

Structure of English Words



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Plan

- Morpheme as the important component of word structure.
- Types of morphemes. Allomorphs.
- Types of affixes.
- Immediate Constituents Analysis.

- The most important component of word structure is the **morpheme** – the smallest unit of language that carries information about meaning or function.
- **Builder** → 2 morphemes: **build** (with the meaning of “construct”) and **-er** (which indicates that the entire word functions as a noun with the meaning “one who builds”).
- **Houses** → **house** (with the meaning of “dwelling”) and **-s** (with the meaning of “more than one”).

A word may consist of one, two or more morphemes:

- *act, act-ive, act-iv-ate, re-act-iv-ate.*
- Morphemes are the smallest indivisible two-facet language units. They are always used as parts of words.

free (*boy*)

A free morpheme coincides with the stem or a word-form.

bound (-s)

A bound morpheme occurs only as a constituent part of a word.

- **Affixes** are bound morphemes.

- Morphemes in various texts can have different phonemic shapes.
- All the representatives of the given morpheme are called **allomorphs** (from Greek *allos* "other") of that morpheme.
- The morpheme used to express indefiniteness in English, for instance, has two forms – **a** before a word that begins with a consonant (**a car**) and **an** before a word that begins with a vowel (**an accent**).
- The variant forms of a morpheme are its allomorphs.

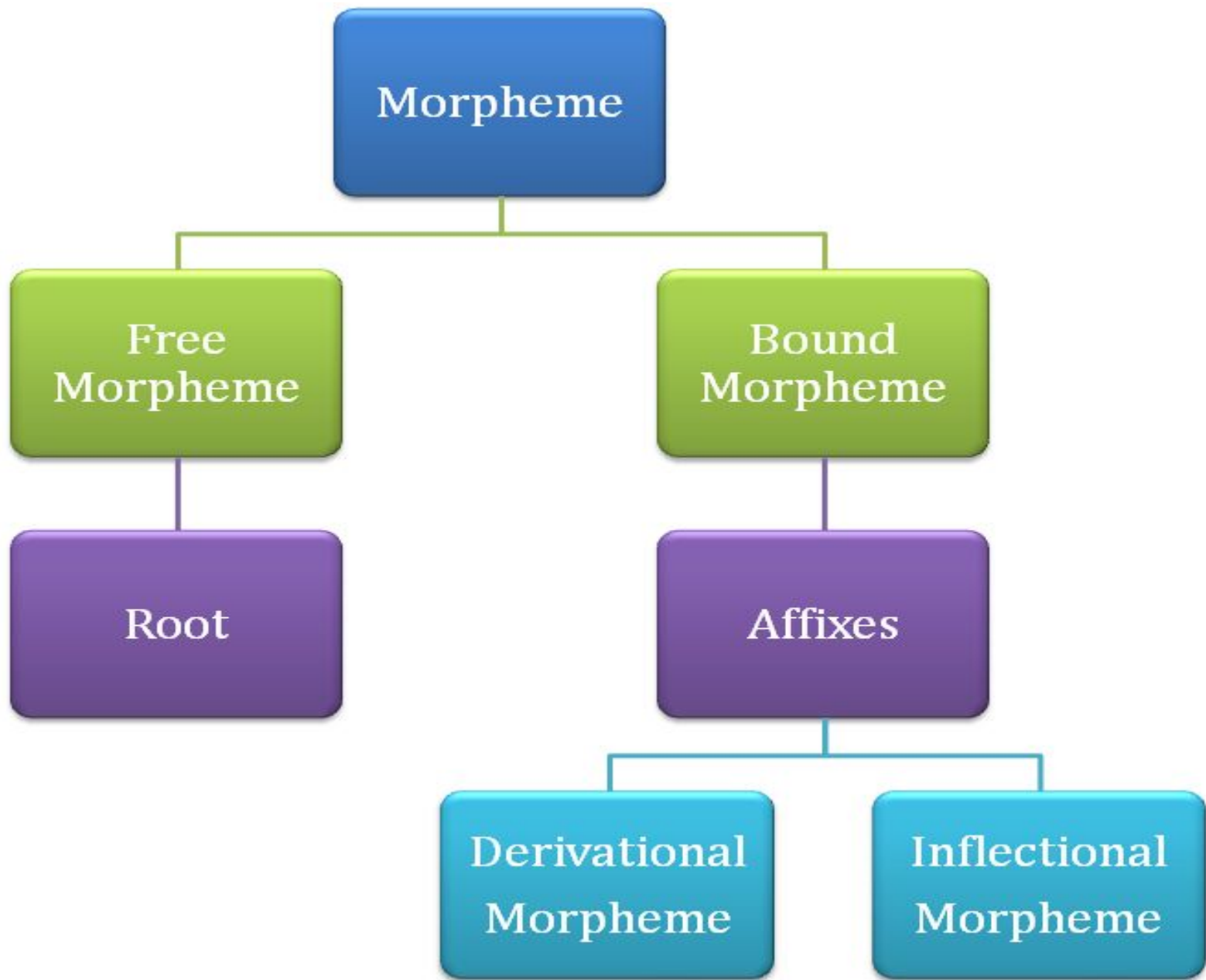
- **Cats** → /s/
- **Dogs** → /z/
- **Judges** → /ɪz/

