Hue University
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An Introduction to English Morphology

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CHAPTER 1

MORPHOLOGY

1. *Introduction*

How can we use and understand words in our language that we have never encountered before? This is the central question of a component of a grammar that deals with words and their internal structure.

Can we always tell precisely what a word is? Do *motet*, *motion* and *motive* have anything to do with each other? What ways do we have of making new words in English? Are the same ways of forming new words found in all languages? Is it just coincidence that although you can have a word like *people* which means much the same as '*a lot of persons'*, and a word *peoples* which means, more or less, '*a lot of lots of persons*', you cannot have a word *personss* meaning the same thing? Is it just coincidence that the ablative plural of the Latin word *re:x* 'king', *re:gibus*, meaning 'by/ from/ with the kings' is so much longer than the nominative singular re:x? (I use the phonetic length mark rather than the traditional macron to show long vowels in Latin.) All of these questions relate to **morphology**, the study of words and their structure.

It is a well-established observation that words occur in different forms. It is quite clear to anyone who has studied almost any of the Indo-European languages. Students of these languages learn paradigms like those below as models so that they can control the form-changes that are required. As illustrations, consider a verb paradigm from Latin and a noun paradigm from Icelandic. (The word 'paradigm' means 'pattern' or 'example'.)

(1)

amo;	'I love'
amais	'you (singular) love'
amat	'he/she/it loves'
ama:mus	'we love'
amaitis	'you (plural) love'
amant	'they love'

(2)

Singular	
nominative	hestur 'horse'
accusative	hest
dative	hesti
genitive	bests
Plural	
nominative	hestar
accusative	hesta
dative	hestum
genitive	hesta

In the nineteenth century, the term 'morphology' was given to the study of this change in the forms of words. The term is taken from the biological sciences, and refers to the study of shapes. In linguistics this means the study of the shapes of words; not the phonological shape (which can be assumed to be fairly arbitrary) but rather the systematic changes in shape

related to changes in meaning, such as those illustrated in the paradigms above, or such as that relating the pairs of words below:

(3)

desert	deserter
design	designer
fight	fighter
kill	killer
paint	painter
twist	twister

By extension, the term ‘morphology’ is used not only for the study of the shapes of words, but also for the collection of units which are used in changing the forms of words. In this sense, we might say that Latin has a more complex morphology than English. Again by extension, ‘morphology’ is also used for the sequence of rules which are postulated by the linguist to account for the changes in the shapes of words. In this sense we might contrast the morphology of language L with the syntax of language L (where the syntax is the sequence of rules postulated by the linguist to account for the ways in which words are strung together). In this sense we might also say that something is part of the job of ‘the morphology of language L’ or, more generally, of ‘morphology’, implying that this is true for all languages. We shall see later how all these senses fit together; such extensions of meaning are common within linguistics, and do not usually cause problems of interpretation.

Many traditional ‘grammars’ (in the sense ‘grammar books’) deal largely with such morphology as can be laid out in paradigms like those presented above, and have little to say about syntax. This has led to the situation where many lay people today still believe that languages like Chinese or English do not have much grammar, because they do not have extensive morphological paradigms. That is, for many people the term ‘grammar’ is equated with morphology. For most linguists today, however, ‘grammar’ includes both morphology and syntax, and most of the linguistic study of ‘grammar’ in this sense has, since the middle of this century, not been of morphology, but of syntax. This is understandable. Syntax, especially from 1957 onwards, was a relatively new field of study, while morphology was considered well-researched and well-under-stood. It did not seem at that time as if there was a great deal that was new to say about morphology. Morphological descriptions of hundreds of languages were available, but all the languages differed in what appeared to be essentially random ways. There did not seem to be any cross-linguistic generalizations to be made in morphology. Syntax, in the middle of this century, was a far richer ground for linguistic discoveries. It was the excitement of the progress being made in the study of syntax which gave Linguistics such a boost in the 1960’s. It was also progress in the study of syntax which eventually led to the realization that there were still questions to be answered in morphology. As a result, there has in recent years been a resurgence of interest in morphology.

The theoretical background to this new interest in morphology comes from three distinct sources. Firstly, there is the philological study of grammar in the last century and the early years of this century. Secondly, there is the study of diverse languages under the influence of one or another of the structuralist schools of Linguistics. In particular the work of the American structuralists, especially Bloomfield and his followers, is important here. Finally, there is the influence of transformational grammar and the school of thought that emerged from the work of Chomsky. It is not always easy to separate out these three strands in current morphological theory, and sometimes one dominates, sometimes another. Nonetheless, all three influences can be strongly felt. This book provides an introduction to the study of

morphology covering the input from these various sources, and attempting some kind of synthesis in the light of the most recent research. It discusses both the general background to all morphological study, and also some of the detail of recent theories of morphology.

