Nativelike selection and nativelike fluency

Holger Diessel
holger.diessel@uni-jena.de

What are fixed expressions?

Fixed expressions

kick the bucket
spill the beans
pull someone's leg

Prototypical idioms

The grass is always greener on the other side.
All roads lead to Rome.
A woman's place is in the home.

Proverbs

as quick as lightening
sleep like a dog
eat like a horse

Stereotyped comparisons

supply and demand
here and there
plus or minus
for or against

Binomials

Fixed expressions

to make use of
to have a fight
to lend somebody a hand

Phrasal verbs

a close look (vs. an exact look)
strong tea (vs. heavy tea)
to have patience (vs. to keep patience)

Restricted collocations

How are you?
Thank you, I'm fine.
You're welcome!

Social formulae

Fixed expressions

Believe it or not …
On the face of it, but …
To the best of my knowledge …

Discourse routines

For instance,
I was just about to
I am going to

Grammatical formulae

for some reason
all the way (to)
in front of

Adverbial expressions

Define fixed expressions

Fixed expressions: Definitions

A sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appear to be, prefabricated; that is, stored and restricted whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar.

[Wray 2002: 9]

A prefab is a combination of at least two words favored by native speakers in preference to an alternative combination which could have been equivalent had there been no conventionalization.

[Erman and Warren 2000: 31]

… lexical phrases are chunks of language of varying length, conventionalized structures that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together each time.

[Nattinger and DeCarrico 1993: 558-567]

Pawley and Syder

Nativelike selection and nativelike fluency

Fixed expressions

Until recently fixed expression have played only minor role in linguistic theory.

Some early studies:

> A vast portion of verbal behavior …. consists of recurrent patterns, of linguistic routines …. [including] the full range of utterances that acquire conventional significance or an individual, group or whole.
>
> [Hymes 1962; from Wray 2002: 8]

> Our language does not expect us to build everything starting with lumber, nails, and blueprint, but provides us with an incredibly large number of prefabs.
>
> [Bolinger 1976; from Wray 2002: 8]

> A very large portion of a person's ability to get along in a language consists in the mastery of formulaic utterances.
>
> [Fillmore 1979; from Wray 2002: 8]

Pawley and Syder: Central hypothesis

If a language learner is to achieve nativelike control, then, he must learn not only a generative grammar as this term is usually understood – a set of rules specifying all and only the sentences of the language. In addition he needs to learn a means for knowing which of the well-formed sentences are nativelike – a way of distinguishing those usages that are normal and unmarked from those that are unnatural or highly marked.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 194]

Grammatical and nativelike

(1) I want to marry you.
(2) I wish to be wedded to you.
(3) I desire you to become married to me.
(4) Your marrying me is desired by me.
(5) My becoming your spouse is what I want.
(6) I want marriage with you.
(7) What is desired by me is to wed you.
(8) It is my wish that I become married to you.
(9) I, who am speaking, want to marry you, whom I am addressing.

Grammatical and nativelike

(1) Was ist jetzt die Zeit?
(2) Welche Stunde haben wir jetzt?
(3) Wie spät ist es jetzt?
(4) Wie viel Zeit ist es jetzt?
(5) Wie früh ist es jetzt?
(6) Was sagt die Uhr?
(7) Wie lang ist der Tag?
(8) Wie spät ist jetzt?
(9) Welche Uhrzeit haben wir jetzt?
(10) Wie spät ist das jetzt?
(11) Was hat die Stunde geschlagen?

Memorized sentences

(1) Can I come in?
(2) Do you need any help?
(3) What did you say?
(4) What's for dinner?
(5) Are you ready?
(6) Would you like some more?
(7) Watch your step.
(8) He's busy right now.
(9) He's not in. Would you like to leave a message?
(10) I can't wait any longer.
(11) Have some more.
(12) I was trying to help.
(13) Speak of yourself.
(14) It's none of your business.
(15) It's a matter of priorities.

Memorized complex sentences

(1) How are you going to do that?
(2) I see what you mean.
(3) I'll believe it when I see it.
(4) You can't believe a word he says.
(5) It's a free country isn't it?
(6) I don't know and I don't care.
(7) Shut up and listen!
(8) He's not the man he used to be.
(9) There's something I forgot to tell you.
(10) I'm surprised to hear that.
(11) If I'd known then what I know now, …
(12) I'd thought you never ask.
(13) I'm terribly sorry to hear that.
(14) There is nothing you can do about it.
(15) Tell me what happened.

Can you think of fixed expressions in German?

What leads to the emergence of fixed expressions?

Pawley and Syder

The novelty scale

Observations of conversational talk indicate that there is a ‘novelty scale’ in the spontaneous speaker’s production of clauses. A minority of spoken clauses are entirely novel creations, in the sense that the combination will of course be put together according to familiar grammatical patterns. Some clauses are entirely familiar, memorized sequences. These are strings which the speaker or hearer is capable of consciously assembling or analyzing, but which on most occasions of use are recalled as wholes or as automatically chained strings. Still other clauses fall at various points along a cline between these two extremes, consisting partly of new collocations or lexical items and partly memorized lexical and structural material.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 205]

Familiarity and fluency

Pawley and Syder

A draughtsman in his 20s talking about christianity

Yeah – I think –
Y'know –
Ah – I've found – in um –
y'know – um –
not in religion at the beginning of this year –
y'know –
ah – ah – the experiences I had – ah – on Queen's Birthday weekend –
y'know –
the peace that I found –
simply being able to throw my –
or – not – not to throw myself just to –
sort of – just to – y'know – ah –
just hold on to another person –
y'know –
let –
just – just – y'know ah –

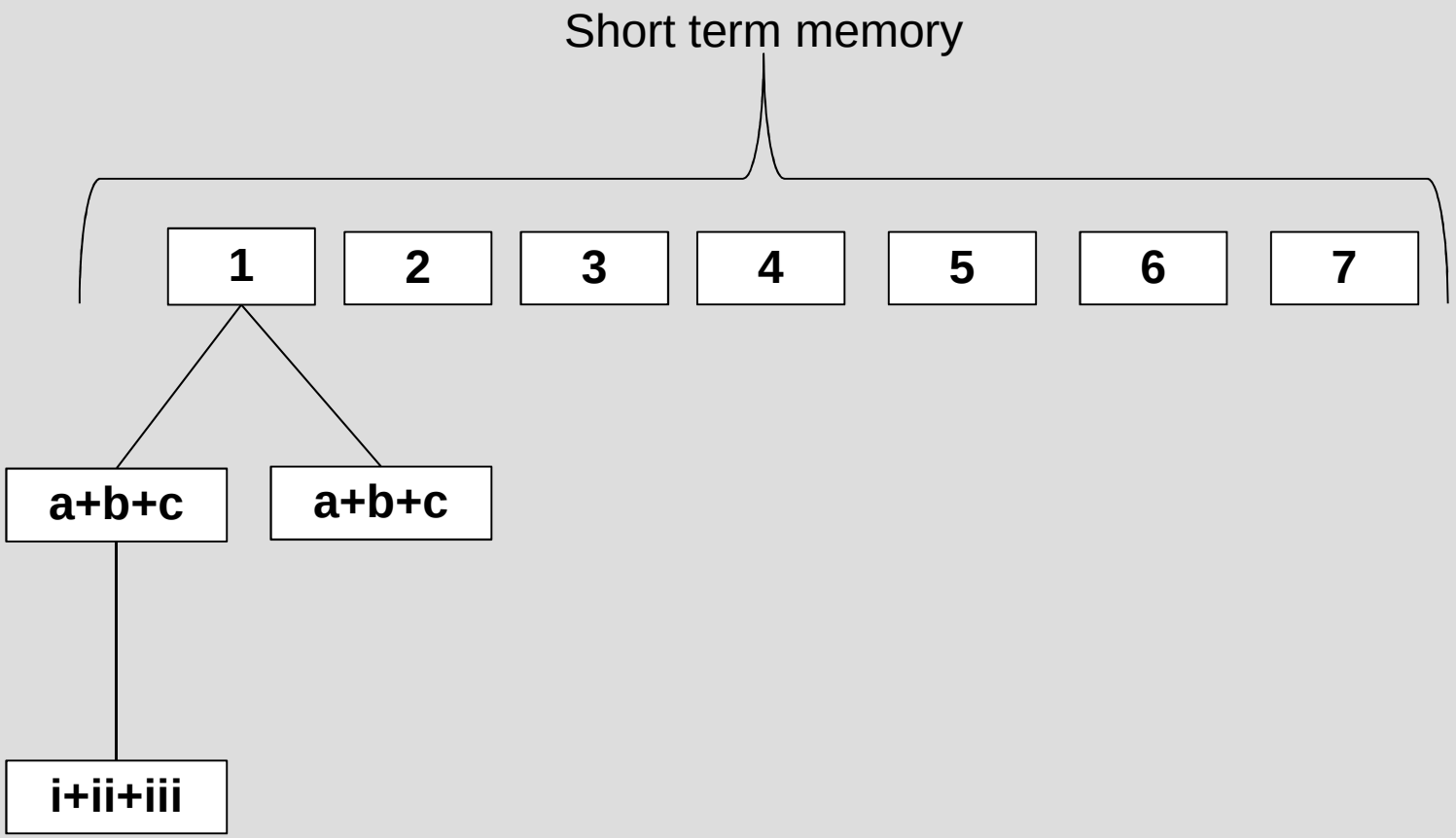
The one clause at a time constraint

The one clause at a time constraint

The largest unit that can “be fully encoded in one encoding operation is a single clause of eight to ten words”.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 205]

Chunking in memory



George Miller 1956

Pawley and Syder

In the store of familiar collocations there are expressions for a wide range of familiar concepts and speech acts, and the speaker is able to retrieve these as wholes or as automatic chains from the long term memory; by doing this he minimizes the amount of clause-internal encoding work to be done and frees himself to attend to other tasks in talk-exchange, including the planning of the larger units of discourse.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 192]

Pawley and Syder

Novelty of clause or sentence is only one element in the creative use of language in talk exchange. As already noted, possession of a large stock of memorized sentences and phrases simplifies the task in the following way. Coming ready-made, the memorized sequences need little encoding work. Freed from the task of composing such sequences word-by-word, so to speak, the speaker can channel his energies into other activities. He can, for example, attend to matching the timing, tone and rhythm of his utterance to his conversational purpose; he can produce a slightly novel, unexpected variation on the familiar usage; and he can do the work of constructing a larger piece of discourse by expanding on, or combining ready-made constructions. Indeed, we believe that memorized sentences and phrases are the normal building blocks of fluent spoken discourse, and at the same time, that they provide models for the creation of many (partly) new sequences which are memorable and in their turn enter the stock of familiar usages.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 208]

Wray and Perkins 2000

It seems that we use prefabricated sequences as a way of minimizing the effect of a mismatch between our potential linguistic capabilities and our actual short term memory capacity. As Becker (1975) points out, it makes little sense to produce from scratch those word strings which we use many times, and we appear to use formulaic sequences to reduce the amount of new processing to only that which has to be new.

