

# Inflectional morphology assignment



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Inflectional Morphology ‘... and even ... the patriotic archbishop of Canterbury found it advisable ...’ ‘ Found what? said the Duck. ‘ Found it, ‘ the Mouse replied rather crossly; ‘ of course you know what “ it” means. ‘ ‘ I know what “ it” means well enough, when I find a thing, ‘ said the Duck; ‘ it’s generally a frog or a worm. The question is, what did the archbishop find? ‘ Lewis Carroll, Alice’s adventures in Wonderland Morphological rules for combining morphemes into words differ from the syntactic rules of a language, which determine how words are combined to form sentences; but there is an interesting relationship between morphology and syntax.

In derivation morphology, we saw that certain aspects of morphology have syntactic implications–nouns can be derived from verbs, verbs from adjectives, adjectives from nouns, and so on. Sentences are combinations of morphemes. It is not always possible to assign a meaning to some of these morphemes, however. For example, what is the meaning of it in the sentence It’s hot in July or in The archbishop found it advisable? What is the meaning of to in He wanted her to go? To has a grammatical ‘ meaning’ as an infinitive marker, and it is also a morpheme required by the syntactic sentence formation rules of the language.

Similarly, there are ‘ bound’ morphemes that, like to the most purely grammatical markers, representing such concepts as ‘ tense’, ‘ number’, ‘ gender’, and ‘ case’. Such ‘ bound’ grammatical morphemes are called inflectional morpheme: they never change the syntactic category of the word or morphemes to which they are attached. They are always attached to complete words. Consider the forms of the verb in the following sentences:

a. I sail the ocean blue. b. He sails the ocean blue. c. John sailed the ocean blue. d. John has sailed the ocean blue. e. John is sailing the ocean blue.

In sentence b the s at the end of the verb is an ‘ agreement’ marker; it signifies that the subject of the verb is ‘ third person’, is singular, and that the verb is in the present tense. It does not add any lexical meaning. In sentence c the ed and ing endings are morphemes required by the syntactic rules of the language to signal ‘ tense’ or ‘ aspect’. English is no longer a highly inflected language, but we do have other inflectional endings. The plurality of a count noun, for example, is usually marked by a plural suffix attached to the singular noun, as in the boy/boys, cat/cats. Count nouns are those that can be counted: one boy, two boys. Non count nouns cannot be counted: ‘ one rice, ‘ two rices) An inflectional morpheme in English is that they typically follow derivational morphemes. Thus, to the derivationally complex word un+like+ly+hood, we can add a plural ending to form un+like+ly+hood+s but not “ unlikeslyhood”. However, with ‘ compounds’ the situation is complicated. For many speakers, the plural of mother-in-law is mothers-in-law, whereas the possessive form is mother-in-law’s.

With non-compound words, though, the inflectional morphemes do come after the derivational morphemes. Some grammatical relations can be expressed either inflectionally or syntactically. See the following sentences: The girl’s book is blue. The book of the girl is blue. He loves books. He is a lover of books. The planes that fly are red. The flying planes are red. He is hungrier than Tom. He is more hungry than Tom. Some languages are highly inflective. The noun in Finnish, for example, has many different inflectional

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endings, as shown in the following example: anterenominative singular (sg. )

mantereengenitive (possessive) sg. manterettapartitive sg.

mantereenaessive sg. mantereeseenillative sg. mantereitapartitive plural (pl)

mantereisiinillative pl. mantereidengenitive pl. These forms of the noun

meaning ‘continent’ are just some of its inflected forms (Campbell 1977) In

English the sentence Maxim defends Victor means something different from

Victor defends Maxim. The word order is important. In Russian, all the

following sentences mean ‘Maxim defends Victor’: Maksim zasciscajet

Viktora.

Maksim Viktora zasciscajet. Viktora Maksim zasciscajet. Viktora zasciscajet

Maksim. Zasciscajet Maksim Viktora. Zasciscajet Viktora Maksim. The

inflectional suffix ??? a added to the name Viktor to derive Viktora shows

that Victor, not Maxim, is the one who is defended. In English, to form the

future tense of a verb we must use a function word will, as in John will come

Monday. In French, the verb is inflected for tense. Notice the difference

between ‘John is coming on Monday’ Jean vient lundi and ‘John will come on

Monday’ Jean viendra lundi.

In derivational and compounding morphology, we noted that knowing the

meaning of the distinct morphemes may not always reveal the meaning of

the morphologically complex word. This problem is not true of inflectional

morphology. If we know the meaning of the word linguist, we also know the

meaning of the plural form linguists: if we know the meaning of the verb

analyse, we know the meaning of analysed and analyses and analysing. This

fact is one difference between derivational and inflectional morphology.