

# MORPHOLOGY

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that is concerned with words and their constituents. In other words, morphology studies word formation and how we build up words from smaller units. That said, the smallest **meaningful unit** in a word is called a **morpheme**. Let us begin our morphological analysis with a very simple word: 'cats'. How many morphemes does 'cats' have?

First off, we must search for the smallest meaningful parts, i.e. the morphemes. Is 'cat' meaningful? If yes, then 'cat' is a morpheme. Let us now separate the words 'cats' into its constituent parts. 'cat' + '-s'. Is '-s' meaningful? Well, since '-s' means 'plural', then it is meaningful and is thus a morpheme. This probably got you thinking.. The status of 'cat' as a morpheme should be different than '-s', since the former is meaningful on its own, while the latter is dependent on a word, a noun to be specific, in order to be realized. This is why we distinguish between a **free morpheme**, which is a morpheme that is an entire 'word' and can appear on its own, like 'cat' 'dog' 'the' 'study' etc.

**Bound morphemes**, on the other hand, are morphemes like '-s' which need to be attached to a meaningful word in order to be realized. Examples include plural '-s', the present simple 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg. '-s', 're-', agentive '-er', comparative '-er' etc.

Let us now turn to **roots**, which are the **main meaningful part** in a word, and to which bound morphemes are often fixed. **Roots** can be free morphemes, like 'cat', 'dog' etc. or bound like 'morph-' in 'morphology' or '-pter' in 'helicopter', which is the Greek root for 'wing' (helix 'spiral'+ pteron).

Bound morphemes may be **prefixes**, which are morphemes attached to the beginning of a word, like '-un' in 'unchain'. They may also be **suffixes**, which are morphemes attached to the end of a word, like agentive '-er' in 'player'.

*Question: How many morphemes does the word 'uncle' have?*

The zero morpheme (null morpheme) is a morpheme which is realized by a phonologically empty element. That means that zero morphemes are 'invisible'. We can infer the existence of zero morphemes through the meaning they contribute to a word. Consider the verb 'study' in the sentence 'I suggest he study hard for the exam.' How do we know that 'study' has a zero morpheme, i.e. it is composed of 'study' + 'Ø' (PHI Ø is the symbol we use for zero morphemes). We know that 'study' in this sentence is a combination of the root 'study' + 'Ø' because 'Ø'= subjunctive.

*Question: In the words 'sheep' (sg.) and 'sheep' (pl.), which one has the zero morpheme?*



**Allomorphy** occurs when a single morpheme takes on more than one shape or form (realizations). For example, English /-s/ for the plural has 3 forms: /-s/ as in ‘cats’, /-z/ as in ‘dogs’, and /-iz/ as in ‘churches’, thus /-z/ and /-iz/ are allomorphs of the plural /-s/.

Question: Can you think of other cases of allomorphy?

### **Word Formation:**

**Inflection** and **Derivation**: Affixes can be seen as belonging to one of two categories, inflectional and derivational affixes. What is the difference between them?

**Inflectional affixes** modify a certain word so as to change some grammatical information that the word encodes, but the lexical meaning remains unchanged. Inflectional affixes play a role in determining these aspects of a word:

1. Number (book= 1 book, book + -s =>1 book)
2. Possession (book, book + -'s or books' in case number = >1)
3. 3<sup>rd</sup> person sg. present (He writes)
4. Past tense (He studied)
5. Comparative and superlative (short, short + -er, short + -est)

Among other inflectional functions, an inflectional affix does not change the meaning of a word, as we saw, but rather modifies grammatical aspects of a word.

**Derivation**, on the other hand, is when a change in meaning is induced. All English prefixes are derivational, since they always change the meaning of a word. Consider the prefixes ‘un-’, ‘re-’, ‘anti-’ and ‘pro-’ etc. When you add these suffixes to a word, the meaning always changes. Sometimes, the change is in the category (class) of the word. For example, the suffix ‘-ize’ verbalizes adjectives (changes the category of a word from an adjective to a verb), which could be seen as a grammatical change and thus should be considered inflectional. However, verbalizing adjectives with ‘-ize’ does create a new ‘lexeme’ (dictionary entry/word) and therefore it is derivational (new meaning).

**Parts of speech** denote the category or class words of a language belong to. Consider the word ‘modern’. As it stands, ‘modern’ is an adjective. What about ‘to make something modern’ as one word? Let us add ‘-ize’ to ‘modern’ creating ‘modernize’ which is a verb. How about the state/quality of being modern? Well, that would be ‘modern’ + ‘-ity’ creating the noun ‘modernity’. This is how **derivational suffixes** work.