Selection of the proper allomorph is dependent on phonological facts.

- **Assert** → [t]
- **Assertion** → [ʃ]
- *Permit* – *permiss*ive, *electric* – *electric*ity,
impress – *impress*-ion.

An **allomorph** is a positional variant of that or this morpheme occurring in a specific environment.

- Words can have two or more parts: a core called a **root** and one or more parts added to it and called **affixes** (something fixed or attached to something else).
- The root is the morpheme that **expresses the lexical meaning** of the word: ***teach*** – ***teacher*** – ***teaching***.
- Affixes are morphemes that **modify the meaning** of the root.
- An affix added before the root is called a **prefix**; an affix added after the root is called a **suffix**.



A word may have one or more affixes of either kind, or several of both kinds:

Prefix	Root	Suffix (es)	Example
<i>un-</i>	<i>work</i>	<i>-able</i>	<i>unworkable</i>
	<i>fright</i>	<i>-en; -ing</i>	<i>frightening</i>
<i>re-</i>	<i>play</i>		<i>replay</i>

- A root constitutes the core of the word and carries the major component of its meaning.
- To find the root, you have to remove any affix there may be: the root ***-morph-*** (form) remains after we remove the affixes ***a-*** and ***-ous*** from ***amorphous***.
- Roots have more specific and definite meaning than prefixes or suffixes:
 - ***-aqua-*** (water) in *aquarium*,
 - ***-cent-*** (hundred) in *centennial*,
 - ***-neo-*** (new) in *neologism*, etc.

DIS

ABLE

RE

COVER

ING

UN

ED



Roots belong to a lexical category, such as ***noun*** (N), ***verb*** (V), ***adjective*** (A), or ***preposition*** (P).

- Nouns typically refer to concrete and abstract things (*door, intelligence*);
- verbs tend to denote actions (*stop, read*);
- adjectives usually name properties (*kind, blue*);
- prepositions encode spatial relations (*in, near*).

Unlike roots, affixes do not belong to a lexical category and are always bound morphemes:

- *-er* (a bound morpheme) combines with *teach* (a verb), → a noun with the meaning "one who teaches".

