

Morphology: affix and inflectional morphemes essay



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According to George Yule, morphology means "The study of forms. It investigates basic forms in language". This term was originally used in biology, but since the middle of nineteenth century, has also been used to describe the type of identification, analysis and description of the structure of morphemes and other units of meaning in a language like words, affixes, and parts of speech, intonation, stress, implied context.

Morphemes We do not actually have to go to other languages to discover that "word forms" may consist of a number of elements. We can recognize that English word forms such as talks, talker, talked and talking consist of one element talk, and a number of other elements such as -s, -er, -ed and -ing. All these elements are described as morphemes. What is morpheme? Morpheme is a minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function.

Units of grammatical function include forms used to indicate past tense or plural, for example. As Geoffrey Finch (1998) puts it: "Morphemes are the smallest units of meaning, and the smallest units of grammatical analysis in the language. It's important not to confuse them with syllables, which are units of sound, and essentially meaningless." Geoffrey Finch (1998: 183) In the sentence The police reopened the investigation, the word reopened consist of three morphemes. One minimal unit of meaning is open, another minimal unit of meaning is re- and a minimal unit of grammatical function is -ed.

Another example is tourists also contains three morphemes; tour, ist and -s. From these examples, we can make a broad distinction between two types of morphemes. There are free morphemes, which stand by themselves as

single words, for example, open and tour. There are also bound morphemes, which are those forms that cannot normally stand alone and are typically attached to another form, exemplified as re-, -ed, -s. Such as affixes. So, we can say that all affixes (prefixes and suffixes) in English are bound morphemes.

The free morphemes can generally be identified as the set of separate English word forms such as basic nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc. When they are used with bound morphemes attached, the basic word forms are technically known as stems. For example: undressed, carelessness. un- dress -ed care -less -ness prefix stem suffix stem suffix suffix (bound) (free) (bound) (free) (bound) (bound) There are a number of English words in which the element treated as the stem is not, in fact, a free morpheme. In words such as receive, reduce and repeat, we can identify the bound morpheme re- at the beginning, but the elements -ceive, -duce and -peat are not separate word forms and hence cannot be free morphemes. These types of forms are sometimes described as "bound stems" to keep distinct from "free stems" such as dress and care.

Lexical and Functional morphemes Free morphemes are called lexical morphemes which are set of ordinary nouns, adjectives and verbs and some examples are: girl, man, house, tiger, sad, long, yellow, sincere, open, look, follow, break. These are treated as "open" class of words. Other types of free morphemes are called functional morphemes. Examples are and, but, when, because, on, near, above, in, the, that, it, them. This set consists largely of the functional words in the language such as conjunctions, prepositions, articles and pronouns. Because we almost never add new

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functional morphemes to the language, they are described as a "closed" class of words.

Derivational and inflectional morphemes Derivational morphemes are bound morphemes, we use them to make new words or to make words of a different grammatical category from the stem. For example, -ness changes the adjective good to the noun goodness. The noun care can become the adjective careful or careless. Other examples are foolish, quickly, payment, etc.

The second set of bound morphemes contains what are called inflectional morphemes. These are not used to produce new words in the language, but rather to indicate aspects of grammatical function of a word. Inflectional morphemes are used to show if a word is plural or singular, if it is past tense or not, and if it is a comparative or possessive form. English has only eight inflectional morphemes illustrated in the following sentences: Jim's two sisters are really different. One likes to have fun and is always laughing. The other liked to read as a child and has always taken things seriously.

One is the loudest person in the house and the other is quieter than a mouse. Morphology, then, is the study of two aspects of words: derivational and inflectional functions.. the first leads us to enquire further into the way words mean, into lexical semantics.

The second, leads us to the way words function in syntax. (Widdowson H. D 1996: 48) Morphological description There is a difference between derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. Inflectional morpheme never changes the grammatical category of a word.

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For example, both old and older are adjectives. However, a derivational morpheme can change the grammatical category of a word. The verb teach becomes the noun teacher if we add the derivational morpheme -er. The following sentence shows a list of all "elements": The nation's wildness shocked the presidents.

The child -' s wild -ness shock functional lexical inflectional lexical derivational lexical -ed the teach -er -s inflectional functional lexical derivational inflectional A useful way to remember all these types of morphemes is in the following chart. lexical (child, teach) free functional (and, the) morphemes derivational (re-, ness) bound inflectional (-' s, -ed) Problems in morphological description There is a number of outstanding problems in the analysis of English morphology. We have considered examples of English words in which the different morphemes are easily identifiable as separate elements. So, if -al is the derivational suffix added to the word legal to get the stem institution to give us institutional, then can we take -al off the word legal to get the stem leg? Unfortunately, the answer is "NO." The relationship between law and legal is a reflection of the historical influence of different languages on English word forms.

Consequently, there is no derivational relationship between the noun law and the adjective legal in English, nor between the noun mouth (from old English) and the adjective oral (a Latin borrowing). However, a full description of English morphology will have to take account of both historical influence and the effect of borrowed elements. One of the perennial theoretical problems in morphology is whether there is a clear-cut distinction between inflection and derivation and if so how to draw it. Inflection is often

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thought to be “ of relevance to syntax,” which is clearly true of contextual inflection, but not so obvious with inherent inflection. Yet we don’t want to say that plurals or past tenses are derivational and hence create new lexemes. Booij’s contextual / inherent distinction is designed to ameliorate this problem (though we are now left with the task of distinguishing inherent inflection from derivation).

A typical borderline case is that of the aspectual forms of Chukchee given above. Chukchee has a set of six tense-aspect forms in which aspect (roughly perfective vs. mperfective) is grammaticalized and expressed as part of the obligatory conjugation system. However, the affixes illustrated in (9–13) are not like this. Rather, they are optional elements which are added to modify the overall meaning of the verb. Does this make them derivational, then- Do we wish to say that “ to verb in a prolonged interrupted fashion” is a new lexeme related to verb (derivation) or a form of the word verb (inherent inflection)- Cases like this are quite common and promise to provide fertile ground for future research into the problem.