*Question: Why is ‘-ity’ in ‘modernity’ seen as a derivational suffix when it could be inflectional, i.e. conveying grammatical information (modern + noun)?*

PARTS OF SPEECH																																		
<p><b>Noun</b></p> <p>A noun is the name of a person, place, or thing.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Person</td> <td>Place</td> <td>Thing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>girl</td> <td>school</td> <td>pencil</td> </tr> <tr> <td>boy</td> <td>home</td> <td>jacket</td> </tr> <tr> <td>teacher</td> <td>store</td> <td>dog</td> </tr> </table>	Person	Place	Thing	girl	school	pencil	boy	home	jacket	teacher	store	dog	<p><b>Adjective</b></p> <p>An adjective describes a noun or a pronoun. An adjective tells what kind, how many, or which one.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>What</td> <td>How</td> <td>Which</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Kind</td> <td>Many</td> <td>One</td> </tr> <tr> <td>happy</td> <td>more</td> <td>this</td> </tr> <tr> <td>brave</td> <td>two</td> <td>that</td> </tr> </table>	What	How	Which	Kind	Many	One	happy	more	this	brave	two	that	<p><b>Verb</b></p> <p>A verb can tell what action someone or something is doing. A verb can also express a state of being.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Action</td> <td>State of Being</td> </tr> <tr> <td>run    jump</td> <td>am    is</td> </tr> <tr> <td>sit    ask</td> <td>are    was</td> </tr> <tr> <td>think    talk</td> <td>were</td> </tr> </table>	Action	State of Being	run    jump	am    is	sit    ask	are    was	think    talk	were
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<p><b>Pronoun</b></p> <p>A pronoun is used in place of a noun in a sentence. A pronoun may take the place of the name of a person, place, or thing.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>I</td> <td>she</td> <td>it</td> <td>they</td> </tr> <tr> <td>you</td> <td>he</td> <td>we</td> <td>me</td> </tr> </table>	I	she	it	they	you	he	we	me	<p><b>Article</b></p> <p>The words <i>a</i>, <i>an</i>, and <i>the</i> belong to a special group of adjectives called articles. An article can be used before a noun in a sentence.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>a</td> <td>an</td> <td>the</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a dog</td> <td>an apple</td> <td>the boy</td> </tr> <tr> <td>a rabbit</td> <td>an ant</td> <td>the bird</td> </tr> </table>	a	an	the	a dog	an apple	the boy	a rabbit	an ant	the bird	<p><b>Adverb</b></p> <p>An adverb describes a verb, adjective, or another adverb. An adverb tells how, when, where, or to what degree.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>How</td> <td>When</td> </tr> <tr> <td>quickly</td> <td>today</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Where</td> <td>To What Degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td>outside</td> <td>barely</td> </tr> </table>	How	When	quickly	today	Where	To What Degree	outside	barely							
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<p><b>Preposition</b></p> <p>A preposition combines with a noun or pronoun to form a phrase that tells something about another word in a sentence.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>from</td> <td>to</td> <td>until</td> </tr> <tr> <td>over</td> <td>with</td> <td>after</td> </tr> </table>	from	to	until	over	with	after	<p><b>Conjunction</b></p> <p>A conjunction joins together single words or groups of words in a sentence.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>and</td> <td>but</td> <td>or</td> <td>nor</td> </tr> </table>	and	but	or	nor	<p><b>Interjection</b></p> <p>An interjection expresses strong feeling or emotion. An interjection can be a single word or a phrase.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Help!</td> <td>Oh!</td> <td>Ouch!</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ugh!</td> <td>Whew!</td> <td>Ah!</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Wow!</td> <td>Look out!</td> <td>Oh dear!</td> </tr> </table>	Help!	Oh!	Ouch!	Ugh!	Whew!	Ah!	Wow!	Look out!	Oh dear!													
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**The boy yelled, "Help!" and he saw a brave dog quickly run to the rescue.**

While this chart does not include everything, we will use it as a reference to categorize what is still missing.

For example, English demonstratives (this/that & these/those) belong to the category of pronouns and/or articles.

Now that this is covered, we may begin deriving new words out of existing words using derivational affixes. The four categories that can be changes with an affix (or lack thereof) are nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

How do we form adverbs? Adverbs are formed by adding the suffix '-ly' to adjectives.

Adj. slow → Adv. slowly      Adj. quick → Adv. quickly

The meaning yielded by the addition of '-ly' to adjectives can be roughly schematized as: In a/an 'adjective X' way. That is, slowly = in a slow way.

Does this mean that every word which has '-ly' is an adverb? No. Some words that end with '-ly' are actually adjectives. Consider the words 'friendly' and 'manly'. Although both these words end with '-ly', they are adjectives. Typically, these words are formed by attaching '-ly' to a noun, not an adjective. The adverb thereby becomes something along the lines of 'in

a friendly way' or 'in a manly way', which, according to the formula above, shows us that 'friendly' and 'manly' are adjectives.

