

English Morphology

Morphology

the branch of grammar which studies the structure of words.

Morpheme

- a minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function that is the central concern of morphology.
- the teacher restructured the final exam.
- *re-* (minimal unit of meaning standing for *again*)
- *-structur* (minimal unit of meaning)
- *-ed* (minimal unit of grammatical function)

Morphemes are commonly classified into:

- **free morphemes** – morphemes which can stand by themselves as separate words,
e.g. *structure, like, go, work, friend* etc.

- **bound morphemes** – morphemes which cannot normally stand alone but need to be attached to other forms,
e.g. *re-, -ed, -s, -ing* etc.

- unit of meaning which can only exist alongside a free morpheme.

These are most commonly **prefixes** and **suffixes**:

- **un**grateful
- **in**sufficient
- **child**ish
- **good**ness

A handful of examples

- *His un-happi-ness is contagious.*
- *He is talking rubbish.*
- *Stop listening to his disruptive comments.*
- *Oh goodness me! He has unraveled the mystery.*
- *That essay is illegible.*
- *She finds it stressful to keep travelling.*

Free morphemes

- lexical morphemes:
 - red, house, colour, kitchen, etc.
- functional morphemes:
 - to, near, because, since, as, for, etc.

BOUND MORPHEMES

- *Derivational morphemes* are affixes (prefixes or suffixes) that are added to words to form new words (e.g., possible / **im**-possible / **im**-possibil-**ity**).
- *Inflectional morphemes* are suffixes as in -*Sally's daughters* - or - *I wanted***ed** *it* - they provide grammatical information about gender, number, person, case, degree, and verb form. They are not used to change the grammatical category of a word.

English inflectional morphology

- English has only three categories of meaning which are expressed inflectionally, known as **inflectional categories**. They are **number** in nouns, **tense/aspect** in verbs, and **comparison** in adjectives.

Word class to which inflection applies	Inflectional category	Regular affix used to express category
Nouns	Number	-s, -es: book/books, bush/bushes
	Possessive	-'s, -': the cat's tail, Charles' toe
Verbs	3rd person singular present	-s, -es: it rains, Karen writes, the water sloshes
	past tense	-ed: paint/painted
	perfect aspect	-ed: paint/painted ('has painted) (past participle)
	progressive or continuous aspect	-ing: fall/falling, write/writing (present participle)
Adjectives	comparative (comparing two items)	-er: tall/taller
	superlative (comparing +2 items)	-est: tall/tallest

- Though most inflectional morphemes are suffixes, some irregular forms do exist (e.g., *men* is the plural of *man*).
- Some words of foreign origins will have irregular inflections (e.g. curriculum/a, corpus - corpora)

The genitive case

- Not only expressing possession (*the cat's food*)
- The notion of origin (*the traveller's story*)
- A description (*a summer's day*)
- A period is measured (*three months' holiday*)
- Doing the action or receiving the action (*the man's application*)
- Personal and higher animal's nouns (*Hilary's book*)
- Nouns of special human relevance (*my life's aim*)

The of- genitive

- Inanimate nouns (*a part of the difficulty*)
- Titles (*the Duke of York*)
- Some nouns can have both forms....
 - *the ship's name* or *the name of the ship*

How is the plural morpheme realised?

- (1) *witch, horse, wish*
- (2) *wand, professor, injury*
- (3) *rat*
- (4) *ox, goose, tooth*
- (5) *werewolf*

- (1) *witches, horses, wishes*
- (2) *wands, professors, injuries*
- (3) *rats*
- (4) *oxen, geese, teeth*
- (5) *werewolves*

Nouns for People

SUFFIX	ROOT	WORD
- er, -or, - ress	Drive Edit Wait	DRIV-ER EDIT-OR WAIT-RESS
-ist	Tour Science	TOUR-IST SCIENT-IST
- ant , - ent	Assist Study	ASSIST-ANT STUD-ENT
-an, - ian	Republic Electric	REPUBLIC-AN ELECTRIC-IAN
- ee	Employ Examine Address	EMPLOY-EE EXAMIN-EE ADDRESS-EE

Forming Adjectives

-y	added to the names of common substances, objects and things that are experienced	Rock = ROCKY (full of rocks, like rocks) Noise = NOISY (producing noise)
-ly	Added to time words and to certain family/personal words	Day = DAILY Week= WEEKLY Man = MANLY
-ful	Added when it indicates in a positive way the presence of a quality or ability	Use = USEFUL Skill = SKILFUL
-less	Negatively suggests the absence of a quality or ability	Use = USELESS Meaning = MEANINGLESS
- al	Added to certain nouns of Latin origin ending in –ion, -ic(s) and -ure	Addition = ADDITIONAL Music = MUSICAL Ethics = ETHICAL Nature = NATURAL