[Wray and Perkins 2000: 15-16]

How do speakers distinguish between ‚natural' and ‚non-natural expressions?

Pawley and Syder

Experience is the main determinant of what native speakers consider ‘natural’ or ‘normal’.

Experience is closely related to frequency.

Frequency is gradient by definition.

Pawley and Syder: “the novelty scale”

Pawley and Syder

The novelty scale

Observations of conversational talk indicate that there is a ‘novelty scale’ in the spontaneous speaker’s production of clauses. A minority of spoken clauses are entirely novel creations, in the sense that the combination will of course be put together according to familiar grammatical patterns. Some clauses are entirely familiar, memorized sequences. These are strings which the speaker or hearer is capable of consciously assembling or analyzing, but which on most occasions of use are recalled as wholes or as automatically chained strings. Still other clauses fall at various points along a cline between these two extremes, consisting partly of new collocations or lexical items and partly memorized lexical and structural material.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 205]

Familiarity, fluency, and memory

Pawley and Syder

A draughtsman in his 20s talking about christianity

Yeah – I think –
Y'know –
Ah – I've found – in um –
y'know – um –
not in religion at the beginning of this year –
y'know –
ah – ah – the experiences I had – ah – on Queen's Birthday weekend –
y'know –
the peace that I found –
simply being able to throw my –
or – not – not to throw myself just to –
sort of – just to – y'know – ah –
just hold on to another person –
y'know –
let –
just – just – y'know ah –

The one clause at a time constraint

The one clause at a time constraint

The largest unit that can “be fully encoded in one encoding operation is a single clause of eight to ten words”.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 205]

Pawley and Syder

In the store of familiar collocations there are expressions for a wide range of familiar concepts and speech acts, and the speaker is able to retrieve these as wholes or as automatic chains from the long term memory; by doing this he minimizes the amount of clause-internal encoding work to be done and frees himself to attend to other tasks in talk-exchange, including the planning of the larger units of discourse.

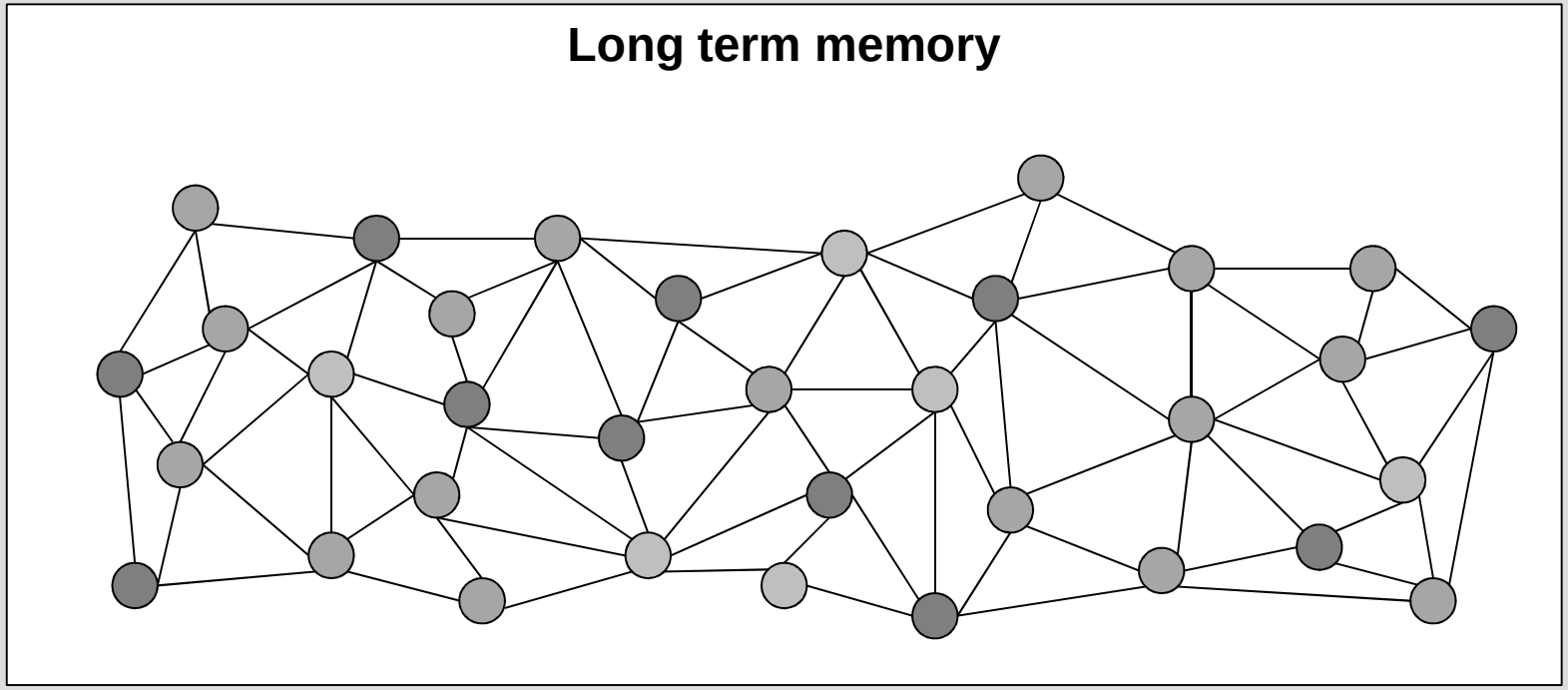
[Pawley and Syder 1983: 192]

Pawley and Syder

In the store of familiar collocations there are expressions for a wide range of familiar concepts and speech acts, and the speaker is able to retrieve these as wholes or as automatic chains from the **long term memory**; by doing this he minimizes the amount of clause-internal encoding work to be done and frees himself to attend to other tasks in talk-exchange, including the planning of the larger units of discourse.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 192]

