call the Grammatical Element itself a Constructed Item. There are an infinite number of Constructed Items possible in every language, just like there are an infinite number of things we can build with our legos.

The second example of “in deep poo-poo” also has a specific meaning, but this meaning has nothing to do with actual poo-poo. In other words, the meaning is not derived from

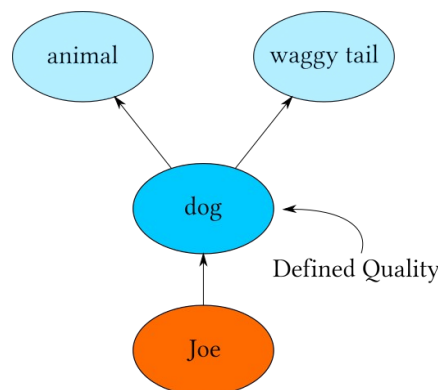
regular grammar rules, but instead is unpredictable and must be learned. I call this a **Vocabulary Meaning**, and I call the **Grammatical Element** itself a **Vocabulary Item**. Every language has a *limited* number of **Vocabulary Items**, just like there are a limited number of individual lego pieces in each of our collections.

Constructed Items and **Vocabulary Items** can be grouped together as **Meaningful Items**. All **Meaningful Items** will, of course, have some meaning, which we call a **Definition**.

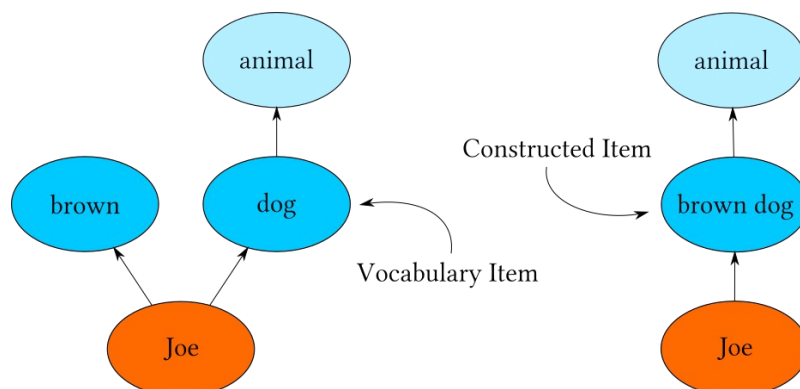
Building a Definition

A **Definition** is a list of **Qualities** that follow naturally from some other **Quality**. By “follow naturally”, I mean that these other **Qualities** either *must* be true, or *may* be true, as a result of the first **Quality**.

For instance, if Joe has the “dog” **Quality**, it follows that he *must* be an animal, and he *may* have a waggy tail. (Some breeds are born without a tail, while others lose their tails due to accident or abuse.) These two “natural result” **Qualities** are what we call **Defining Qualities**. The first **Quality** can then be called the **Defined Quality**, regardless of whether it is a **Distinct**, **Indistinct**, or **Defining Quality** itself.



Traditional grammar tends to reserve the term “**Definition**” to describe only the meaning of **Vocabulary Items**, but there isn’t really much difference between the meaning of a **Vocabulary Item** and the meaning of a **Constructed Item**.



The Defining Quality “animal” is part of the Definition of “dog”, as well as part of the Definition of “brown dog”. The only difference between the two is that the Definition of “dog” is in the dictionary, while the Definition of “brown dog” is not.

Determining a Quality

Part of the job of Defining Qualities is to *determine* whether a Defined Quality actually applies or not. I call this Determining a Quality. If some important Defining Quality is not present, then the Defined Quality is not the case. For instance, a sandwich isn't really a sandwich without bread. If I said I wanted a turkey sandwich without bread, you might say “That's not really a sandwich then, is it?”

The Defining Qualities that *must* be true are called Absolute Qualities, while the Defining Qualities that *may* be true are called Associated Qualities. So “bread” would be an Absolute Quality of sandwiches, while mayo would be an Associated Quality. All Defined Qualities have a combination of Absolute and Associated Qualities.

Subjective & Objective Qualities

Some Defining Qualities cannot be clearly marked as Absolute or Associated, because people will disagree over them. We can call these Subjective Qualities. Qualities that are *easy* to mark as either Absolute or Associated can be called Objective Qualities. Basically, if everyone would agree that a certain Defining Quality is Absolute, it is Objective. If some say it's Absolute and others say it's Associated, it is Subjective.

For instance, an animal is either a dog or it's not. There is no middle ground. This can be determined by looking for Associated Qualities that are only true of dogs, but ultimately you are only using those Qualities to rule out other animals. In the end, what you are *really* looking to determine is that it's *a living creature*, and *part of the species Canis lupus familiaris*. Not only are these Absolute Qualities, but they are universally agreed upon as the Definition of the “dog” Quality by the entire human race (regardless of the word we use for it). So these are *very* Objective Qualities, because everyone in the world agrees on them.

