

MORPHOLOGY AS THE STUDY OF INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF WORDS

Zakhro Mamadaliyeva

Teacher of Ferghana State University

Islomjonova Gulruxsor

Student of Ferghana State University

Annotation. This article discusses the significance of morphology and its role in language. Morphology, stemming from the Greek words "morphē" (form) and "logos" (science or word), constitutes a segment of grammar dedicated to the examination of words within the context of their parts of speech. In essence, morphology scrutinizes the broad meanings and alterations of words.

Key words: morpheme, logos, morphology, speech, meaning, word, form, grammar.

Introduction

Morphology (from Greek *morphe* meaning "form" and *logos* meaning "word") is a branch of grammar focused on the internal structure of words, their grammatical categories, and their meanings.

The study of modern English morphology encompasses four main areas:

1. General analysis of morphemes and types of word formation.
2. The classification system of parts of speech.
3. The detailed examination of each part of speech, including its grammatical categories and syntactical functions.

A **morpheme** is defined as the smallest meaningful unit of a word. Comprised of phonemes, it cannot be divided into smaller units without losing its significative function.

Example: The word "writers" can be broken down into three morphemes:

1. *writ-* (root morpheme) conveys the core lexical meaning.
2. *-er-* (agent morpheme) denotes someone who performs the action of writing.
3. *-s* (plural morpheme) indicates that the noun is plural.

Some morphemes may sound identical but have different meanings, known as **homonyms**. For instance, the morpheme *-er* in "writer" (indicating an agent) has a homonym *-er* in "longer" (indicating comparative degree).

There are also **zero morphemes**, where the absence of a morpheme conveys a specific meaning. For example, in the comparison between "book" and "books," the plural "books" includes the -s morpheme, whereas the singular "book" includes a zero morpheme indicating it is singular.

Traditional Classification of Morphemes: Morphemes are classified based on two main criteria:

1. **Positional:** The placement of marginal morphemes relative to central ones.
2. **Semantic/Functional:** The relative contribution of the morphemes to the overall meaning of the word.

Based on these criteria, morphemes are divided into:

- **Root Morphemes (Roots):** Convey the concrete, material meaning of the word. They are the core lexical components of content words.
- **Affixal Morphemes (Affixes):** Specify additional aspects of the word's meaning, which can be lexical or grammatical.

Affixal morphemes include:

1. **Prefixes**
2. **Suffixes**

Prefixes and lexical suffixes serve a word-building function and, together with the root, form the word stem.

3. **Inflexions (Grammatical Suffixes):** These morphemes form grammatical variations of words and do not have independent lexical meanings but express different morphological categories.

The general structure of an English word can be represented as: prefix + root + lexical suffix + inflection/grammatical suffix.

The Concept of Distribution in Linguistics

The **distribution** of a linguistic unit refers to the totality of its environments, essentially its context within different classes or categories.

Distributional analysis aims to identify and study language units based on their textual environments, i.e., the elements adjacent to them in text.

Examples:

1. **The/boat/s/were/gain/ing/speed**
 - This sentence is divided into **morphs**, which are combinations of phonemes that convey meaning and cannot be subdivided further.
2. **un-pardon-able**

- In this word, the root *pardon* has a left environment (the prefix *un-*) and a right environment (the suffix *-able*). Conversely, *pardon* is the right environment for the prefix and the left environment for the suffix.

Types of Distribution:

1. Contrastive Distribution:

- Morphs with different meanings or functions are in contrastive distribution and form different morphemes.
- *Example:* The suffixes *-(e)d* and *-ing* in "returned" and "returning".

2. Non-Contrastive Distribution:

- Morphs with the same meaning or function are in non-contrastive distribution and are called **free alternants** or **free variants** of the same morpheme.
- *Example:* The suffixes *-(e)d* and *-t* in "learned" and "learnt".

3. Complementary Distribution:

- Formally different morphs with the same function in different environments are in complementary distribution and are **allomorphs** of the same morpheme.
- *Examples:*
 - The plural morpheme *-s* has allomorphs */-s/*, */-z/*, */-iz/* depending on the phonological environment.
 - The past tense morpheme *-ed* has allomorphs */-id/*, */-t/*, */-d/*.
 - The plural allomorph *-en* in "oxen" and "children", and the zero suffix in "sheep".

Complementary distribution helps identify grammatical elements.

Types of Morphemes Based on Self-Dependence:

1. Free Morphemes:

- Can form words independently.
- *Example:* In "handful," *hand* is a free morpheme.

2. Bound Morphemes:

- Cannot form words by themselves and are identified as part of words.
- *Example:* In "handful," *-ful* is a bound morpheme.

There are few productive bound morphemes in English, most of which are homonymous:

1. *-(e)s* [plural of nouns, possessive case of nouns, third person singular present of verbs]
2. *-(e)d* [past and past participle of verbs]
3. *-ing* [gerund and present participle]
4. *-er, -est* [comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives and adverbs]

Semi-bound morphemes include auxiliary word-morphemes (*do, be, have, will, shall, would, should*), adverbial elements (*more, most*), the infinitive particle (*to*), and articles. These function as separate elements in speech but form categorical unities with their stem-words.

Conclusion

Morphology is a vital subfield of linguistics that delves into the intricacies of word formation and structure. By understanding morphology, linguists gain insights into the fundamental processes that shape languages. Whether through inflection, derivation, compounding, or other morphological processes, the study of morphemes and their distribution provides a deeper understanding of how language conveys meaning and adapts to various grammatical and contextual needs.

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