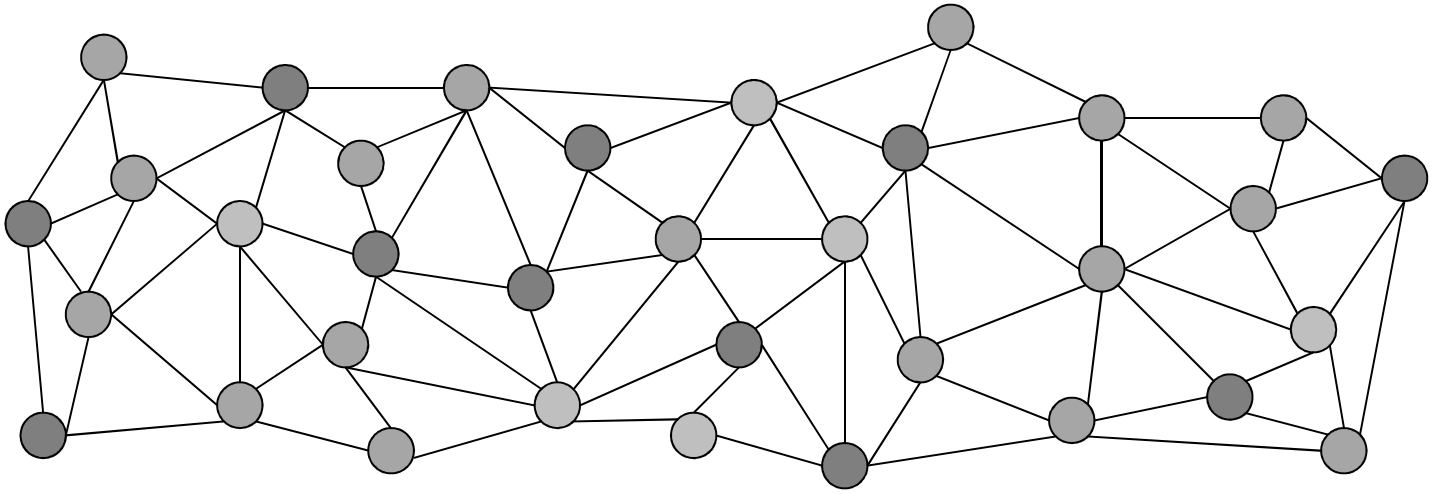
Memory



Memory

Short term memory

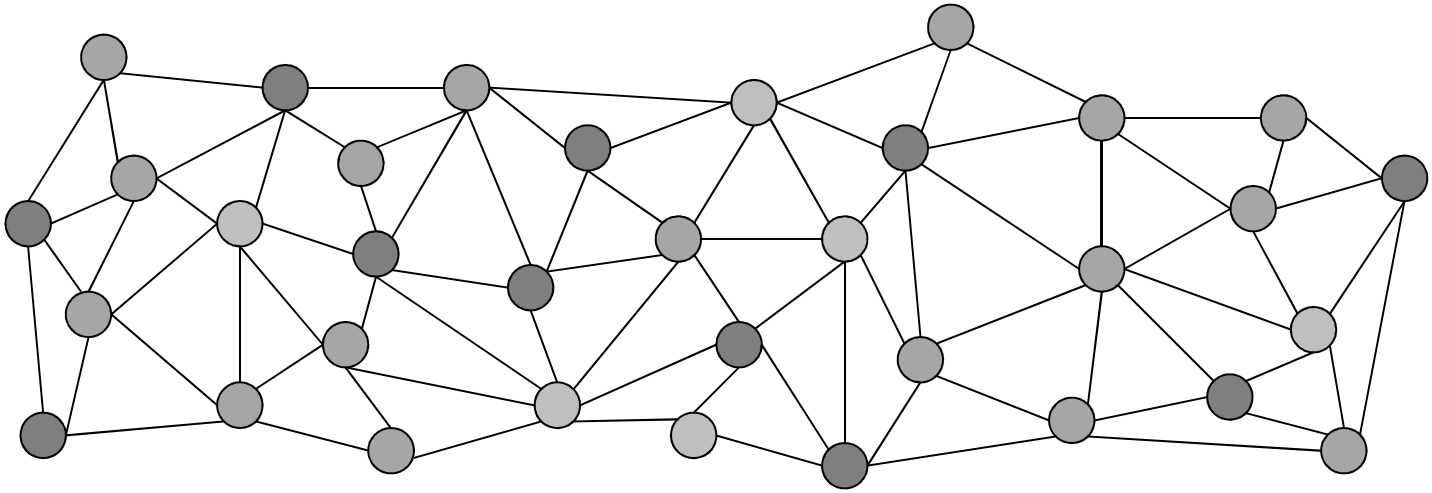
Long term memory



Memory

Short term memory

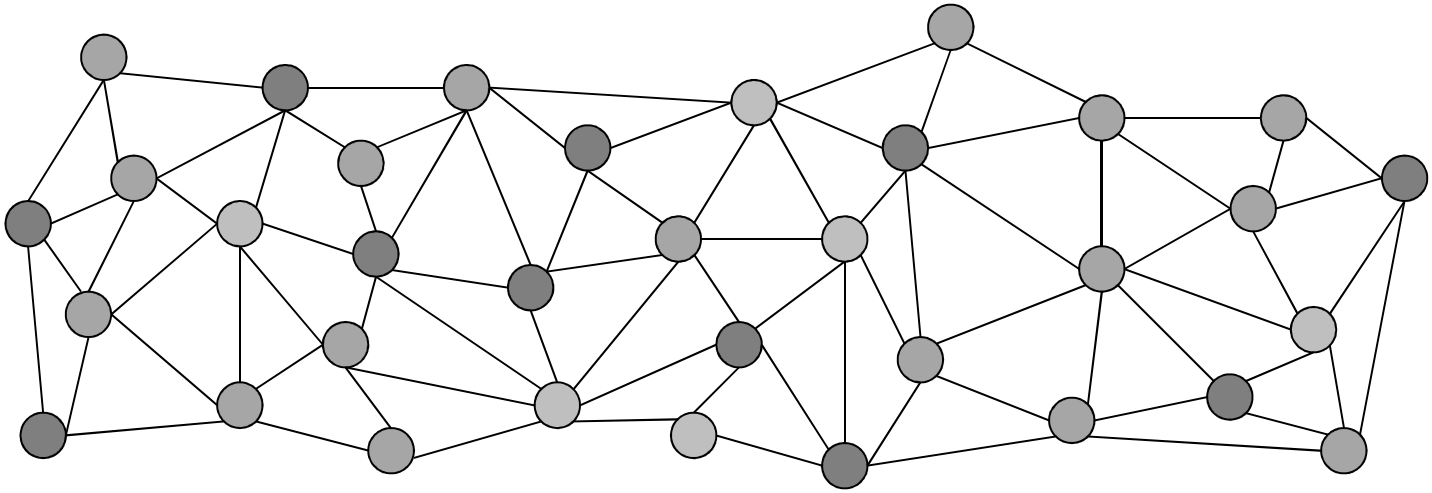
Long term memory



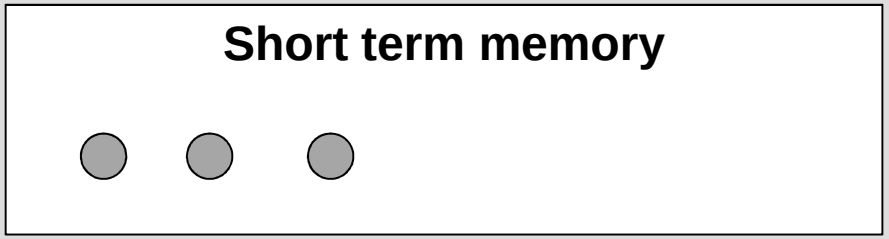
Memory

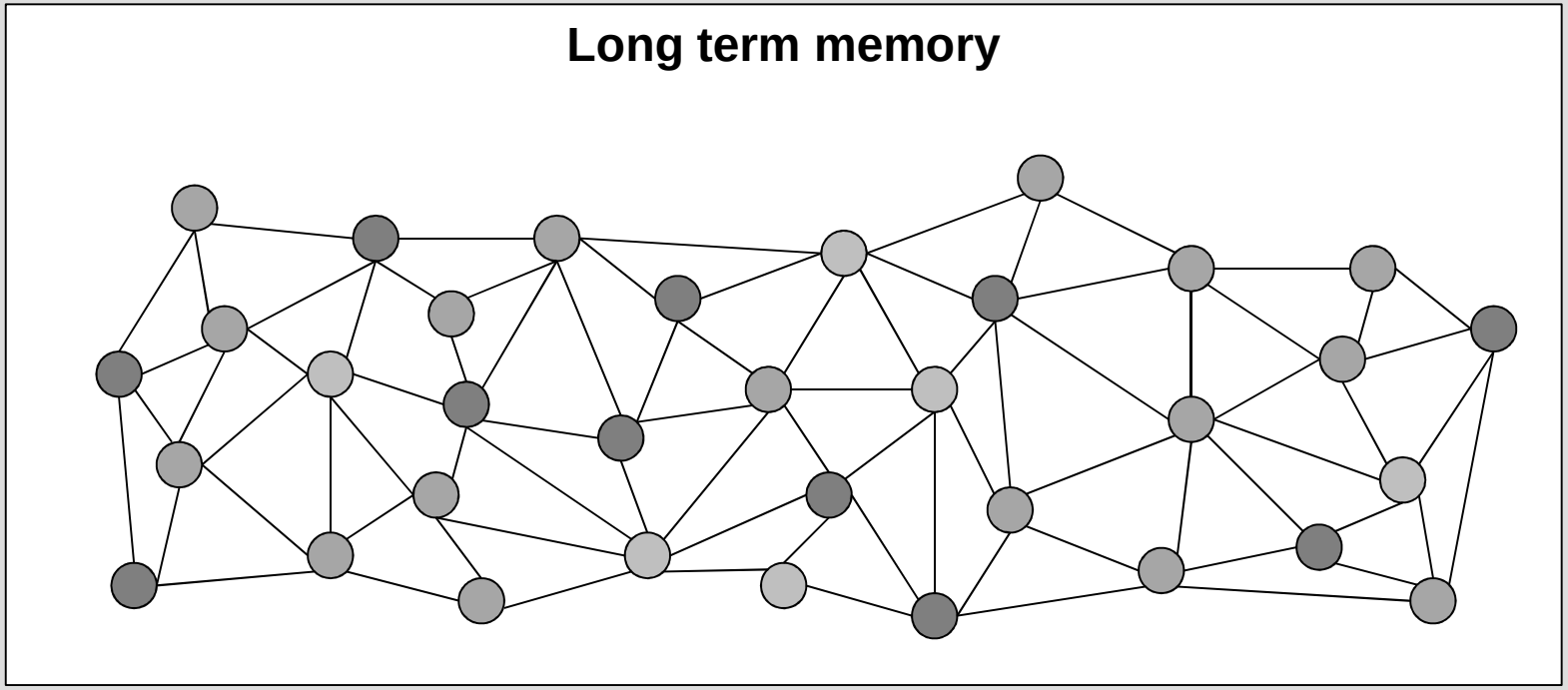
Short term memory

Long term memory

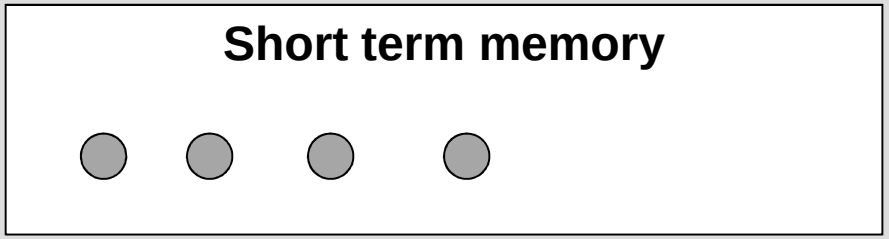


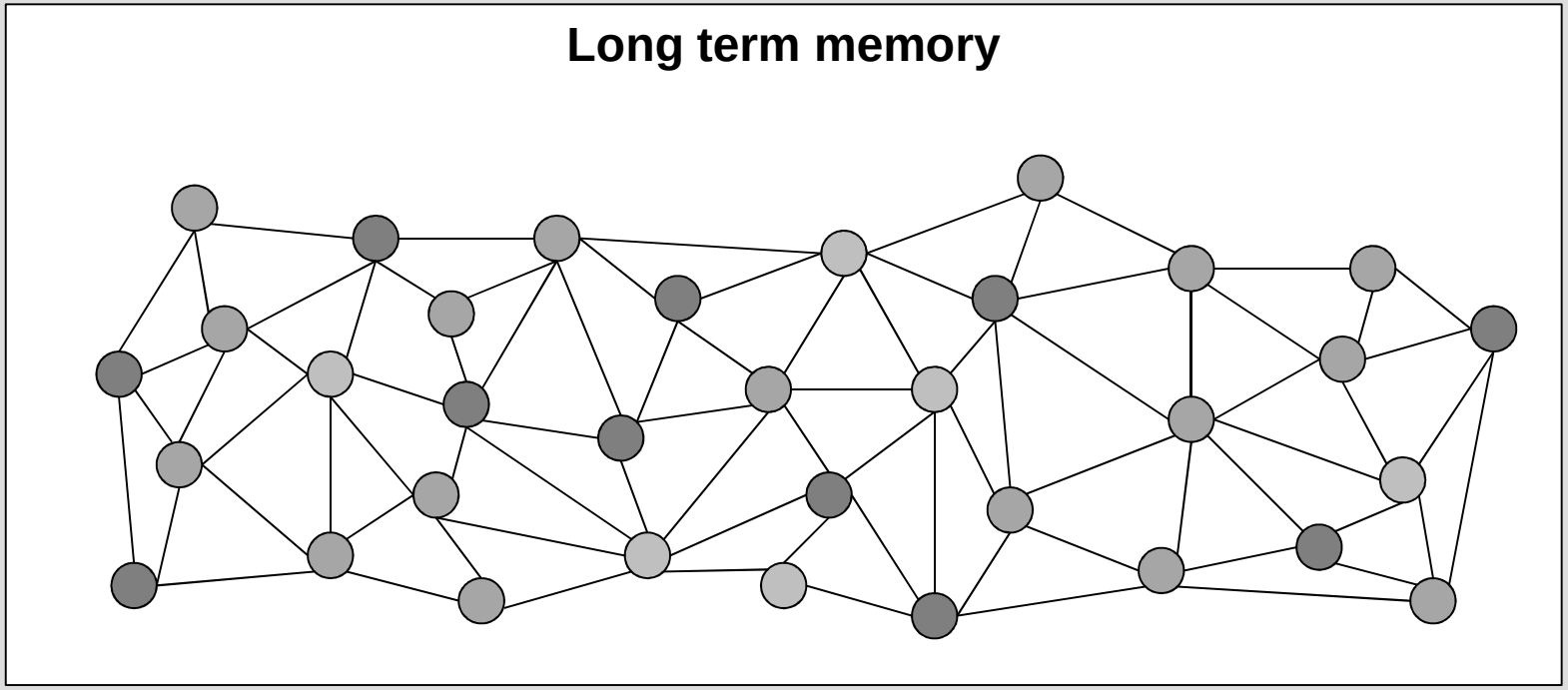
Memory