(Laurie Bauer 1992: 3-5)

As with any other area of linguistic theory, we must distinguish between *general morphological theory* that applies to all languages and *the morphology of a particular language*. General morphological theory is concerned with delimiting exactly what types of morphological rules can be found in natural languages. The morphology of a particular language, on the other hand, is a set of rules with a dual function. First, these rules are responsible for **word formation,** the formation of new words. Second, they represent the speakers' unconscious knowledge of the **internal structure** of the already existing words of their language.

2. *Definition*

Morphology is the study of internal structure of words and of the rules by which words are formed.

De<u>institution</u>alization: practices of releasing patients from hospitals for the mentally ill.
Re<u>institution</u>alization: practices of returning them to these institutions.

By means of morphological rules we all understand that the above two words are derived from the root *institution* and the affixes *de-*/*re-*, *-al*, *- ize*, *-ation.*

Questions:
1. How is morphology of a particular language understood/meant?
2. What is meant by English morphology?

APPENDIX 1

The following is chapter 3 extracted from Laurie Bauer *Introducing Linguistic Morphology* (1988: 19-41). It aims at providing readers with more detailed information on morphological structure of words.

3. The Morphological Structure of Words

In this chapter, we shall consider the various processes by which words can be built. I shall illustrate these processes from a number of languages, some of which will be familiar to you, and others of which will not be familiar to you. It is the wide range of ways in which it is possible to build words which is the central focus of this chapter. In passing, attention will also be drawn to some of the difficulties that arise in morphological description, to show why linguists find morphology interesting. One reviewer said about morphology recently that 'we do not understand all that we know'. This is part of the interest and the challenge provided by morphology.

3.1 Word-building processes using affixes

By far the most common way of building new words in the languages of the world is by using affixes. The commonest type of affix by far is the suffix. There are several languages in the world which use suffixes to the exclusion of any other type of affix (Basque, Finnish and Quechua are examples), but only very few which use prefixes to the exclusion of other types of affix (Thai is an example), and none which use any other type of affix exclusively. Thus the obligatorily bound morph *par excellence* in the languages of the world is the suffix.

3.1.1 Suffixes. Suffixes are used for all purposes in morphology. They are used derivationally as in

(1) *English*: constitut·ion·al·ity
Finnish: asu·nno·ttom·uus
live·noun·without·abstract-noun
'houselessness'
Mam: txik·eenj
cook·patient
'something cooked'

and inflectionally as in

(2) *Finnish*: talo·i·ssa·an
house·plural·in·3rd-person-possessive
'in their houses'

Turkish: gel·é·miy·eceğ·im
come·be-able·negative·future·1st-person
'I will not be able to come'

Notice that all of the suffixes in (2) are inflectional, even though some of them are translated into English by separate lexemes. The meaning of an affix is not sufficient to tell you whether that affix is inflectional or derivational. This will be taken up again in Chapter 6. Neither is it the case that a given type of meaning is always realised in the same kind of way across languages. Even plurality may not always be an inflectional category. In Diyari, an aboriginal language of South Australia, plurality is marked optionally by a derivational suffix.

As is clear from the examples given above, suffixes can occur in sequences, although there is no expectation that they will. When both inflectional and derivational suffixes co-occur in the same word-form, the general rule (although it is by no means exceptionless, see below section 6.5) is that the derivational suffixes precede the inflectional ones, so that the following cases are typical:

(3) *Diyari*: yiŋki·mali·yi
give·reciprocal (derivational)·present (inflectional)
'give one another'

Finnish: kirja·sto·sta·mme
book·collective (deriv)·out-of (infl)·our (infl)
'out of our library'

French: égal·is·a
equal·verb (deriv)·3rd-person-singular-past (infl)
'[he/she/it] equalised'

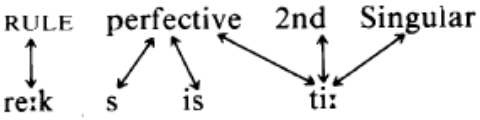
Portmanteau morphs are very common as suffixes in highly inflecting languages. This is illustrated by the case and number marking on the nouns in many Indo-European languages. The paradigm for the Latin noun ANNUS 'year' given below will provide an example.

(4)

	Singular	*Plural*
Nominative	ann·us	ann·i:
Vocative	ann·e	ann·i:
Accusative	ann·um	ann·o:s
Genitive	ann·i:	ann·o:rum
Dative	ann·o:	ann·i:s
Ablative	ann·o:	ann·i:s

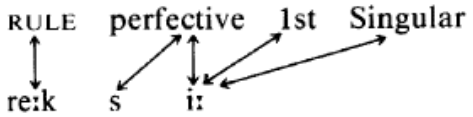
In this paradigm it can be seen that there is neither a consistent realisation of singularity, nor one of plurality. Neither is there a single realisation of any one of the cases (and if the other genders were taken into consideration, this would be even more striking). Rather the final morph analysed in the word-forms in (4) has to be seen as a portmanteau morph, realising simultaneously the category of number and that of case. The alternative position, where a single morpheme is realised in more than one morph, can also be illustrated from Latin. Consider the realisation relations shown by the arrows in the Latin word-form *re:ksisti*: 'you (sg) ruled'.

