

words by using sounds in a non-imitative way. There is an overriding tendency for the relationship between sounds and meanings to be arbitrary. Normally there is no reason why a particular morpheme is realised by any particular sounds. The choice of the allomorph or allomorphs that represent a particular morpheme is arbitrary.

Obviously, as everyone knows, all languages do not have the same words. Since virtually any arbitrary match of sound and meaning can produce a word, it is not surprising that words vary greatly in their structure across languages. But this does not mean that chaos reigns. The ways in which morphs are used to form words is regulated by general principles. So, the amount of crosslinguistic variation in word-formation falls within certain broad parameters. It is as if there is a menu of blueprints for word-formation from which all languages make their selections:

[3.14]

- (i) ISOLATING (or analytic) languages
 - (ii) AGGLUTINATING languages
 - (iii) INFLECTING (or synthetic) languages
 - (iv) POLYSYNTHETIC languages
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No language makes all its choices from just one part of the menu. To varying degrees all languages make mixed choices. The idea of this menu is to indicate the predominant word-formation tendencies, if they exist. In the subsections below we shall consider in turn examples of the different morphological types.

3.6.1

Tiny words (isolating languages)

In an archetypical isolating language the word is virtually indistinguishable from the morpheme, for every word contains just one morpheme. Every morpheme is a free morpheme. There are no bound morphemes. Vietnamese comes close to this ideal:

[3.15]

Vietnamese

a.	Tôi	á	ã	qua'	bóng	vã	hn	â	dã	tôi
	I	kick	past	class.	ball	and	he	punch	past	me
	'I kicked the ball and he punched me.'									
b.	Chúng	tôi	mua	ã	g o					
	Pl.	I	buy	past	rice					
	'We bought the rice.'									

Typically, the words are short and contain just one morpheme each. Almost every concept is expressed by a separate word. Look again, for example, at the treatment of past tense in verbs (e.g. *punched*, *bought*) and the plurality of *we* (plural plus first person).