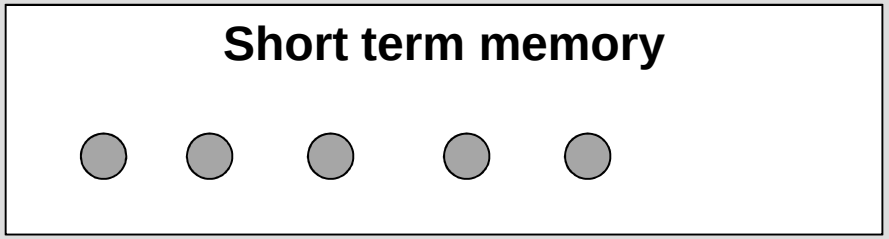


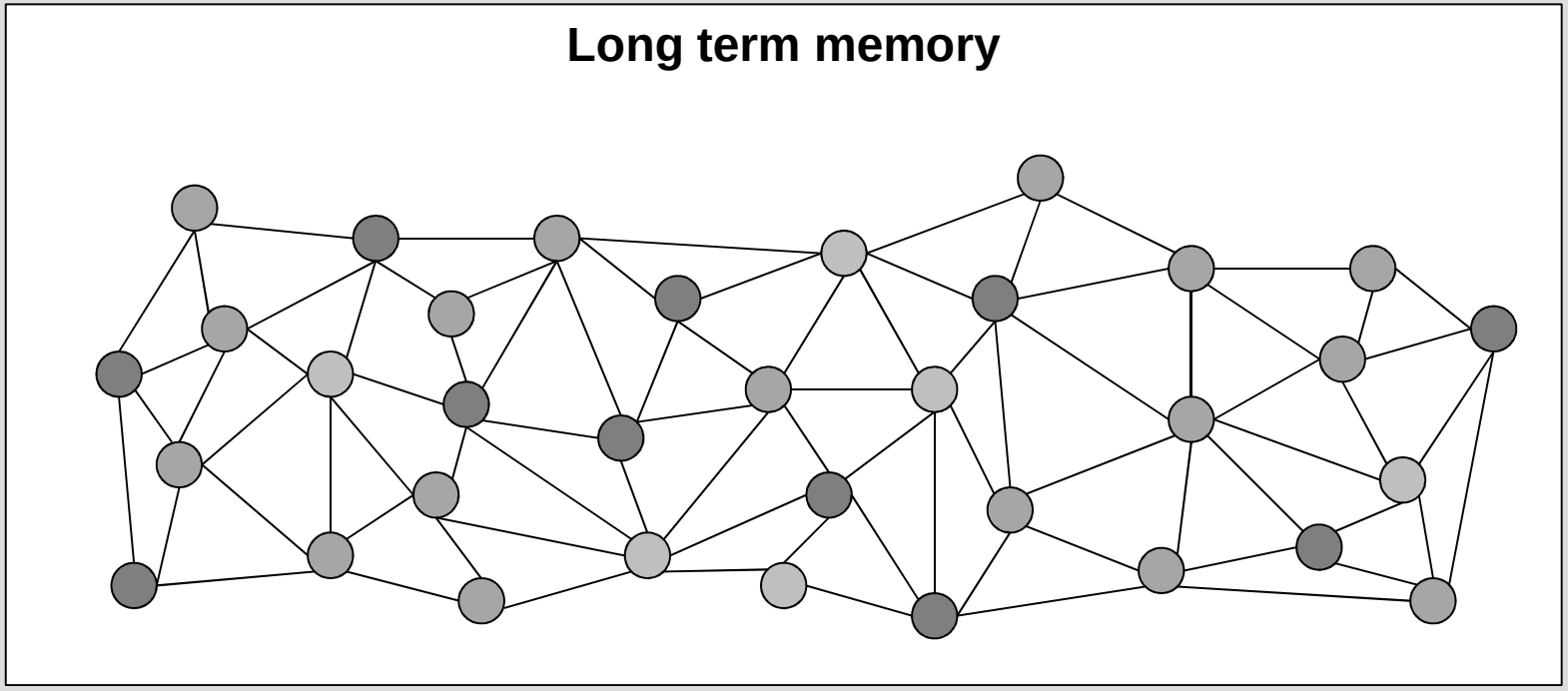
Memory





Memory





Memory

The number of items that can be held in working memory is limited.

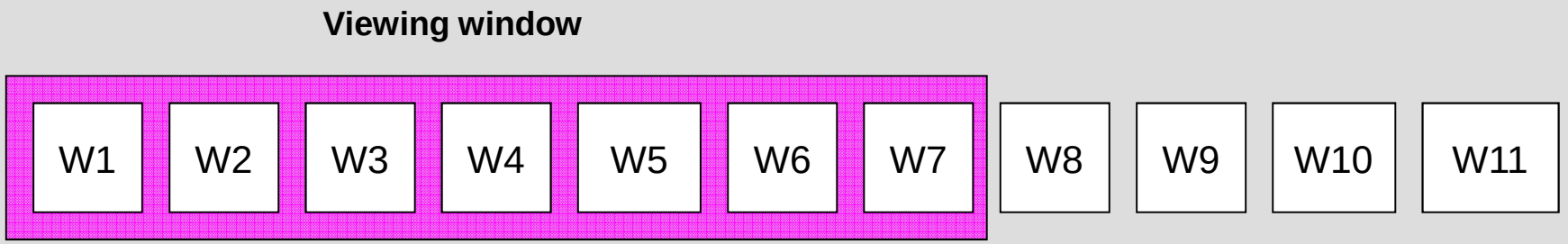
How many items can be held in working memory?

George Miller (1956): seven plus-minus two

The magic number seven

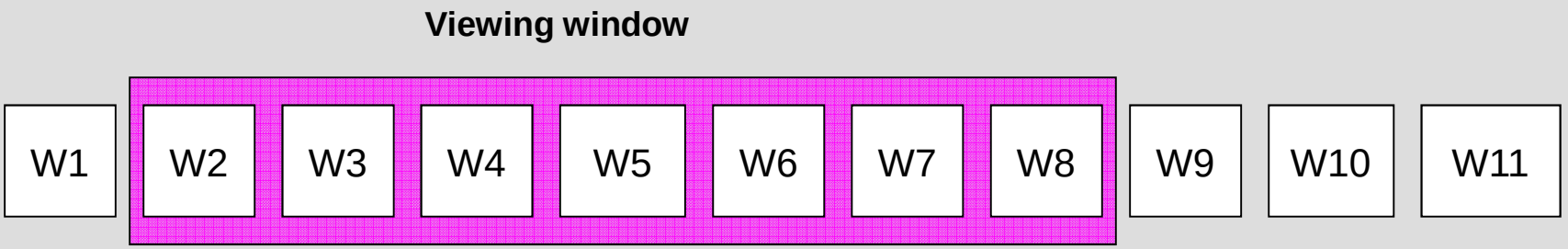
Memory models in linguistics

Frazier and Fodor (1978)