On the other hand, there is no hard line that says when something definitely *is* a “party”. There are some things that are definitely *not* parties, but no clearly dividing line that marks when something definitely *is* a party. First let's look at how we can rule out things that are definitely *not* parties.

For something to be called a party, it *must* be “a gathering of people”, by definition. A cheeseburger is *not* a gathering of people, therefore it could *never* be mistaken for a party. This is an **Absolute Quality**, because it *absolutely must* be true, or the “party” **Quality** cannot apply. And since *everyone agrees* that it is an **Absolute Quality**, it is also a **Objective Quality**. We could even call it an **Objectively Absolute Quality**.

But beyond the **Absolute Quality** of “a gathering of people”, it is *not* completely clear and **Objective** what **Qualities** definitively make something a party. Is there a minimum number of people who must be present for a gathering to be called “a party”? Does there have to be music, dancing, and refreshments? Should there be some kind of celebration involved? Some will say these **Qualities** are optional, making them **Associated Qualities**, but others might say they are required, making them **Absolute Qualities**. These are **Subjective Qualities**, because people *disagree* about whether they are required (**Absolute**) or optional (**Associated**).

For instance, some may say that music is required for a party, making it a **Subjectively Absolute Quality**. Others may say that music is optional, making it a **Subjectively Associated Quality**.

Whether or not a gathering has the **Absolute Qualities** to be deserving of the title “party” will be based on the **Indistinct Referent** held in the memory of each different person. If someone has been to lots of three or four-person gatherings that were called “parties”, they are more likely to call your three-person gathering a “party”, because those small parties are what they use to define the term. On the other hand, someone who has only been to *large* parties might *not* think of your three-person gathering as “a party”. That said, if *you* call it a party, the “large party person” may *change* their definition of the word “party”, at least when they are around you, because they will realize you define parties differently than they do.

I refer to **Definitions** whose **Absolute Qualities** are all **Objective** (universally agreed upon) as **Precise Definitions**; and **Definitions** that include **Absolute Qualities** which are **Subjective** (not universally agreed upon) as **Imprecise**. So the “dog” **Quality** has a **Precise Definition**, while the “party” **Quality** has an **Imprecise Definition**.

Keep in mind that **Imprecise Definitions** are not any less useful than **Precise Definitions**. For instance, it’s impossible to say when the color orange ends and the color red begins, but that doesn’t mean colors don’t exist. We just have to keep in mind that some **Qualities** fundamentally cannot be the same for everyone, and may require adjustment depending on who you’re talking to.

Definitionally Determining vs. Logically Determining

In the last section, I talked about how we can “determine” that a Quality exists. What I meant in that section is how we determine whether a Quality is true *by definition*. I was *not* talking about logic or detective work here. I am only talking about checking the Quality against its Definition, to see if the Definition applies. That means only checking the Absolute Qualities, because they are the things that *must* be true in order for the Defined Quality to be true. Let’s call this a Definitional Determination.

If we were *detectives*, we may also use Associated Qualities and more creative *logic* to determine if a Defined Quality were true. For instance, a waggy tail, which is an Associated Quality of dogs, could be used *logically* to decide that something is most likely a dog. However from a *definitional* standpoint, “waggy tail” does not *equal* “dog”. “Animal of the species canine” *equals* dog. These are the Absolute Qualities we use to Definitionally Determine the “dog” Quality. When we instead use Associated Qualities and *logic* to determine if we *think* a Quality is true, we can call it a Logical Determination.

Typical & Atypical Qualities

So we have seen that Defining Qualities can be divided into Absolute and Associated Qualities. In addition to this, Associated Qualities can be divided into Typical or Atypical Qualities; though this is more of a sliding scale.

Defining Qualities	Absolute Qualities	
	Associated Qualities	Typical ... somewhat Typical ... Atypical

