



# Introduction to English Morphology

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# Morphology

Several subfields of linguistic theory: phonology, phonetics, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and morphology.

- M. – Phonology – the selection of the form that manifests a given morpheme may be influenced by the sounds that realise neighbouring morphemes. (e.g. Indefinite article *a/an*; we cannot describe the phonological shape of the indefinite article without referring to the sound at the beginning of the word that follows it.)
- M. - Syntax Interaction – the form of a word may be affected by the syntactic construction in which the word is used. E.g. The verb *walk* has a number of forms *walk*, *walks*, *walked*. The selection of a particular form of this verb on a given occasion is dependent on the syntactic construction in which it appears.
- M. – Semantics – the relationship between a word and its meaning is arbitrary. There is no reason why a word has the particular meaning that it has. Wimple? You have to memorise the fact that this word refers to a kind of mediaeval headdress.

# The Scope of Morphology

- Morphology: the branch of grammar that deals with the internal structure of words.
- A sub-branch of linguistics not until the 19th century.
- Evolution, biology, morphology – metaphorical extensions (roots, family, branch...)
- Regarded as an essentially **synchronic** discipline, i.e. a discipline focusing on the study of word-structure at one stage in the life of a language rather than on the evolution of words.
- In American structural linguistics morphology was studied as one linguistic level. The most important contribution of American structural linguists was recognition of the fact that words may have intricate internal structures. Whereas traditionally linguistic analysis had treated the word as the basic unit of grammatical theory and lexicography, the American structuralists showed that words are analysable in terms of **morphemes**. These are the smallest units of meaning and/or grammatical function. The purpose of morphology was the study of morphemes and their arrangements in forming words.

# Morpheme

- E.g. *Some books are printed in bold typeface.*
- *Some, book+s, are, print+ed, in, bold, type+face*
- 10 units
- From this structuralist analysis, we can conclude that *morpheme* is the minimal, indivisible, or primitive unit.
- Meaning!

# The Scope of Morphology

- The name is a Greek-based parallel to the German *Formenlehre* – ‘the study of forms’, and like many linguistic terms is 19th-century in origin (biology).
- The term itself is attributed to J.W. von Goethe who coined it in early 19th century in a biological context. (Aronoff, 2005)
- It is simply a term for that branch of linguistics which is concerned with the ‘forms of words’ in different uses and constructions.
- In biology *morphology* refers to the study of the form and structure of organisms; in geology it refers to the study of the configuration and evolution of land forms.

# The Word

- We begin this study with one of the most fundamental units of linguistic structure: the word.
- How many words do we know?
- How do we use a finite vocabulary to deal with the potentially infinite number of situations we encounter in the world?
- Open-endedness of our vocabulary

# Words

- How many words?

Children entering school – 13000\*

A highschool graduate – 60000\*

A literate adult – 120000\*

+ names of people, places...

- The list of words for any language is called *lexicon*.
- Existence of words in our native language is obvious, but in a foreign, incomprehensible language it is difficult to recognise words.
- When you have mastered a language, you are able to recognise individual words without effort.

\* source: Akmajian, A. et al. 2001. *Linguistics*. Cambridge: MIT Press. p. 11 (quoted from Steven Pinker's *Words and rules: The Ingredients of Language*)

# Word Properties

- What do we know when we know a word?
  - What kind of information have we learned when we learn a word?
1. *Phonetic/Phonological information.* For every word we know, we have learned a pronunciation. Part of knowing the word *book* is knowing certain sounds.
  2. *Lexical structure information.* For every word we have learned, we intuitively know something about its internal structure. *Book-books (pl.)*
  3. *Syntactic information.* For every word we learn, we learn how it fits into the overall structure of sentences in which it can be used. *Read-readable.*



# Word properties

4. *Semantic information.* For virtually every word we know, we have learned a meaning or several meanings. E.g. Knowing the word *minister* is to know that it has a certain meaning of a 'government official'. We may or may not know other meanings.
5. *Pragmatic information.* For every word we learn, we know not only its meaning or meanings but also how to use it in the context of discourse or conversation. E.g. *Hello* is usually used to greet, but sometimes *Hello!* Can have other meanings, such as 'wake up'...

We have seen that words are associated with a wide range of information and that each type of information forms an important area of study for a subfield of linguistics.