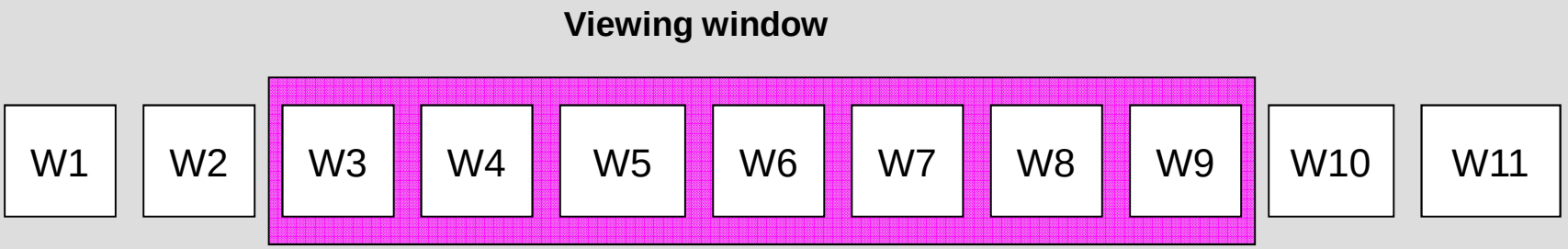
Memory models in linguistics

Frazier and Fodor (1978)



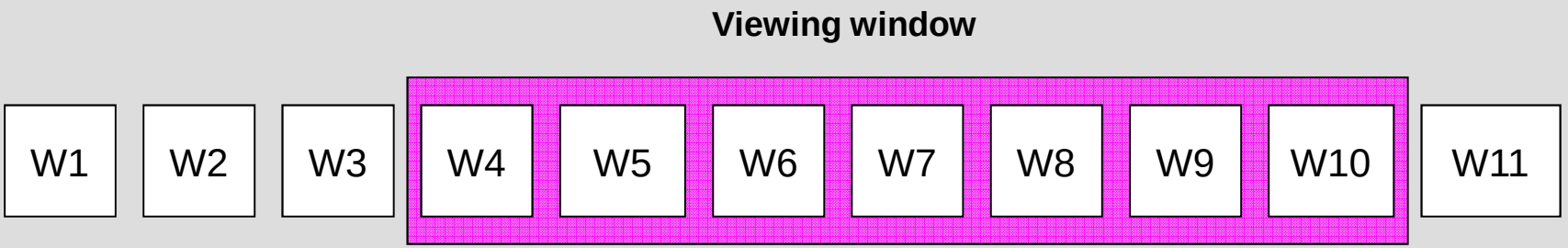
Memory models in linguistics

Frazier and Fodor (1978)

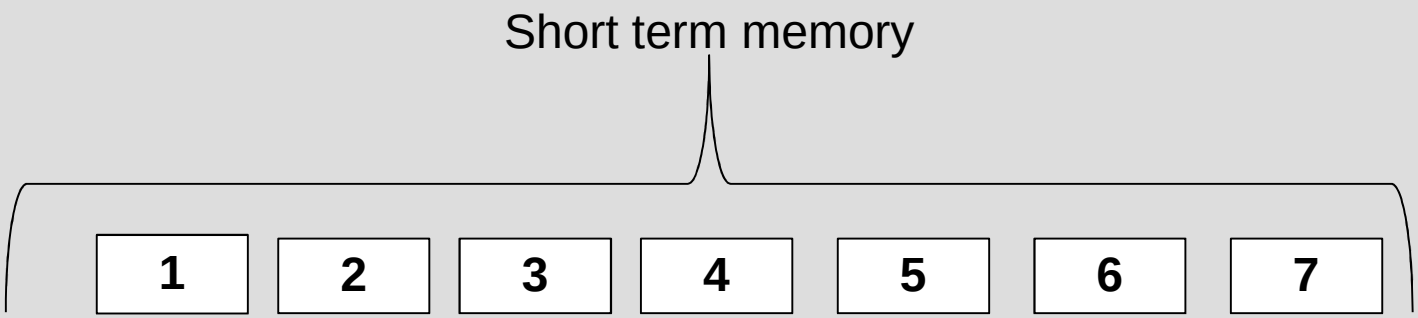


Memory models in linguistics

Frazier and Fodor (1978)

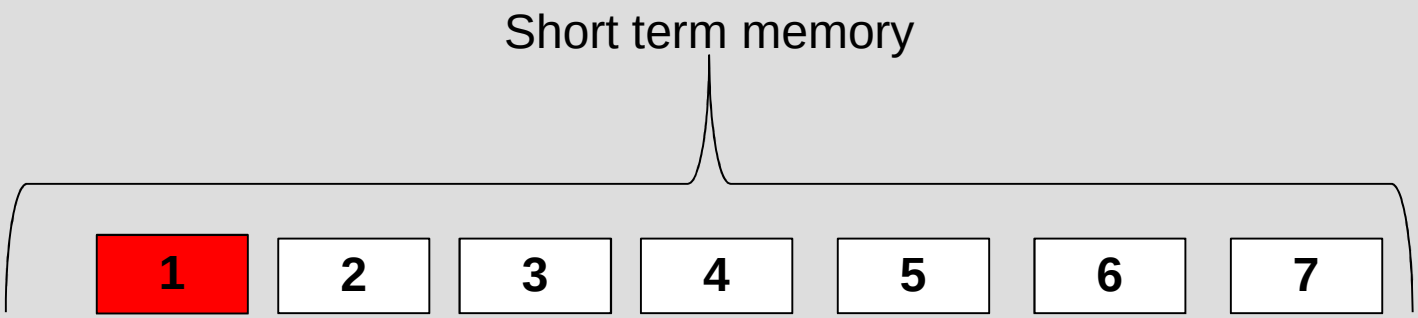


Chunking in memory



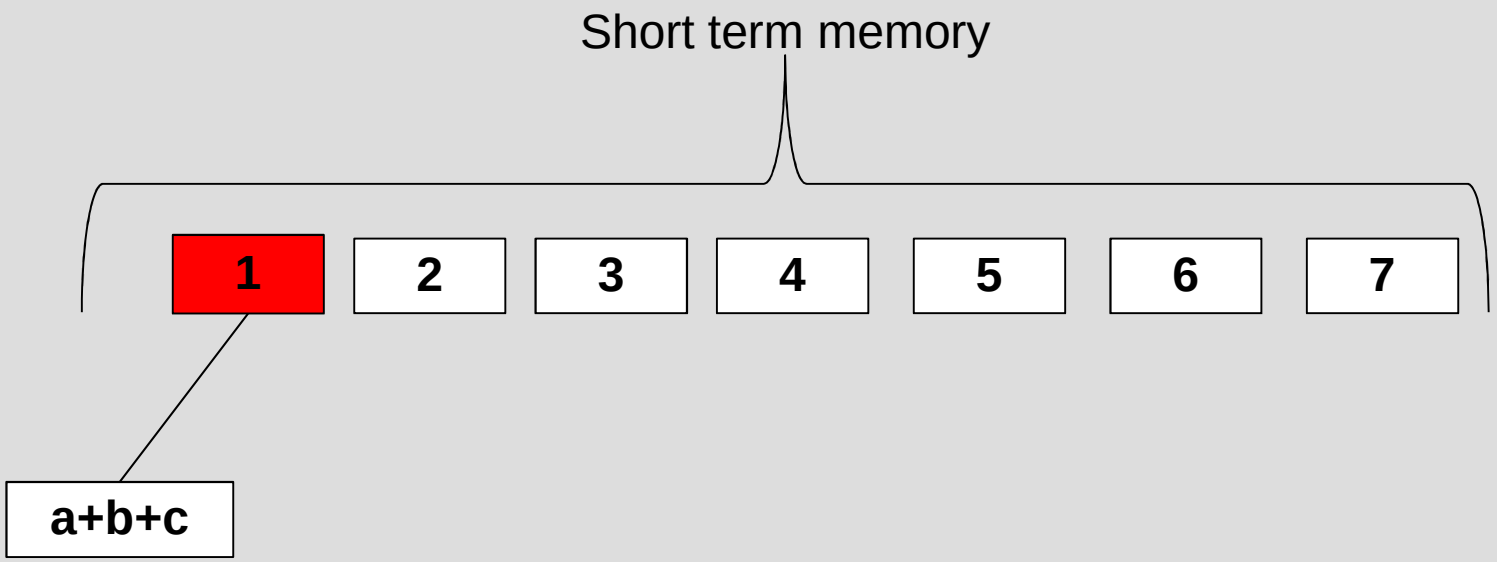
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