For instance, nearly all dogs like head pats, so we can call it a Typical Quality. Only *some* dogs bite, so we can call it an Atypical Quality. As you can imagine, just because a Quality is Atypical doesn’t mean it’s unimportant. Even if only one dog in twenty bite, it’s still enough to make you wary of any new dog you meet.

~~~ Review ~~~

Today we learned the following terms:

Vocabulary ~ All the **Grammatical Elements** in a language that have specific meanings, which are *not* simply the sum of their parts. A single one of these **Grammatical Elements** is called a **Vocabulary Item**.)

Grammatical Elements ~ The spoken or written components that form the main building blocks of a language. Consists of **Words, Phrases, Clauses, & Morphemes**.

Meaningful Item ~ A **Grammatical Element** with a specific meaning. Could either be a **Vocabulary Item** or a **Constructed Item**.

Constructed Meaning ~ A specific meaning of a **Grammatical Element**, which is created logically by taking the meaning of its constituent **Grammatical Elements**, and applying regular grammar rules. (Ex. “a” + “brown” + “dog” = “a brown dog”)

Constructed Item ~ A **Grammatical Element** with a **Vocabulary Meaning**.

Vocabulary Meaning ~ A specific meaning of a **Grammatical Element**, which is *not* simply the sum of its parts, and cannot be determined logically. Instead it must be already known in order to understand. (Ex. “get up” is not simply “get” plus “up”.)

Vocabulary Item ~ A **Grammatical Element** with a **Vocabulary Meaning**. There are a limited number of these in every language, and they are what you find listed in dictionaries. (Also of note: in a dictionary, many entries have multiple meanings. Each one of these is a separate **Vocabulary Item**.)

Definition ~ The meaning of a **Meaningful Item**. Consists of **Defining Qualities**.

Defining Quality (*additional definition) ~ A **Quality** that follows naturally from some other **Quality**. By “follow naturally”, I mean that **Defining Qualities** either *must* be true, or *may* be true, as a result of the **Defined Quality**.

Defined Quality ~ The **Quality** being defined by the **Defining Qualities**. This is often conflated with the **Meaningful Item**, but it’s sometimes important to remember that a **Meaningful Item** is a **Grammatical Element** with a specific meaning, while a **Defined Quality** is an **Idea** with a specific meaning. An **Idea** may have any number of **Grammatical Elements** that could be used to represent it, or even none at all (if it is a new **Idea**). For example, “dog” (English), “inu” (Japanese), and “gou” (Chinese) are all different **Meaningful Items** that represent the same **Quality**.

Absolute Quality ~ A **Defining Quality** that *must* be true as a result of the **Defined Quality**. Conversely, if the **Defined Quality** applies to something, the **Absolute Qualities** of the **Defined Quality** must be true, *by definition*.

Associated Quality ~ A **Defining Quality** that *may* be true when a particular **Defined Quality** applies. Whether it is more or less common, it is nevertheless associated

with the Defined Quality. (For instance, “white” and “black” are both Associated Qualities of swans, even though “white” is much more common.)

Objective Quality ~ A Defining Quality where everyone agrees on whether it is Absolute or Associated.

Subjective Quality ~ A Defining Quality where people disagree on whether it is Absolute or Associated.

Objectively Absolute Quality ~ A Defining Quality that everyone agrees is Absolute.

Objectively Associated Quality ~ A Defining Quality everyone agrees is Associated.

Subjectively Absolute Quality ~ A Defining Quality that the person in question believes is Absolute.

Subjectively Associated Quality ~ A Defining Quality that the person in question believes is Associated.

Precise Definition ~ A Definition whose Absolute Qualities are all Objective.

Imprecise Definition ~ A Definition whose Absolute Qualities are *not* all Objective.

Determining a Quality ~ The act of deciding whether a Defined Quality is true.

Definitionally Determining a Quality ~ The act of deciding whether a Defined Quality is true, *by Definition*. (That is, according only to its Absolute Qualities.)

Logically Determining a Quality ~ The act of deciding whether a Defined Quality is true, *according to clues and creative logic*. (This may involve Associated Qualities.)

Typical Quality ~ An Associated Quality that is generally true. (Ex. Most swans are *white*.)

Atypical Quality ~ An Associated Quality that is sometimes, but not usually true; yet is still associated with the Defined Quality. (Ex. Some swans are *black*.)



Today we learned how the mind defines things. We started by seeing how a smaller Indistinct Referent can exist inside a larger Indistinct Referent. This relationship, which is called a Defining Quality, means that everything in *one* group is automatically also part of *another* group, by definition. For instance, the “dogs” group exists inside the “animals” group, since all dogs are animals, *by definition*.

Then we learned about Meaningful Items, which are the things in an Expression that have some meaning attached to them. These include both the Vocabulary Items in our dictionaries, and the Constructed Items that we can make using normal grammar rules. Here we learned that a Definition is little more than a *list* of the Defining Qualities that are true of a Meaningful Item. That’s why in my grammar, Definitions do not *only* apply to Vocabulary Items, but to Constructed Items as well.

We also learned how to use Defining Qualities to determine whether another Quality is true. Absolute Qualities are the Defining Qualities that *must* be true, so they are how we test to see if a Defined Quality is *true by definition*. This Definitional Determination, which is absolute, is not the same as a Logical Determination, which is more of a guess based on Associated Qualities and creative logic.

Finally, we learned that Associated Qualities can be more Typical or Atypical.

In the next lesson, we will learn how to assign Qualities to Thoughts.