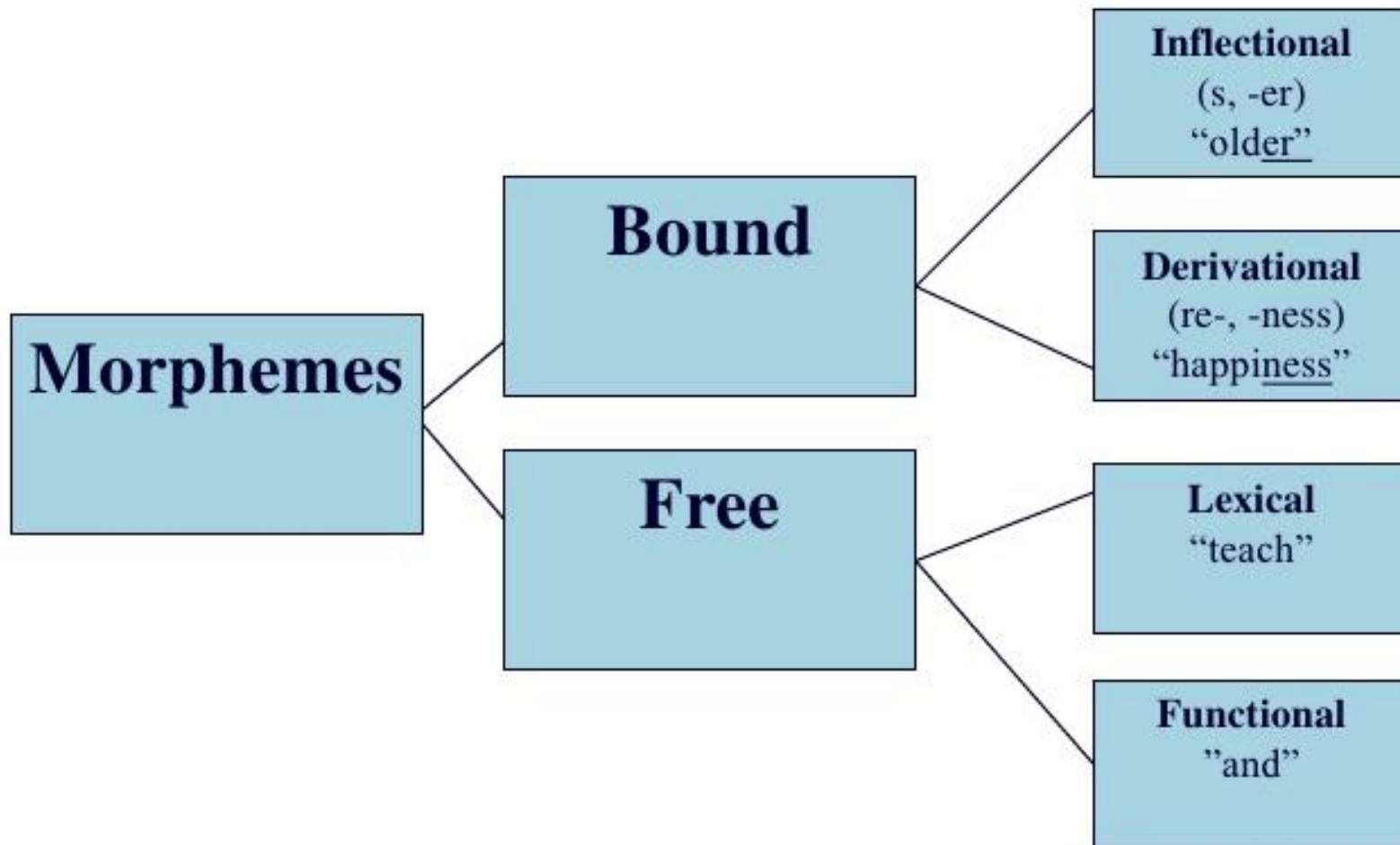
A base (stem) is the form to which an affix is added

- In many cases, the base is also the root: books.
- In other cases, however, the base can be larger than a root: blackened. Black is not only the root for the entire word but also the base for *-en*. The unit blacken, on the other hand, is simply the base for *-ed*.

One should distinguish between suffixes and **inflections**.

- Suffixes can form a new part of speech: beauty — beauti*ful*.
- They can also change the meaning of the root: black — *blackish*.
- Inflections are morphemes used to change grammar forms of the word: work – works – worked – working.
- English is not a highly inflected language* .

A Useful Way to Remember Different Types of Morphemes (Yule, 2010)