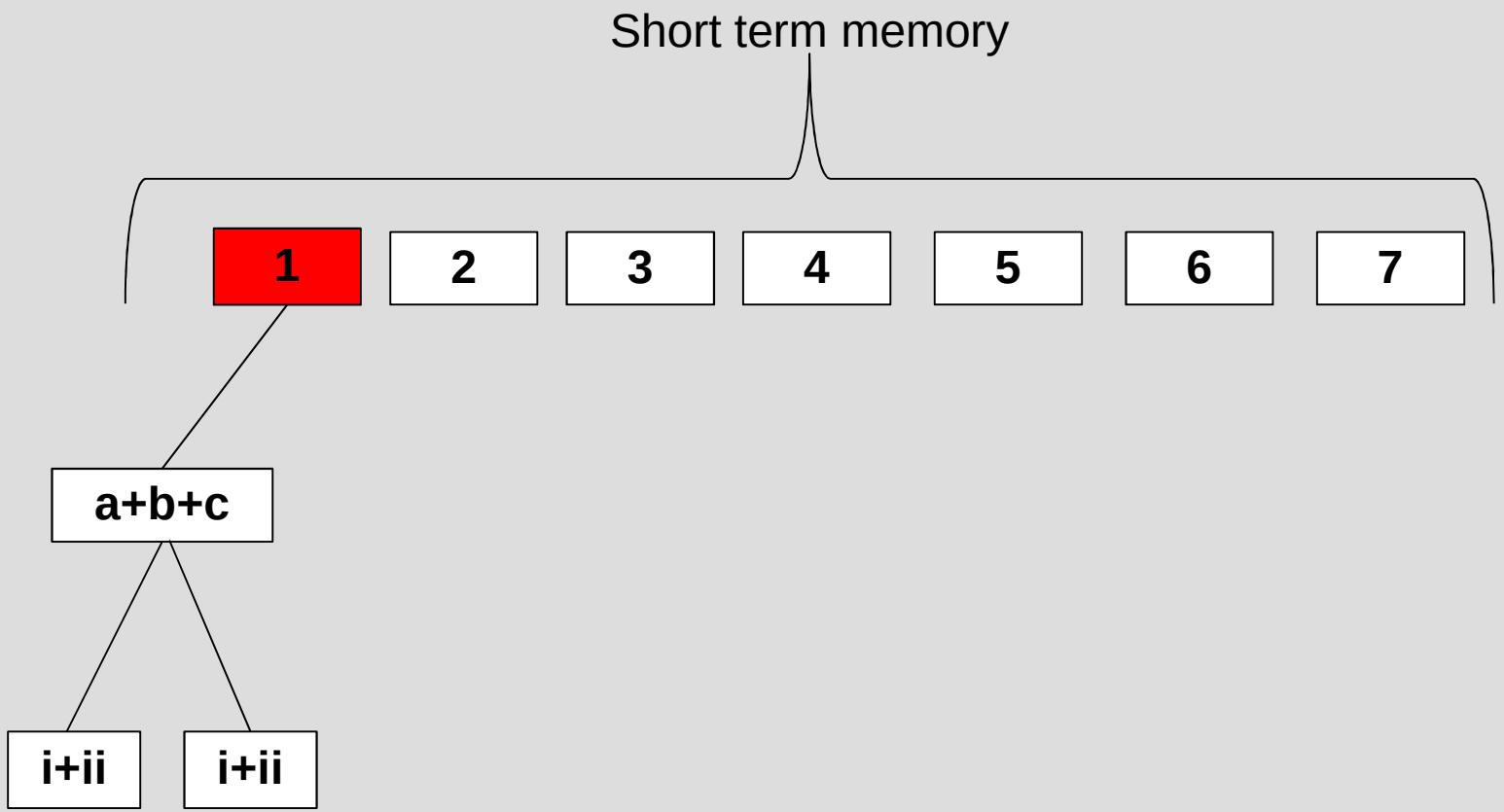
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



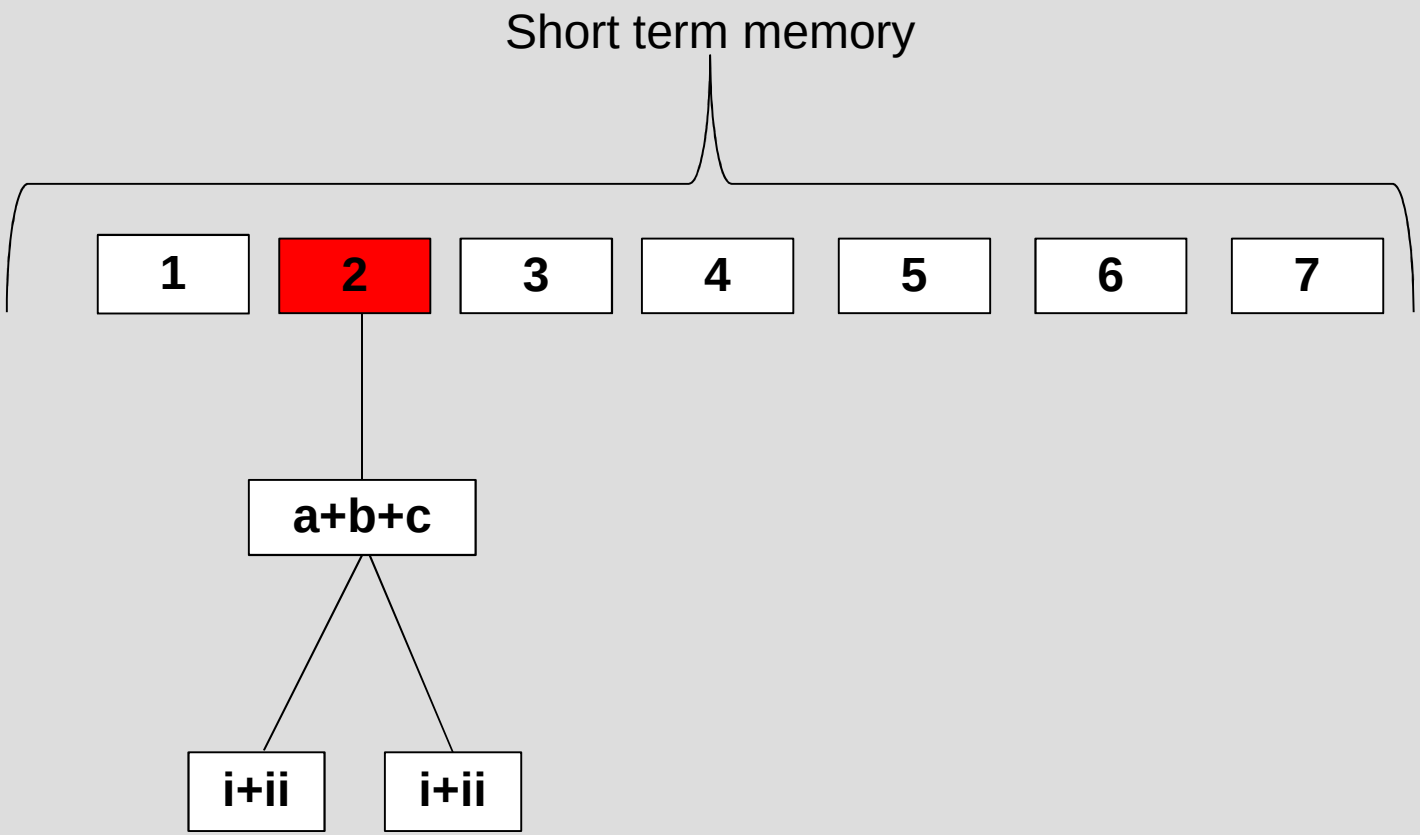
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



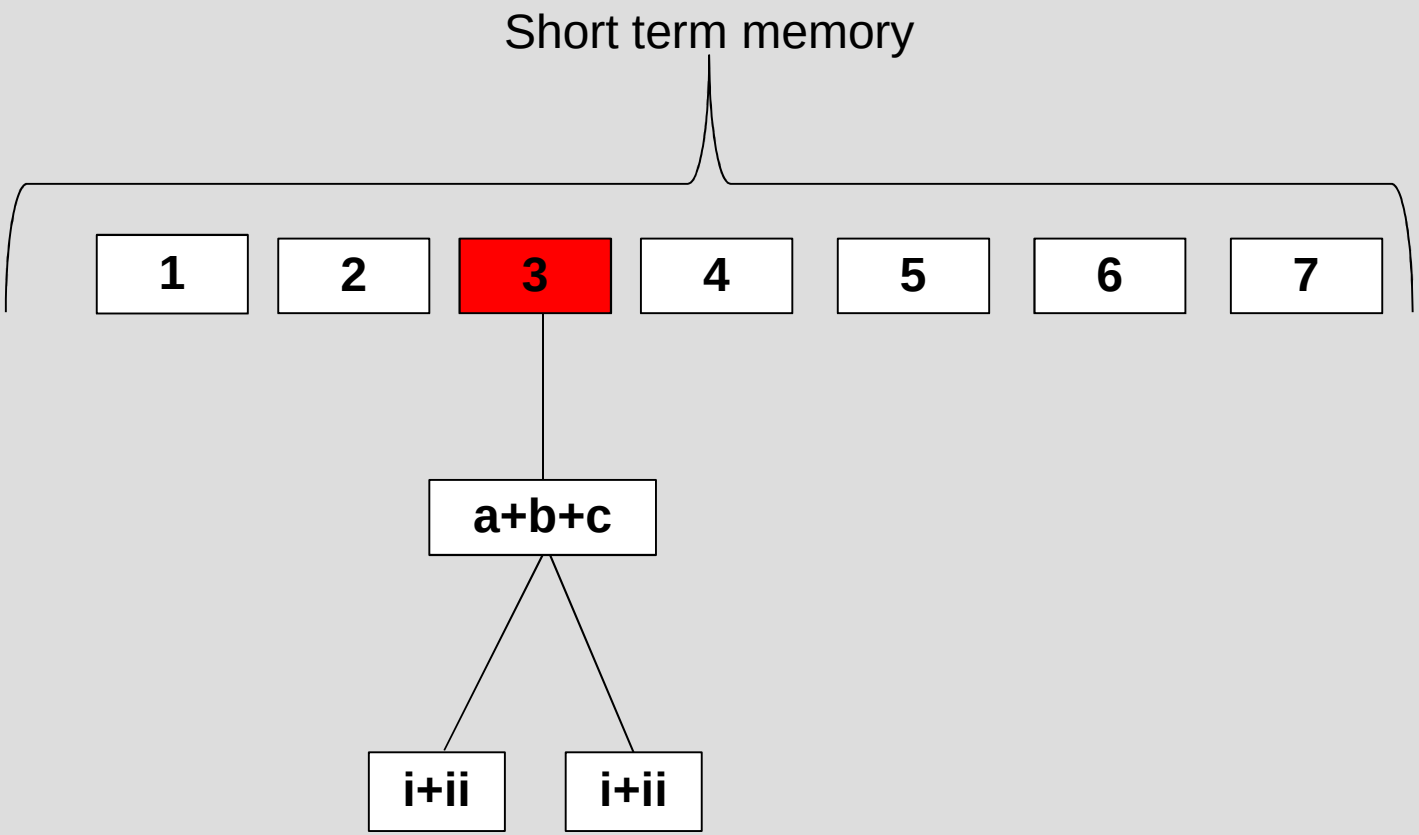
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