(5)



Each of the morphs analysed in (5) can be motivated by comparison with other forms of Latin, and the realisation relations can be justified since if any of the morphemes were changed, the morphs realising those morphemes would also change. Compare, for example, the form for 'I ruled':

(6)



3.1.2 Prefixes. Although they are rarer than suffixes, prefixes work in very much the same way. They can be derivational, as in

(7)

English:	dis·en·tangle
Mam:	aj·b'iitz
	agent·song
	'singer'
Tagalog:	pan·ulat
	instrument·write
	'pen'

or inflectional as in

(8)

Mam:	t·kamb'
	3rd-singular-possessive·prize
	'his prize'
Swahili:	a·si·nga·li·jua
	he·negative·concessive·past·know
	'if he had not known'
Tagalog:	i·sulat
	modal·write
	'writing (participle)'

These examples show that, like suffixes, prefixes can occur in sequences. The norm is for derivational prefixes to occur to the right of inflectional prefixes within the same word-form, as is shown in the data from Achenese, a language of Sumatra, below:

(9) (a) jih ji·langũ
he 3rd-person-(younger) (infl)·swim
'he swims (transitive, e.g. swims the river)'

(b) jih ji·mɨ·langũ
he 3rd-person-(younger) (infl)·intransitive (deriv)·swim
'he swims (intransitive)'

(c) jih ji·pɨ·langũ
he 3rd-person-(younger) (infl)·causative (deriv)·swim
'he makes [someone] swim'

Prefixes can, of course, co-occur in the same word with suffixes, and all possible combinations of derivational and inflectional are found in such cases.

(10) *English*: un·thank·ful
(deriv) (deriv)

English: re·think·s
(deriv) (infl)

Mam: ky·xoo·ʔkj
3rd-person-plural-ergative (infl)·throw·processive (deriv)
'they went and threw'

Turkana: è·ràm·i
3rd-person (infl)·beat·aspect (infl)
'he is beating'

3.1.3 Circumfixes. In some cases a prefix and a suffix act together to surround a base. If neither of these affixes is used on its own, and the two seem to realise a single morpheme, they are sometimes classed together as a **circumfix.** This can be illustrated from German, where the past participle of weak verbs is made by adding a prefix *ge-* and simultaneously, a suffix *-t*. That is, the base is enclosed in affixes, neither of which can occur on its own in the forms in question. This is illustrated below.

(11)

film·en	'to film'	ge·film·t	'filmed'
frag·en	'to ask'	ge·frag·t	'asked'
lob·en	'to praise'	ge·lob·t	'praised'
zeig·en	'to show'	ge·zeig·t	'shown'

**Ge·film* etc do not occur.

Film·t etc do not occur in this meaning but only as 3rd person singular present tense forms.

If the circumfix *ge···t* is taken to be a single affix, it is a **discontinuous morph.** Discontinuous morphs are considerably rarer than continuous morphs.

3.1.4 Infixes. Since infixes create discontinuous bases, the rarity of discontinuous morphs also accounts for the relative rarity of infixation (the use of infixes) in the languages of the world. Consider the following examples, (12) from Chrau, a language of Vietnam, and (13) from Tagalog, a language of the Philippines.

(12)	vŏh	'know'	v·an·ŏh	'wise'
	căh	'remember'	c·an·ăh	'left over'
(13)	sulat	'write'		
	s·um·ulat	'wrote'		
	s·in·ulat	'was written'		

In both these cases the infix is inserted after the initial consonant of the base. Note that in (12) the infix is used derivationally, while in (13) it is used inflectionally. Infixes can co-occur in the word-form with prefixes and suffixes. This is illustrated below from Tagalog. Verbs like *sulat* in Tagalog have three different passive themes. The first was illustrated above in (13), the second involves prefixation as well, and the third suffixation, as can be seen in (14a and b) respectively.

(14)	(a)	i·s·in·ulat	second passive theme (preterite)
	(b)	s·in·ulat·an	third passive theme (preterite)

3.1.5 Interfixes. A rather special kind of infix can be found, for example, in many of the Germanic languages, where there is a linking element which appears between the two elements of a compound. This can be illustrated from German.

(15)		*Element* 1	*Element* 2	*Compound*	*Gloss*
	(a)	Auge	Arzt	Auge·n·arzt	'eye doctor'
		Schwester	Paar	Schwester·n·paar	'pair of sisters'
		Tag	Reise	Tag·e·reise	'day's journey'
		Uhr	Kasten	Uhr·en·kasten	'clock case'
	(b)	Bauer	Frau	Bauer·s·frau	'farmer's wife'
		Jahr	Zeit	Jahr·es·zeit	'season' (*lit.* year time)
		Tag	Licht	Tag·es·licht	'day light'
		Wirt	Haus	Wirt·s·haus	'inn' (*lit.* host house)
	(c)	Stern	Banner	Stern·en·banner	'stars and stripes'
		Strauss	Ei	Strauss·en·ei	'ostrich egg'