

Chapter 2

Morphology

Words and Their Parts

Introduction

Chapter 2 is divided into two sections. Section 1 focuses on word classes and includes a brief introduction to some of the basic parts of speech to aid in our discussion of the next section. Section 2 focuses on morphology, which is the structure and form of words.

Section 1: Word Classes

For many people, words are the center of language. This comes as no surprise if we consider that the most obvious, concrete and recognizable parts of any language are its words or its *lexicon*. In any given language there are tens of thousands of words, although most speakers will know and use only a relatively small number of them.

A primary concern of grammarians is the classification of words into groups or categories. Traditional English grammar, based on Latin, adopted terminology and classification systems that often do not reflect the actual grammar of English. However, in order to discuss the different elements and structures of English, we need to employ some sort of terminology, so we continue to use the traditional labels and classification systems which have their usefulness in that they provide a common vocabulary for discussing the words of language. For example, you have probably learned that different words are classified into *parts of speech* and many grammar texts still use this classification.

However, many grammar texts prefer to think of parts of speech in terms of *form* and *structure* classes. The form classes are composed of the major parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These are the words that carry the content or meaning of a sentence. The structure class words are composed of the minor parts of speech: prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, qualifiers and other subsets. These structure words generally accompany specific form classes. For example, determiners, or articles, such as *the* or *a/an* typically occur before a noun such as *dog*, *bed*, *battle*.

Try Discovery Activity 1 to see how much you know about the different word classes (or parts of speech), even if you are not always sure of the labels.

Discovery Activity 1: Introduction to Parts of Speech

Look at the following words.

system in big communicate between confidentiality relevant obey under
shatter blizzard warn weary beside rebellion happy

1. On a separate sheet of paper, make 4 columns. Label these columns **Group A**, **Group B**, **Group C** and **Group D** as you see below.

2. Without using a dictionary or any other reference tool, try to place the different words that you think belong together in the different columns. The first four words have already been done for you as a sample.

3. After you have categorized as many words together as you can, explain why you grouped them as you did.

Group A

system

Group B

in

Group C

big

Group D

communicate

4. Now take your paper and make two new columns, **Group A** and **Group B**.

5. Using the new list of words below, try to place the different words that you think belong together in the different columns. There are just two groups this time.

• As you group this new list of words, consider whether any of the words can belong to more than one group. Try to explain why or why not.

harm remind cancer cup scream date struggle queen poison announce
style write

Discussion: Discovery Activity 1

Your grouping of the words in the first list probably looks like this:

Group A	Group B	Group C	Group D
system	in	big	communicate
confidentiality	between	relevant	obey
rebellion	under	weary	shatter
blizzard	beside	happy	warn

Each of these four groups represents a word class. Even without knowing the labels for each group, you should have been able to place the words in the list together with other words performing the same function. Group A consists of *nouns*; Group B consists of *prepositions*; Group C of *adjectives*; and Group D of *verbs*.

Your grouping of the words in the second list should look like this:

Group A	Group B
harm	harm
	remind
cancer	
cup	cup
scream	scream
date	date
struggle	struggle
queen	
poison	poison
	announce
style	style
	write

Here Groups A and B again represent different word classes. Group A represents words that are verbs and Group B words that are nouns. Some of the words fit into both groups; for example *harm* can be either a verb or a noun. You can *harm* (verb) someone or you can suffer *harm* (noun).

While you may recognize that a word can fit into more than one group, you may not be able to do so without thinking of a sentence or *context* for that particular word. In English, the group or class to which a word belongs is not always obvious without context, as you were most likely aware of when doing Discovery Activity 1.

Unlike many other languages, English does not always rely on word endings or word forms to determine part of speech. The form of a word in English does not necessarily tell us the function of that word. However, context and sentence position are key to clarifying the function of a word or phrase in English because word order is highly fixed. As we saw in Chapter 1, words need to be placed in a certain order. This helps us to understand their function and meaning. These are two central themes we will revisit throughout this text: Form in English does not necessarily equal function; and, word order is fixed, meaning that words in English have to occur in a particular sequence.

Context and Function

How are the sentence position of a word and its function related?

As the *Jabberwocky* activities and discussion in Chapter 1 illustrated, the sentence position of some of the nonsense words told you their function. The context let you guess what word class some of these words belonged to.

The following sentences illustrate again the importance of context in assigning function and/or class. In both sentences you can see that the same word appearing in different contexts has a different function:

- (1) She made a **wish** on a star.
- (2) They **wish** to learn more about effective research practices.

In Sentence (1), *wish* is a noun, while in Sentence (2), *wish* is a verb. In subsequent chapters we will be analyzing the clues that help us decide which function words have in different contexts.

Word Plays and Context: An Additional Illustration

Newspaper headlines are famous for using short, catchy phrases with words that have different meanings depending on context. A reader's attention is caught by the headlines, which often play on the different meanings of words. The actual meanings only become clear after reading the articles themselves.

Discovery Activity 2: News Headlines

- Look at the newspaper headlines.
 - Underline the words you find ambiguous, i.e. have more than one meaning.
 - Explain what these different meanings are.
1. City Fires Director for New Look
 2. Kidnapped Child Found by Tree
 3. British Left Waffles on Gibraltar
 4. EMT Helps Raccoon Bite Victim
 5. Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

Discussion: Discovery Activity 2

In order to see the double meanings implied by the headlines, consider the questions below: How you answer determines what words you might want to insert to clarify the exact meaning.