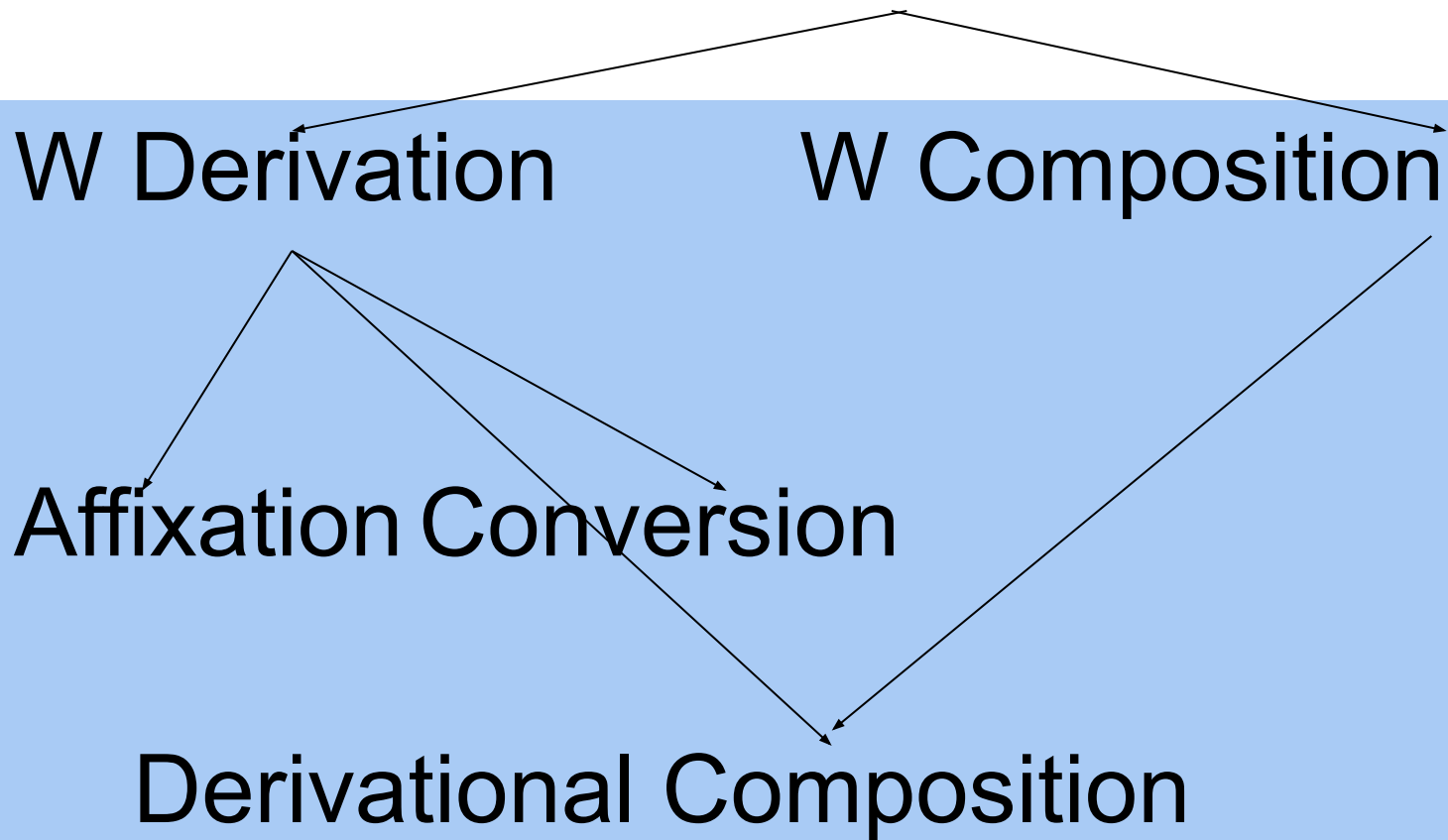
Four structural types of words in English:

- **simple** (root) words consist of one root morpheme (& an inflexion): *boy, warm, law, tables, tenth*;
- **derived** words consist of one root morpheme, one or several affixes (& an inflexion): *unmanageable, lawful*;
- **compound** words consist of two or more root morphemes (& an inflexion): *boyfriend, outlaws*;
- **compound-derived** words consist of two or more root morphemes, one or more affixes (& an inflexion): *left-handed, warm-hearted, blue-eyed*.

In conformity with structural types of words we distinguish two main types of word-formation:

- **word-derivation** (*encouragement*, *irresistible*, *worker*) and
- **word-composition** (*class board*, *day-dream*, *weekend*).

WORD FORMATION



Immediate Constituents Analysis

- The theory of Immediate Constituents (I.C.) was originally set forth by L. Bloomfield as **an attempt to determine the ways in which lexical units are related to one another.**
- This kind of analysis is used in lexicology mainly **to discover the derivational structure of lexical units.**

- This method is based on the *binary principle*, i.e. each stage of the procedure involves two components the unite immediately breaks into.
- The analysis is completed when we arrive at constituents incapable of further division, i.e. morphemes

Wrong:

X

en | large ment

In | depend | ent

In | support | able

Right:

