

**-13-****Morphology****Morphology**

- In many languages, what appear to be single forms actually turn out to contain a large number of "word-like" elements. For example, in Swahili (spoken throughout East Africa), the form **nitakupenda** conveys what, in English, would have to be represented as something like **I will love you**. Now, is the Swahili form a single word? If it is a "word" then it seems to consist of a number of elements which, in English, turn up as separate "words".

**A rough correspondence can be presented in the following way:**

ni--	ta--	ku--	penda
" I	will	love	you "

- It would seem that this Swahili "word" is rather different from what we think of as an English "word". Yet, there clearly is some similarity between the languages, in that similar elements of the whole message can be found in both. Perhaps a better way of looking at linguistic forms in different languages would be to use this notion of 'element' in the message, rather than depend on identifying only 'words'.
- The type of exercise we have just performed is an example of investigating basic forms in language, generally known as **MORPHOLOGY**. This term, which literally means "the study of forms," was originally used in biology, but, since the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has also been used to describe the type of investigation that analyzes all those basic "elements" used in a language. What we have been describing as 'elements' in the form of a linguistic message are technically known as **MORPHEMES**.
- We can recognize that English word forms such as **talks, talker, talked and talking** must 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. The definition of a 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.
- In the sentence, ...The police reopened the investigation..., the word **reopened** consists of three morphemes. One minimal unit of meaning is **open**, another minimal unit of meaning is **re-** (meaning again) and a minimal unit of grammatical function is **-ed** (indicated past tense).
- The word **tourists** also contains three morphemes. There is one minimal unit of meaning **tour**, another minimal unit of meaning **-ist** (marking "person who does something"), and a minimal unit of grammatical function **-s** (indicating plural).

## Free and Bound Morphemes

- From these examples, we can make a broad distinction between two types of morphemes. There are **FREE MORPHEMES**, that is, morphemes that can 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--*, *--ist*, *--ed*, *--s*.
- These forms are called **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:**

un--	dress	ed	care	--less	--ness
prefix	stem	suffix	stem	suffix	suffix
bound	free	bound	free	bound	bound

## Lexical and Functional Morphemes

- What we have described as free morphemes fall into two categories. The first category is that set of ordinary nouns, adjectives, and verbs that we think of as the words that carry the content of the messages we convey.
- These free morphemes are called LEXICAL MORPHEMES and some examples are :** girl, man, house, tiger, sad, long, yellow, sincere, open, look, follow, break. We can add new lexical morphemes to the language rather easily, so they are treated as an "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 functional morphemes to the language, they are described as a "CLOSED" class of words.

## Derivational and Inflectional Morphemes

The set of affixes that make up the category of bound morphemes can also be divided into two types. One type is described in terms of the derivation of words. These are the **DERIVATIONAL MORPHEMES**. We use these bound morphemes to make new words or to make words of a different grammatical category from the stem. For example, the addition of the derivational morpheme *--ness* changes the adjective *good* to the noun *goodness*. The noun *care* can become the adjective *careful* or *careless* by the addition of the derivational morphemes *--ful* or *--less*. A list of derivational morphemes will include suffixes

such as *-ish in foolish*, *--ly in quickly*, and the *-ment in payment*. The list will also include prefixes such as *re-*, *ex-*, *mis-*, *co-*, *un-* and many more.

- 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 aspect of the grammatical function of a word. Inflectional morphemes are used to show if a word is plural or singular, if it is a comparative or possessive form. English has only 8 inflectional morphemes (or 'inflections'), 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.
- In the first sentence, both inflections ('s, -s) are attached to nouns, one marking **possessive** and the other marking **plural**. Note that -s here is a possessive inflection and different from -s used as an abbreviation for is or has (e.g. she's singing, it's happened again).

**There are four inflections attached to verbs:**

**--s (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular), --ing ( present participle), --ed ( past tense), and --en ( past participle).**

**There are two inflections attached to adjectives:**

**--er ( comparative) and --est ( superlative).** In English, all the inflectional morphemes are suffixes.

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