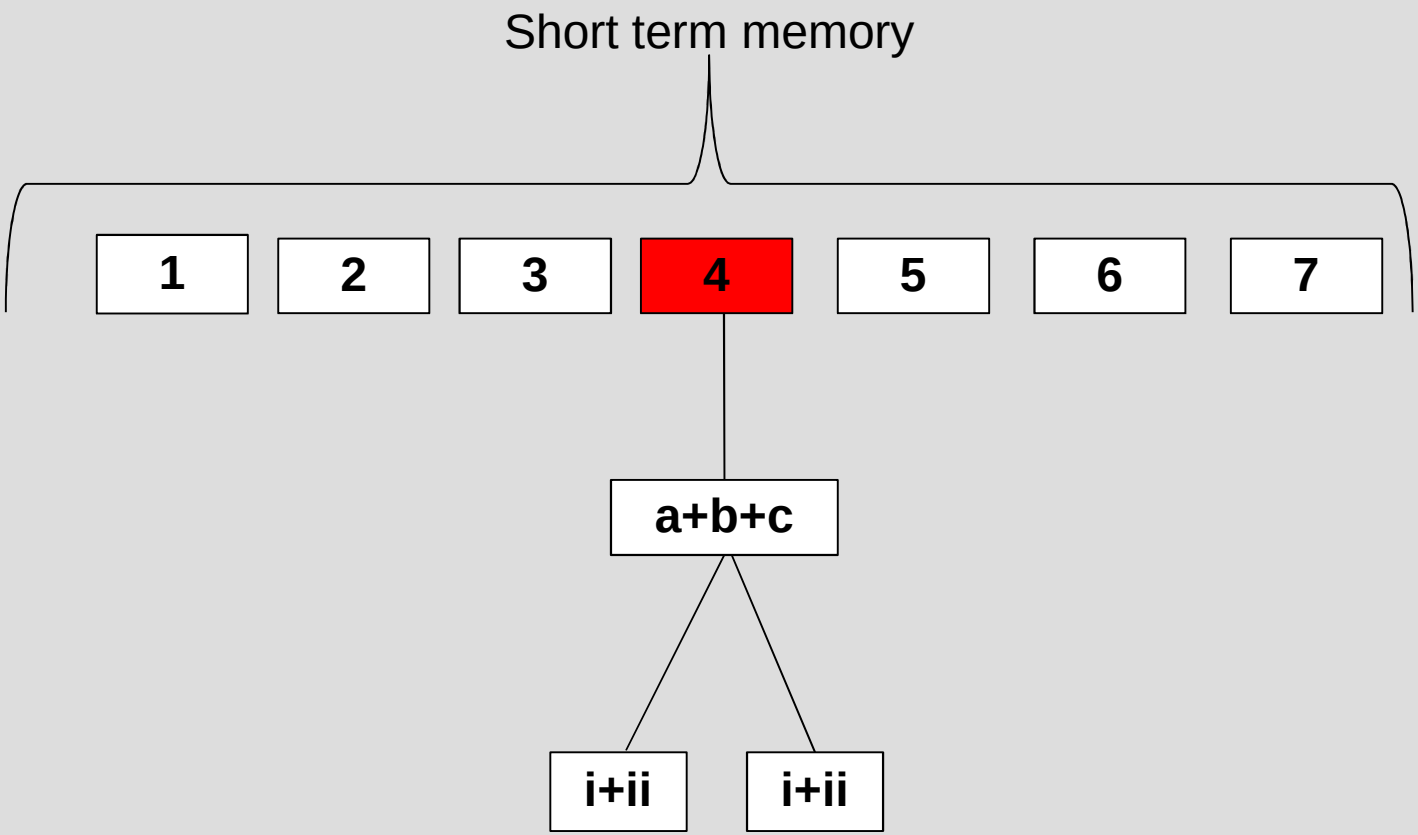
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



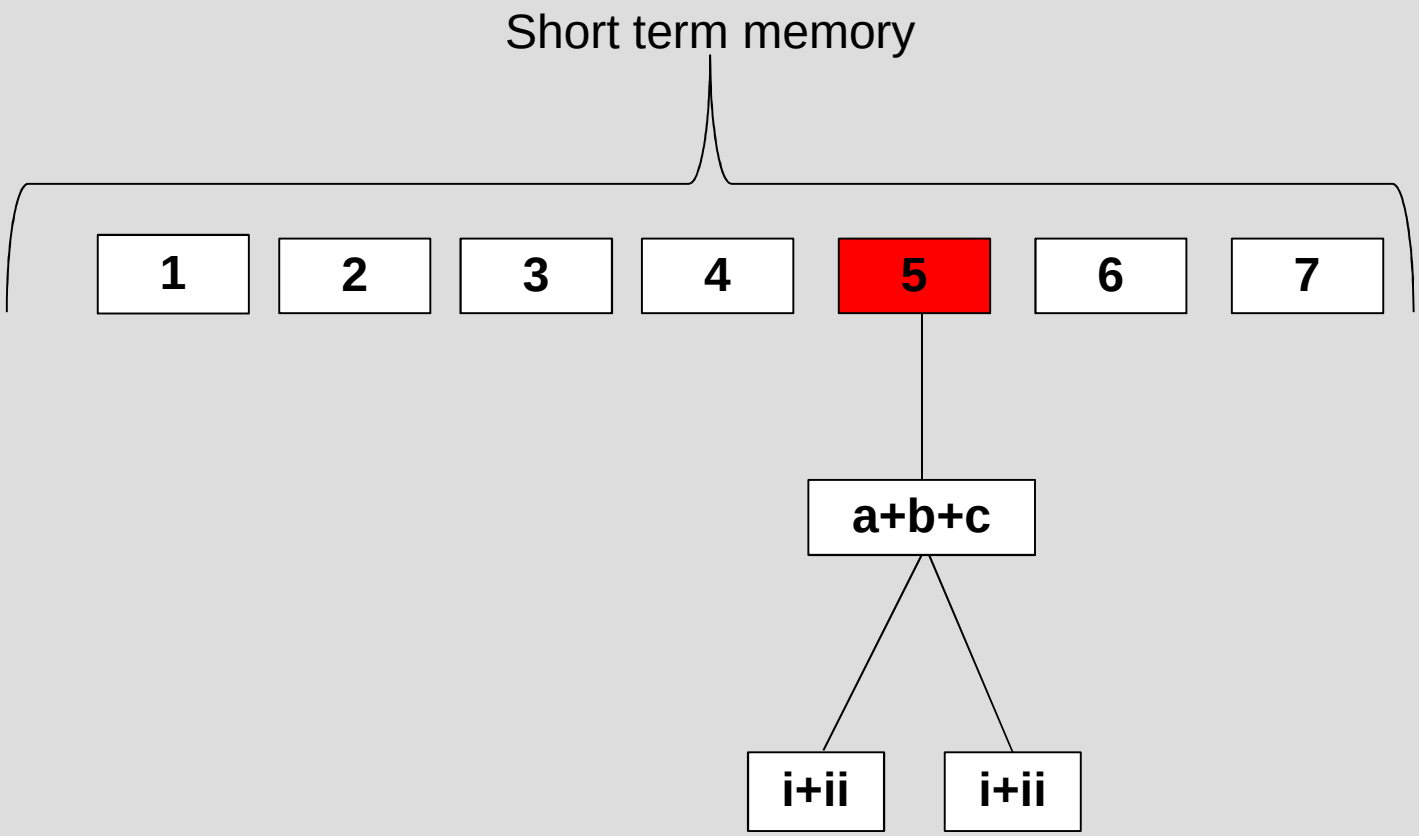
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



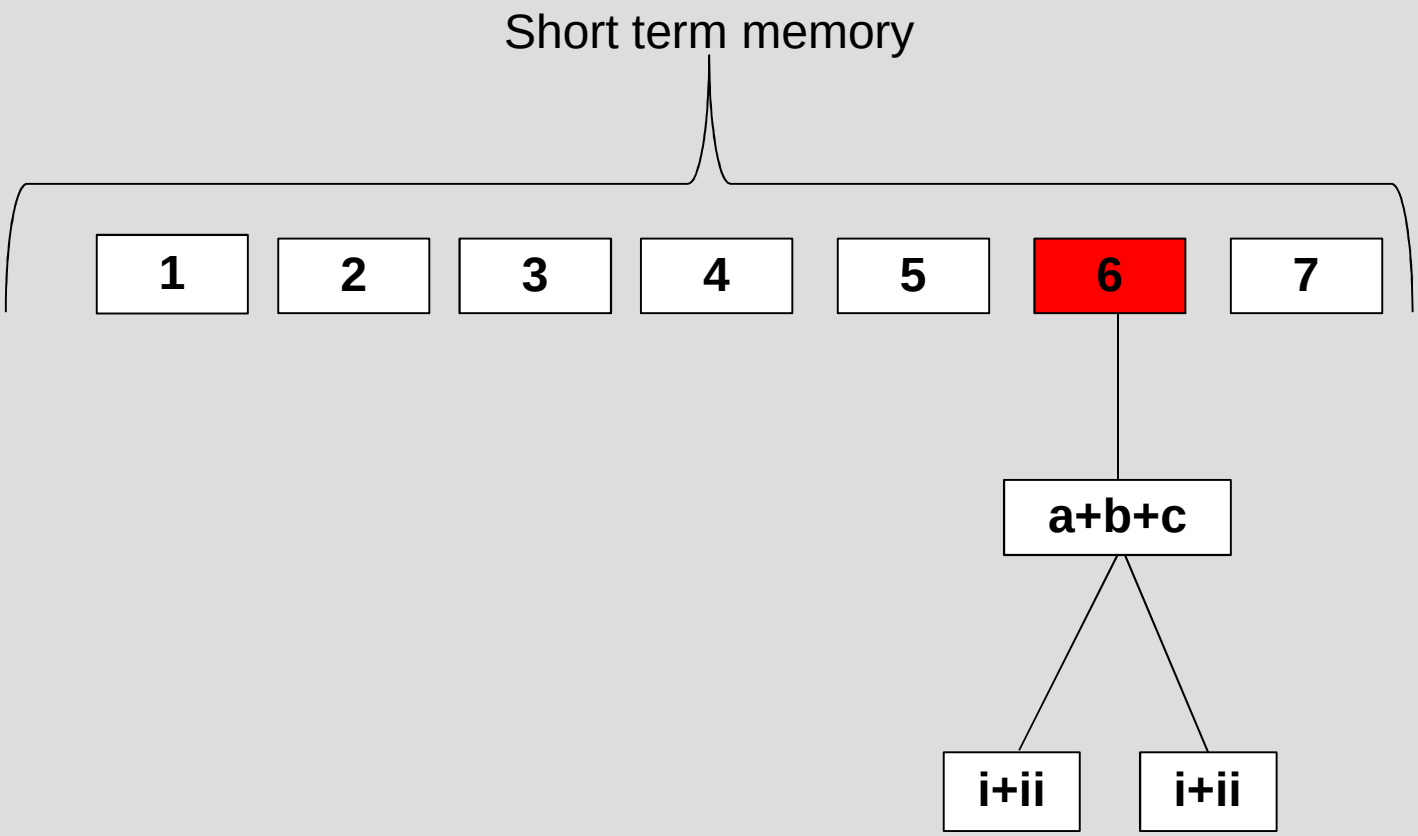
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