✓

en large | ment

in | depend ent

in | support able

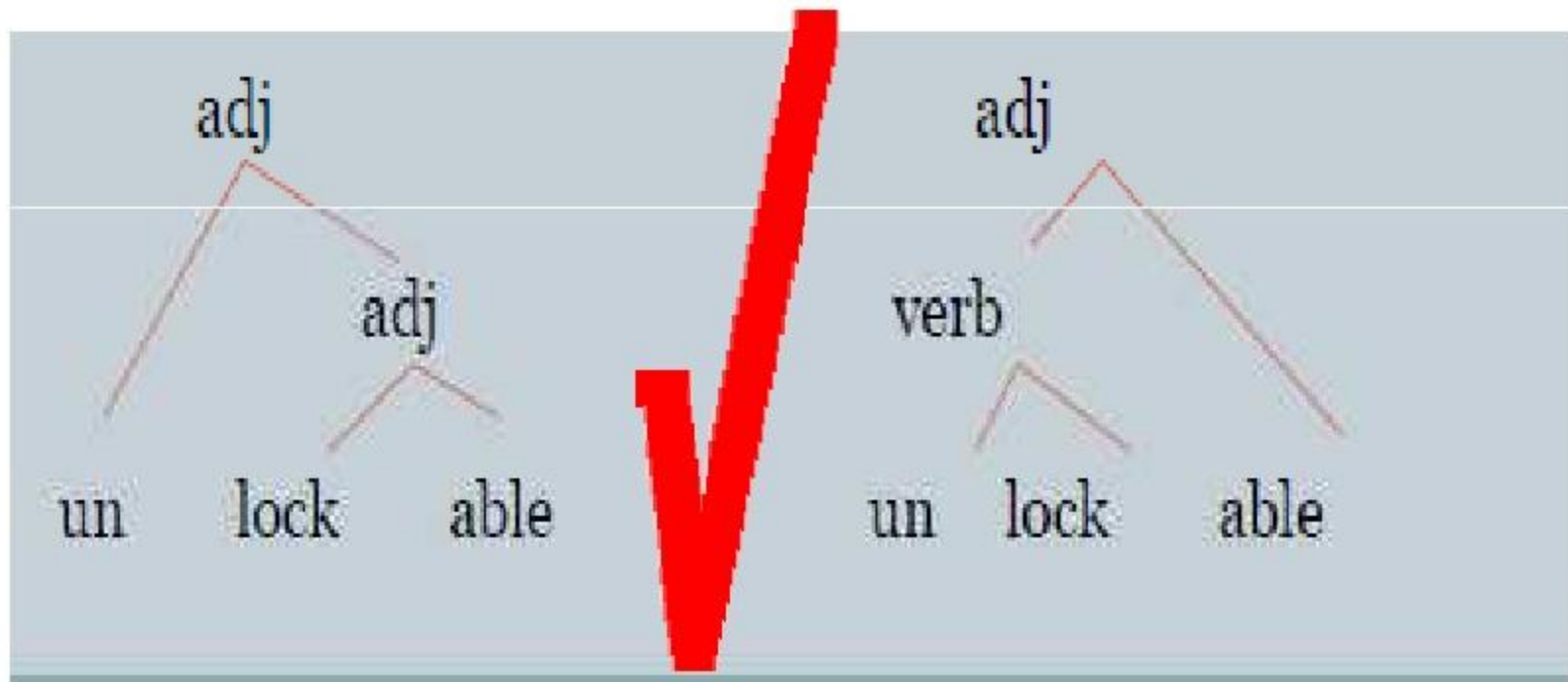
- Immediate constituents are **any of the two meaningful parts of a word**.
- The main constituents are an **affix** and a **stem**.
- ***ungentlemanly*** – consists of a negative prefix *un-* + *an adjective stem*.
- First we separate a free and a bound forms: *un-* + *gentlemanly* and *gentleman* + *-ly*.
- Then we break ***gentleman***: ***gentle*** + ***man***.
- At any level we obtain only **two** ICs, one of which is a **stem**.
- The formula is: *un* + (*gentle* + *man*) + *ly*.

- ***eatable*** consists of two ICs: *eat* + *able* and may be described as a ***suffixal derivative***
- ***uneatable*** possesses a different structure: the two ICs are *un* + *eatable* which shows that this adjective is a ***prefixal derivative***.
- *snow-covered* = *snow* + *covered*
(a ***compound***)
- *blue-eyed* = (*blue* + *eye*) + *ed*
(a ***suffixal derivative***)

- **KEY TERMS:**

- **morpheme** – *the smallest bit of language that has its own meaning, either a word or a part of a word;*
- **free** – *(not in a fixed position or) not joined to anything;*
- **bound** – *tied with;*
- **root** (of a word) – *is its most basic form, to which other parts, such as affixes, can be added;*
- **affix** – *a letter or group of letters which are added to the beginning or end of a word to make a new word.*

- some words are **ambiguous** in that they have more than one meaning.
- When we examine their internal structure, we find out that they may be analyzed in more than one way.



Key terms:

Morpheme

Free
Morpheme

Bound Morpheme

Derivational
Morpheme

Inflectional
Morpheme

+ *immediate constituents analysis*