*Question: Can we say 'friendlily' and/or 'manlily'?*

Just like the suffix '-ly' is able to trigger a change in the category of a certain word, there are many other suffixes that trigger similar operations. Let us discover them.

*Exercise: Just like 'modern', add all possible **derivational** suffixes to the following words. Don't worry if you don't get all of them in one go!*

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Play      | 2. Spot      |
| 3. Move      | 4. Please    |
| 5. Peace     | 6. Derive    |
| 7. Science   | 8. Base      |
| 9. King      | 10. Friend   |
| 11. Destroy  | 12. Dominate |
| 13. Act      | 14. Liquid   |
| 15. Ridicule | 16. Real     |
| 17. Digit    | 18. Convert  |
| 19. Commune  | 20. Argue    |

*Question: Think of decide and respond as verbs. What are they as nouns? How can we explain the apparent phonological difference? Is this still affixation?*

**Other word formation processes**, include, but are not limited to:

1. **Coinage:** Coinage is the act of coining new words without reference to already existing words in the language. Think of hoover as a verb and a noun (vacuum cleaner), named after the founders of the company that sold the first vacuum cleaners; his last name was 'Hoover'. Rizz is another, more modern word coined just like that. Can you think of some words in your own language that came to exist as a result of coinage?
2. **Compounding:** Compounding is the process of taking two already existing words and putting them together to create a new word. Think of 'mousepad', which is the result of compounding 'mouse' + 'pad'. What other compound words can you think of?
3. **Blending:** Blending is the process of fusing two or more words, but fusing one part of the word with another part of the other word, not whole words. Think of 'webinar' a blend of 'web' and 'seminar'. 'Motel' is an example of 'motor' and 'hotel'.

4. **Borrowing:** Borrowing is very common across all languages in the world. Any word that comes from outside a certain language is a borrowed word. Think of the word 'rendezvous' borrowed as is from French.
5. **Clipping:** It is the process of shortening a word by means of 'clipping' a part or parts of it. 'Gas' is clipped from 'gasoline', in BrE, 'pram' (stroller in AmE) is the clipped version of 'perambulator'.
6. **Acronym or Initialism:** Taking the first letter of each word to form one, shorter version of it. 'CD' is the acronym for 'compact disk'.
7. **Back formation:** This process can be thought of as the opposite of affixation. Instead of adding an affix to a word, we remove an existing affix, ending up with a new form of the word. The verb 'to babysit', for example, is a back formation of 'babysitter'.
8. **Conversion:** Conversion is the process of changing the grammatical category of a word (part of speech or class) with the zero affix. This means that we get a new word without adding anything to it. 'Command' as a noun and 'command' as a verb. However, there are many words such as 'progress' as a noun and 'progress' as a verb that have no affixes involved, but rather a shift of stress.
9. **Reduplication:** Is the repetition of a part of a word or the whole word, usually results in a frequentative or emphatic form of the word. Reduplication is not a common process in English, but examples include 'tick-tock'. Can you think of reduplicated forms in your language?
10. **Onomatopoeia:** Is the process by which a sound is the basis of creating a new word. When bees fly by, the sound you hear is 'bzzzz', and this is how the verb 'buzz' came to light.

*Exercise: Think of two words that belong to each of the aforementioned word formation processes, one of which should be in English, and the other in your own language. Present your findings to the class.*



*Question: Think of the trio 'good-better-best'. What is the process involved here called? Can you think of other instances of this process?*

**Suppletion** is not exactly a word formation process; it is rather the use of a form that comes from a different root to that of the base form. The ordinal number 'first' is a suppletive form of the cardinal number 'one'. The phenomenon of suppletion appears to occur cross-linguistically.

*Question: What about forms like child/children, or irregular verbs? Is this suppletion?*

Notes:

A **lexeme** is the abstract root underlying a set of words in a certain **paradigm**. For example, in the **paradigm** 'sing-sang-sung-sings', the lexeme is 'sing'. It is roughly equivalent to a dictionary entry. A lexeme is usually typed in small caps, i.e. SING.

A **paradigm** in morphology refers to a system that relates words to each other through inflection. This means that a paradigm can be the set of words/forms that may occur (by inflection) from a single word (lexeme).

**Productivity** refers to the applicability of a certain affix. As a rule of thumb, inflectional affixes are completely productive, that is, an inflectional affix may be used with any word that belongs to the class of words it attaches to. For example, the plural '-s' is fully productive, since it can be found on any noun (with the exception of the exceptions!).

Derivational affixes, on the other hand, may or may not be productive.

*Exercise: Think of some inflectional affixes. Are they completely productive? Try using them with different words belonging to the same part of speech.*

*Now think of some derivational affixes. Are they completely productive?*