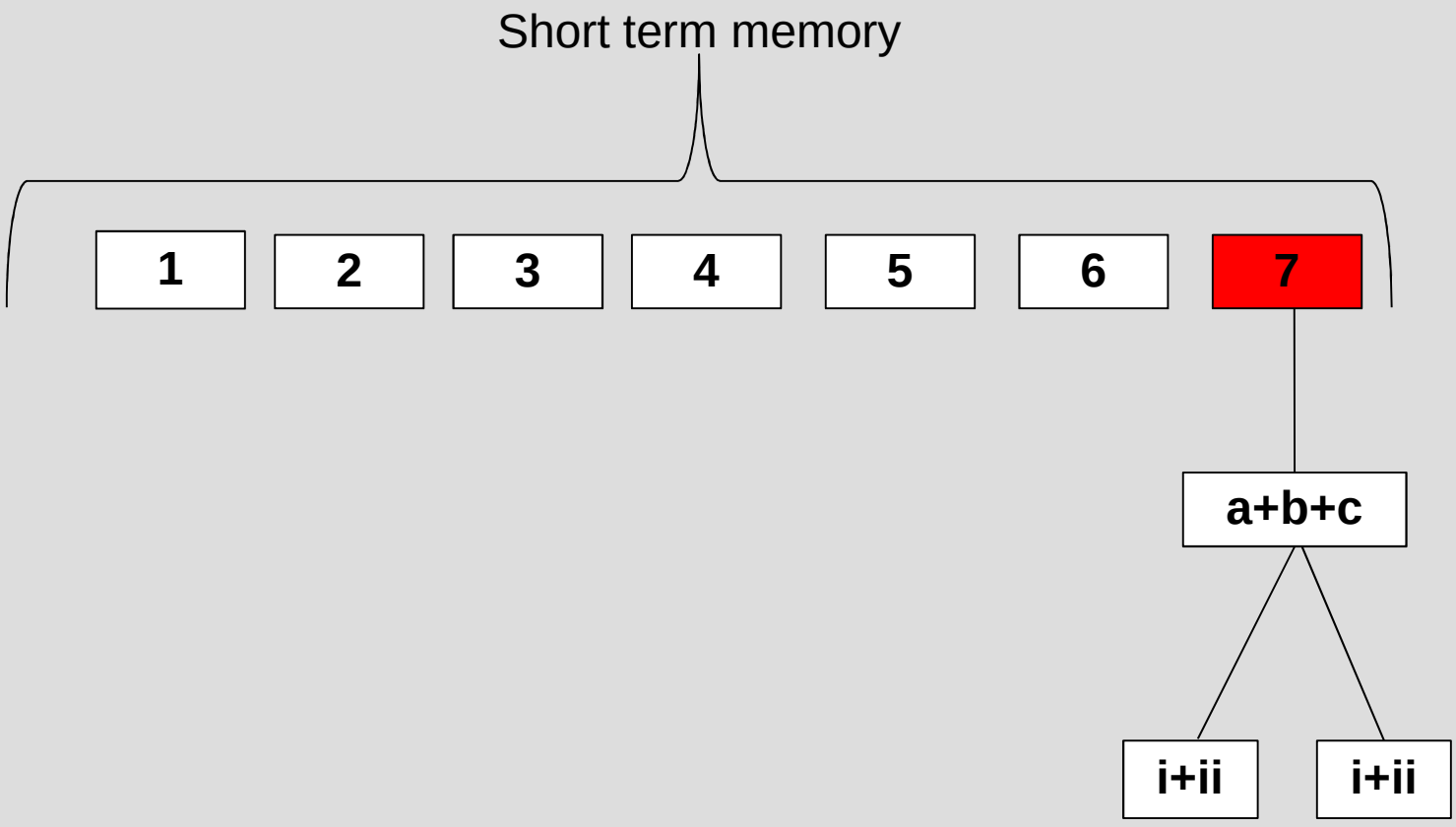
George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



George Miller 1956

Chunking in memory



George Miller 1956

Pawley and Syder

The existence of prefabricated linguistic chunks increases the power of working memory.

The less effort is needed to construct a sentence in working memory, the more capacity is available for other tasks of communication.

Pawley and Syder

Coming ready-made, the memorized sequences need little encoding work. Freed from the task of composing such sequences word-by-word, so to speak, the speaker can channel his energies into other activities. He can, for example, attend to matching the timing, tone and rhythm of his utterance to his conversational purpose; he can produce a slightly novel, unexpected variation on the familiar usage; and he can do the work of constructing a larger piece of discourse by expanding on, or combining ready-made constructions.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 208]

Wray and Perkins 2000

It seems that we use prefabricated sequences as a way of minimizing the effect of a mismatch between our potential linguistic capabilities and our actual short term memory capacity. As Becker (1975) points out, it makes little sense to produce from scratch those word strings which we use many times, and we appear to use formulaic sequences to reduce the amount of new processing to only that which has to be new.

[Wray and Perkins 2000: 15-16]

The communicative functions of fixed expressions

Pawley and Syder

What makes an expression a lexical item, what makes it part of the speech community's common diction, is, firstly, that the meaning of the expression is not (totally) predictable form its form, secondly, that it behaves as a minimal unit for certain syntactic purposes, and third, that it is a social institution. This last characteristic is sometimes overlooked, but is basic to the distinction between lexicalized and non-lexicalized sequences.

[Pawley and Syder 1983]

- Not totally predictable
- Minimal unit for certain syntactic purposes
- Social institution

Wray 2002

- Fixed expressions serve to manipulate the addressee

  (1) Keep off the grass!
  (2) Could you repeat this please?
  (3) I wonder if you'd mind …

- Fixed expressions serve to organize discourse

  (4) You are never going to believe this, but …
  (5) Yes, but the thing is …
  (6) The first thing that you have to realize, of course, is …

- Fixed expressions serve to assert group identity

  (7) We are the champions.
  (8) Happy birthday.
  (9) I wouldn't do that if I were you.

Pawley and Syder

Fixed expressions have two general functions:

- Processing
- Communication

> The processing capacity is vital to the language user in his normal situation, when he is required to compose and decode spoken discourse, often under tight time-bounding … Holistically stored sequences have the advantage of being quickly retrievable and of being familiar to the hearer as well as the speaker. And they have certain advantages in the use of language as a cultural instrument. They provide convenient ways of referring to those concepts that happen to be salient in a particular culture and which are not provided by the stock of unitary lexical items.
>
> [Pawley and Syder 1983: 218]

Lexicalized sentence stems

Pawley and Syder

Two types of “lexicalized sentence stems”:

- Complete sentences (e.g. *How are you?*)
- Grammatical sentence frame

Pawley and Syder

(1) I'm sorry to keep you waiting.
(2) I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.
(3) Mr X is sorry to keep you waiting all this time.

NP be-TENSE sorry to keep-TENSE you waiting.

Pawley and Syder

(1) Tell the truth!
(2) Joe seldom tells the truth.
(3) I wish you had told me the truth.

NP tell-TENSE truth.

Pawley and Syder

(1) Who the hell do you think you are!
(2) Who does that woman think she is!
(3) Who the fuck does he think he is!

Who EXCLAIM do-TENSE NP think PRO be-PRES.

Pawley and Syder

(1) If it is good enough for you, it's good enough for me.
(2) If it was good enough for John, it will be good enough for me.
(3) If it's good enough for the Queen to wear jeans, it's good enough for me.

If it be-TENSE good enough for NP, it be-TENSE good enough for me.

Pawley and Syder

Grammatical sentence frames are a bit like words:

- Stem

  NP be-TENSE sorry to keep-TENSE you waiting.

- Inflection

  NP be-TENSE sorry to keep-TENSE you waiting.

- Expansion

  NP be-TENSE sorry to keep-TENSE you waiting for so long.

Pawley and Syder

It appears, however, that each such sentence stem [frame] has a more or less unique grammar; each one is subject to a somewhat different range of phrase structure and transformational restrictions.

[Pawley and Syder 1983: 215-6]

Theoretical implications

Pawley and Syder

Hypothesis 1: All this has no theoretical implications for our view of grammar.

Hypothesis 1 has problems:

- Many structures are represented twice (i.e. redundantly) in grammar and lexicon.
- It is unclear how grammatical sentence frames ought to be represented (in grammar and/or lexicon).

Pawley and Syder

Apart from grammar and lexicon there is a third component: