

Morphology

Every word is consisted of one or more than one part. In this lesson, we're going to analyze words in detail. Let's find out.

What Is Morphology?

'Morphology' is a Greek word consisting of 'morph-' meaning 'form' and '-ology' meaning 'the study of something'. In linguistics, morphology is the study of the **internal structure** of words. In other words, It is a way of analyzing **constituent elements** of words. These parts or elements of words are called '**morphemes**'.

What Are Morphemes?

Morphemes are the **smallest units** of meaning or grammatical function. A morpheme is a word unit with a content meaning of itself. It can also be an **affix** or a word part with no content meaning in itself but with a **function**. For example:

Renewed → **re** (unit of meaning) + **new** (unit of meaning)+ **-ed** (unit of grammatical function)

Tourists → **tour** (unit of meaning) + **-ist** (unit of meaning) + **-s** (unit of grammatical function)

Morphemes: Types

Morphemes can be divided into two general groups:

- **Free** Morphemes
- **Bound** Morphemes



Jane is taller than her sister.

an example of inflectional morpheme

Free Morphemes

Morphemes that can function as a **single** word with a specific meaning are called **free** morphemes. In other words, they can stand alone **without** any other element involved. Note that Free morphemes are described as **base words**. Here are some examples:

Picture

Life

With

And

Free morphemes are divided into two groups based on what they do in a sentence:

- **Lexical morphemes:** They are a set of nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that carry the **most content** of a sentence. It is possible for lexical morphemes to change their meaning when combined with other morphemes, but their free morphemes will still form the content of the sentence. Take a look at the examples:

Follow (verb)

House (noun)

Happy (adjective)

Now (adverb)

- **Functional morphemes:** They are a set of conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, demonstratives, auxiliaries, quantifiers, and articles. They fulfil grammatical roles and carry little meaning of their own. Note that they are not normally combined with affixes. For example:

It (pronoun)

Or (conjunction)

The (article)

On (preposition)

These (demonstrative)

Does (auxiliary verb)

Some (quantifier)

Tip!

Almost all free morphemes can be modified by affixes to form **complex** words. On the other hand, combining two free morphemes (mostly lexical) creates a compound word. Here are some examples:

Mail + box → **mailbox** (compound)

* As you can see, two free morphemes (lexical) made a compound noun.

Fight + -er → **fighter** (complex)

Bound Morphemes

Bound morphemes are those that cannot stand alone and normally have no linguistic meaning unless they are attached to a root, base word, or other morphemes. Thus, we can say that all affixes in English are bound morphemes. Here are some examples:

Unsatisfied → **un-** (bound) + satisfy (free) + **-ed** (bound)

Hopefully → hope (free) + **-full** (bound) + **-y** (bound)

Bound morphemes are divided into two groups:

- **Derivational morphemes:** When we use a set of affixes to make new words with different **grammatical** roles. Derivational morphemes include suffixes such as -ish, -ly, -ment, -ful and prefixes such as re-, pre-, ex-, un-, etc. Most derivational morphemes have roots in Latin or Greek. For example:

Good (adjective) + **ness** → goodness (noun)

Care (noun) + **less** → careless (adjective)

re- + start (verb) → restart (verb)

* As you can see, the bound morpheme changed the meaning of the word.

- **Inflectional morphemes:** The second type of bound morphemes is used **only** to show grammatical functions. English only has eight inflectional morphemes. Take a look at the examples below:

Noun + -'s → Sara**'s** mother is very sick.

* Here, -'s is attached to a noun and made it possessive. Notice that it is different from the -'s used as a contraction for *is* or *has* (e.g. it's mine).

Noun + -s or -es → She has two little sister**s**.

Verb + -s → He like**s** baseball.

Verb + -ing → I'm think**ing** about it.

Verb + -ed → I studi**ed** hard for tomorrow's exam.

Verb + -en → Jane's car got stole**n**.

Adjective + -er → Jane is taller**er** than her sister.

Adjective + -est → He is the kindest**est** person that I have ever seen.

Tip!