# What are words?

- We can say that a word 'friendship' is a complex pattern of sounds associated with a certain meaning. Of course, this meaning is expressed with different sound patterns in different languages, i.e. The nature of the sound does not dictate what the meaning ought to be, so we say that the pairing of sound and meaning is said to be arbitrary.
- As a first definition we might say that a word is *an arbitrary pairing of sound and meaning*.
- There are at least two reasons why this definition is inadequate. First, it does not distinguish between words and phrases or sentences, which are also (derivatively) arbitrary pairings of sound and meaning. Second, a word such as *it* in a sentence such as *It is snowing* has no meaning. The word is simply a placeholder for the subject position of the sentence.
- Therefore, not all sound sequences are words, and not all sound sequences that native speakers would identify as words have a meaning. We have intuitions about what is and is not a word in our native language, but as yet we do not have an adequate definition for the term *word*.

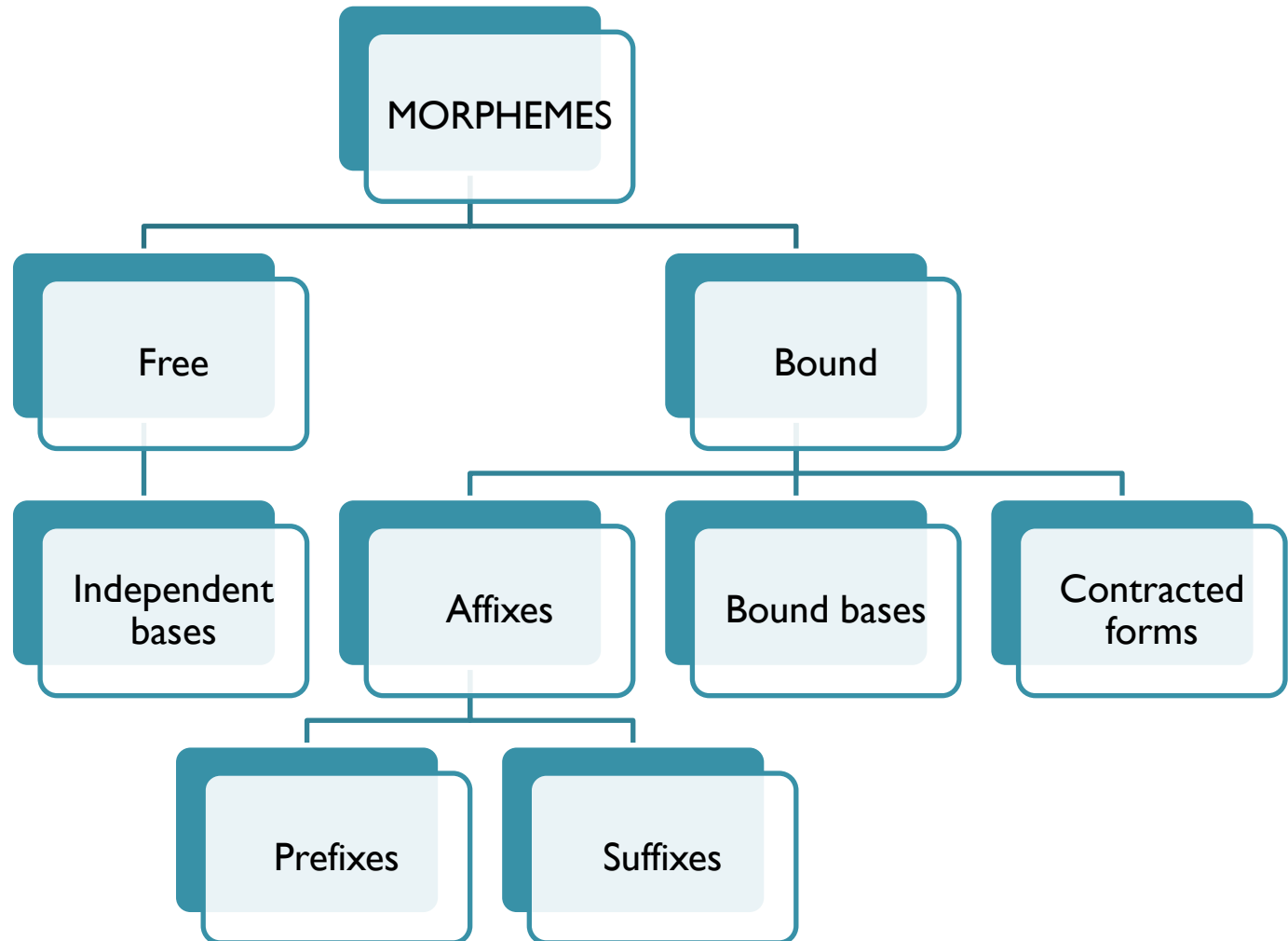
# Words and Morphemes

- It has long been recognised that words must be classed into at least two categories: *simple* and *complex*. A simple word such as *tree* seems to be a minimal unit; there seems to be no way to analyse it, or break it down further, into meaningful units. On the other hand, the word *trees* is made up of two parts: the noun *tree* and the plural ending, spelled –s in this case.
- Not every noun in English forms its plural in this fashion (*children*, *oxen*), but we can say that most of complex plural forms are made up of a simple noun followed by the plural ending –s. The basic parts of a complex word are called **morphemes**. The meaning of such plural forms is a combination, in some intuitive sense, of the meaning of the base morpheme and the meaning of the plural morpheme –s. In some cases a morpheme may not have an identifiable meaning (e.g. –ceive). In short, we will say that morphemes are the minimal units of word building in a language; they cannot be broken down any further into recognisable or meaningful parts.

# Morphemes

- Morphemes are categorised into two classes: **free morphemes** and **bound** morphemes. A free morpheme can stand alone as an independent word in a phrase (*John ate an apple*). A bound morpheme cannot stand alone but must be attached to another morpheme (*cranberry*, *books*).
- Certain bound morphemes are known as affixes, others as bound base morphemes (*cran-*). Affixes are referred to as *prefixes* when they are attached to the beginning of another morpheme (like *re-* in words such as *redo*, *rewrite*, *rethink*), and as *suffixes* when they are attached to the end of another morpheme.
- The morpheme to which an affix is attached is the **base** or **stem** morpheme. A base morpheme may be free (*tree*, *boy*) or bound (*cran-*).

