

# Word Formation

## Unit 3

NAMS

2025-08-10



# What is a word?

Discuss what a word is, its origin, and functions in a language.



- Study of the origin and history of words
- Example:
  - The etymology of 'henna': Arabic حِنَّاء (ḥinnā' [ħin' næ:ʔ])
  - The etymology of 'etymology': Greek (étymon "original form" + logia "study of")
- Words once considered bad taste, may evolve to be a part of the day-to-day use.



- Taking over of words from other languages
  - ‘kindargården’ from German, ‘pulis’ from French, bāik from English
  - Which language has English borrowed ‘namaste’ from?



- Direct translation of the elements of a word into the borrowing language
  - From German 'Übermensch', English has 'superman'
  - From English 'hotdogs', Spanish has 'perros calientes'



- Joining of two separate words to produce a single word
  - ‘Lehn’ and ‘Wort’ combine to form ‘Lehnwort’ in German (English claquees it as ‘loanword’)
  - English compounding: doghouse, bluebird, breakwater, trustworthy, good-looking, full-time, manhandle
  - German: Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän
  - Nepali: gharbār, āṃdhihuri, lekhajokhā
- Do same parts of speech combine?

(Check IAST for transcription of Devnagari script)



- Combination of two separate forms to produce a single new term
- By joining the beginning of one word and the end of the other word
  - Smog, infotainment, brunch



- When a bi- or multi-syllabic word is reduced to a shorter form usually beginning in casual speech.
- Form slangs that gradually move to common usage
  - ad (advertisement), bra (brassiere), cab (cabriolet), flu (influenza), maths (mathematics), bot (robot), sci-fi (science fiction), vax (vaccine), gas (gasoline), app (application)
- Which syllable of the word remains?





- A type of reduction
- In English, a longer word is reduced to a single syllable, then -y or -ie is added to the end.
  - movie (moving pictures), telly (television), barbie (barbecue), hankie (handkerchief), Philly (Philadelphia)
- In Nepali, a long name is reduced and -ū is added: cirañjibi-> cirū



- A word of one type (usually a noun) is reduced to form a word of another type (usually a verb).
  - English: 'Edit' was backformed from 'editor' that was already in use.
  - televise, sculptor, babysitters, beggars, burglars, peddlers and swindlers are all backformed from television, sculpt, babysit, beg, burgle, peddle and swindle.



- A change in the function of a word, i.e., category change, functional shift
- E.g., a noun gets used as a verb (without any reduction)
  - A spy 'spies'. Did they 'doctor' those pictures?



- Words formed from the initial letters of a set of other words.
- Pronunciation can be individual letter (e.g., CD) or the acronym as a new word (e.g., NASA)
- Some become part of common usage losing capital letters, e.g., sim card instead of SIM (subscriber identity module) card.



- New words are derived by adding affixes to root words
- Prefixes, suffixes, infixes
- Generally not categorised as new words in dictionary
  - believe -> believable -> unbelievable -> un-freakin'-believable
- Does Nepali have infixes?



- Newly formed word or phrase gaining popularity and institutional recognition beyond just a group or community
- After publication in a dictionary, the word is no longer a neologism
- Examples:
  - Finfluencers, Showerthoughts
  - Earlier neologisms: Metaverse, NFTs, Fomo, Ghosting
- What are the latest neologisms in your social media feed?



- New words formed in a language from more than one method/process
- 'snowball'
  - Compounding of snow and ball
  - conversion: snowball (noun) -> snowball (verb)

See Yule (2023) for further details.



Yule, G. (2023). The study of language (8th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