A word's grammatical role is never changed by **inflectional** morphemes. However, derivational morphemes can change both a word's part of speech and semantic meaning. Note that these two morphemes **always** appear in a specific order. The derivational morpheme will attach to a word first, and then the inflectional morpheme is added. For example:

Teachers → teach + **-er** (derivational)+ **-s** (inflectional)

Allomorphs

An allomorph is a **phonetic** and **spelling** variant of a morpheme. In other words, allomorphs are different sounds that pronounce the same morph. Here are some examples of the three most common types of allomorphs in the English language:

- **Past tense allomorphs:** We add the '-ed' morpheme to the end of regular verbs to form their past tense. It always functions the same but is sometimes pronounced differently. For example:

wanted /'wɑ:n.tɪd/ Vs. washed /wɒʃt/

* As you can see, -ed is pronounced as /ɪd/ in 'wanted', and pronounced as a /t/ in 'washed'.

rested /'res.tɪd/ Vs. touched /tʌtʃt/

* Here, the pronunciation symbols that you see between slashes are from the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

- **Plural allomorphs:** For making plural nouns, we must add -s or -es to the end of the words. They function the same but have three different versions of pronunciation /s/, /z/ and /ɪz/. For example:

Chips /tʃɪps/

Buses /'bʌsɪz/

Dogs /dɔ:gz/

- **Negative allomorphs:** We have different prefixes to make a negative word; all of them function the same but are pronounced differently. For example:

Unbelievable

Impossible

Informal

What Is a Null Allomorph?

A null allomorph (also known as a zero allomorph or a zero morph) can not be seen or said in a word, it is invisible. It can **only** be understood by the **context** of the word. We can find null allomorphs in the plural forms of some words and past tenses of irregular verbs. For example:

Sheep (singular) → sheep (plural)

* As you can see, we do not say 'sheeps'. The plural morpheme is invisible so it is called a null allomorph.

hit (present) → hit (past)

Roots, Base words and Stems

The English language has borrowed many words from other languages. **Latin** and **Greek** are the most common origins. There are three parts to a word: a root, a prefix, and a suffix. In a word, an affix does not function as a stand-alone word but is attached to the root or base word. Most people think root words, base words, and stems are the same, but in fact, they are different from each other.

Roots

Root words serve as the starting point for new words by adding **prefixes** and **suffixes**. The term 'root' refers to the part of the word that is not further analyzable. In other words, it is the part of the word that cannot be broken down. In traditional roots, these words usually can not stand alone and come from Latin or Greek Language. By this definition, roots are divided into two groups:

- Independent Root Words
- Dependent Root Words

Independent Root Words

There are some root words in English that can be used **independently** or as part of other words that are commonly used. Here are some examples:

act as in 'actor'

form as in 'conform'

Dependent Root Words

Much of English words are derived from Latin and Greek, so many word roots in English are not easily recognizable because of their origin. These root words usually can not stand alone; to form a complete word in English, they need to be combined with something else. For example:

aud as in audience

* Here, 'aud' is a Latin root which means 'to hear'. Obviously you can not use it as a stand-alone word but so many other words are formed by this root word.

biblio as in bibliophile

* Here, 'biblio' is a Greek root which means 'of books'.

Base Words

In contrast to roots, base words can always **stand alone** in the English Language. These words have meanings of their own and can also be prefixed and suffixed to form new words. In general, bases are any forms to which one can add affixes. For example:

bicycle → cycle (base word)

* Here, 'cycle' is a full and free word in English, but it can function as the base of other words. The word 'cycle' itself, is based on the root 'cyc' which means 'circle'.

reinvented → invent (base word)

* As you can see, by removing all the affixes you can extract the base word. The word 'invent' itself, is based on the root 'ven/vent' which means 'to come'.

Stems

Stems are only relevant in **inflectional** morphology. When the inflectional suffix is removed from a word, the part that remains will be called 'stem'. Here are some examples:

Responding → respond (stem)

* As you can see, whatever remains after removing the inflectional suffix is called 'stem'.

Demographics → demographic (stem)

Comments (0)

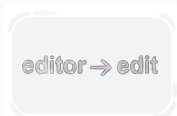
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Back-Formation and Conversion

Sometimes we can make a new word by shortening a long word and sometimes we can create a new word without changing anything. Isn't it interesting? Let's see.

