

BRIEF SUMMARY

Koutstaal, W. (2001). The edges of words. *Semiotica*, 137, 57–97.

[From the paper] Where does a word start and where does it end, what are its boundaries, its limits, where and what are its edges? One might most readily—at the outset—construe this question as relating to the meaning of words. [...] Yet [...] once conceived, the notion of the edges of words simply would not itself 'stay put' with this first (possibly more obvious) nucleus of meaning. The edges pulled outward—the question of where, and what, are the edges of a word seemed to demand (or recruited into itself) considerations of the physical form of words: visually—their orthography, their appearance and placement on the page [...] and also auditorily, and temporally, as a word 'unfolds' over (in) time as it is spoken and perceived and apprehended in a listener's mind. The notion of 'the edges of words' provokes many questions concerning the effects and role of a word's physical beginnings and endings: a word's placement within a sentence or in a line of verse [...] and in relation to adjacent (preceding and following) words and punctuation. For example, what should we (or can we) make of Emily Dickinson's extensive use of the dash? How do dashes—those straight, horizontally elongated adjoiners of one word or set of words with another—work? Or commas, and colons, and hyphens? [...] Although I [...] draw on literature and poetry as sources of examples, I [...] chiefly draw on empirical research, particularly in cognitive psychology, cognitive neuropsychology, and related fields, relating to how we perceive, comprehend, and produce the beginnings and endings of words.