# Classification of morphemes



# Morphemes

- Certain languages also have affixes known as **infixes**, which are attached within another morpheme. Infixation is common in languages of Southeast Asia and the Philippines, and it is also found in some Native American languages.
- It must be noted that not all bound morphemes are affixes or bound bases. E.g. In English certain words have *contracted* (shortened) forms. The word *will* can occur either as *will* or in a contracted form 'll. The latter form is a bound morpheme in that it cannot occur as an independent word and must be attached to the preceding word or phrase. Other contracted forms ('s, 've, 'd) are all bound morphemes.

# Summary

- We have seen that words fall into two general classes: simple and complex. Simple words are single free morphemes that cannot be broken down further into recognisable or meaningful parts.
- Complex words consist of two or more morphemes in combination.

# Grammatical Categories

- Each word belongs to a grammatical category and each member of a grammatical category shares some properties with other members. E.g. Most of nouns create plural with the addition of –s. Verbs form third person singular by adding –s.
- All these properties provide morphological evidence for distinguishing nouns and verbs from words belonging to other grammatical categories.



# Morphological properties of grammatical categories

- Verbs take the suffix –s in the present tense (*bake-bakes, walk-walks...*) and this is known as third person singular because this is the form of the verb that occurs when the subject of the sentence is third person singular. The verb form remains the same as in first person singular, except when the subject is third person singular.
- Verbs can also take the suffix –ing, as in *bake-baking, walk-walking*.
- Adjectives can usually take the suffixes –er, -est (*big-bigger-biggest*). Some other do not occur with these suffixes but with the comparative words *more* and *most*.
- Adverbs share many of the properties of adjectives and are often formed from adjectives by the addition of the suffix –ly. (*quick-quickly*). (but adjectives can end in –ly: e.g. *lonely*).
- Prepositions have no positive morphological evidence for their classification.

# Morphological properties of grammatical categories

- We have to point out that grammatical properties of a given part-of-speech class are quite specific to a given language or a small group of languages.

# Open-class vs. Closed-class Words

- A distinction is sometimes made between *open-class words* and *closed-class words*. They are sometimes referred to as *content words* and *function words*.
- The open-class words include nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs; these classes tend to be quite large and open-ended. An unlimited number of new words can be created and added to these classes.
- Closed-class words are those belonging to grammatical, or function, classes: articles, demonstratives, quantifiers, conjunctions, and prepositions. They tend to include small number of fixed elements.
- This distinction can be seen especially in *telegraphic speech*. E.g.

HAVING WONDERFUL TIME. ZADAR GREAT. PROFESSORS DULL.  
SEND MONEY. STOP.