1. Who has the “new look”? The director or some thing or place in the city?
 - If the director has a “new look,” perhaps you want to write: City Fires Director for *His* New Look.
 - If the city is meant to have a “new look,” e.g. be revitalized, perhaps you would write: City Fires Director *in Order to Get a* New Look.
2. Can a tree find a child or is the reference to the place where the child was found?
 - Since it is unlikely that a tree can find a child, you may want to choose to re-write the sentence as: Kidnapped Child Found *Sitting* by Tree.
3. Did the British leave an edible food item or are the leftists indecisive?
 - In this case the writer is probably referring to the verb form of *waffles*.
 - In order to convey the verb form meaning, you could re-write the headline along these lines: British Left Waffles on Gibraltar *Decision*, or British Left Waffles on *Decision* About Gibraltar.

4. Did EMT personnel help the raccoon or the victim?

- Similar to #2, it is unlikely that the medical personnel helped a raccoon bite its victim. You might like to re-write the headline this way: *EMT Helps Victim Bitten by Raccoon* or *Raccoon Bite Victim helped by EMT*.

5. Are the kids the snack or do they prepare them?

- As in #s 2 & 3, the writer is not likely to be equating children with good things to eat; therefore, you may want to choose an alternative verb for make: *Kids Prepare Nutritious Snacks*.

The writers of these headlines have deliberately played on the different meanings of the words to create humorous, attention-getting titles by omitting important words. The actual meanings are within the articles, which provide the context for the correct meanings.

Tell me again why I need to focus on context with my ESL/EFL learners? Shouldn't I just focus on their mastering a form and then worry about context?

Teachers need to be aware of what learners need to know about a language and why they need to know it. Reflect again on our discussion in Chapter 1 of native speakers' innate knowledge of grammar and Discovery Activity 1 of this chapter. Context lets native and near-native speakers "know" the function of a word without necessarily knowing *how* they know it or without knowing *the labels* for what they know. ESL/EFL learners, on the other hand, don't have this type of knowledge because they are *learners* of English.

As Discovery Activity 2 highlighted, context is critical in determining meaning. Whether "left" refers to the past tense of "leave" or to the term describing political persuasion becomes clear only in the reading of the text. Words without context can be difficult to understand. Similarly grammar taught without context may have little meaning for ESL/EFL learners.

Isolated grammar rules with isolated sentences may be necessary at very low levels of English proficiency to introduce learners to a particular form. However, ESL/EFL learners need to use forms and structures in meaningful and relevant contexts as often as possible.

The next Discovery Activity highlights again the importance of context in understanding meaning and function.

Discovery Activity 3: Context

Look at the following pairs of sentences.

- Think about how context alters the function and meaning of the words in each pair.
- Consider how in English form is not equal to function. Use the questions below to help you.

- I.
 - a) I **practice** my **talk** every morning.
 - b) I **talk** every morning before the **practice**.
 - II.
 - c) I **present** many speeches.
 - d) I gave her a nice **present**.
 - e) The students are all **present**.
1. Are the two words, **practice** and **talk**, the same in sentences (a) and (b)?
 2. What differences and similarities are there between **practice** and **talk** in sentences (a) and (b)
 - How are they similar?
 - How are they different? Do they have the same function in both sentences?
 - Do they have the same form? Why or why not?
 3. How do **practice** and **talk** differ in the two sentences?
 4. What differences and similarities are there between **present** in Sentences (c), (d) and (e)?
 - Does **present** have the same function in both sentences?
 - Does it have the same form? Why or why not?

Discussion: Discovery Activity 3

The purpose of this activity is to highlight the importance of context in understanding the meanings and functions of individual words. Words that look the same may have different meanings and functions depending upon where they occur in a sentence.

- In Sentence (a), **practice** is an action word (verb) referring to what *I* (the subject) is doing. **Talk** refers to a “thing” (noun).
- In Sentence (b), the opposite is true. **Talk** is an action word (verb) referring to what *I* (the subject) is doing. **Practice** refers to a “thing” (noun).
- In Sentence (c), **present** is an action word (verb) referring to what *I* (the subject) is doing.
- In Sentence (d), **present** refers to a thing (noun).
- In Sentence (e), **present** is describing something about *the students*. It is being used as an adjective.

In spoken English, there is a difference between **present** in Sentence (c). The action word **present** in Sentence (c) is accented on the second syllable: pre sent'. **Present** in Sentences (d) and (e) is accented on the first syllable: pre' sent. There is also a phonological shift that ESL/EFL learners need to be aware of. The “s” of *present*

has a “z” sound when functioning as a verb and an “s” sound when functioning as a noun or adjective.

The next part of the chapter will introduce the parts of speech. Different chapters will explore these parts of speech or word classes in greater depth.

Parts of Speech or Lexical Categories

As we mentioned earlier, English words fall into two main categories: form class words, which include the major word classes, and structure class words, which include the minor word classes.

The **major** category is the larger of the two categories. This category consists of the word classes commonly labeled nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (although not all linguists agree that adverbs belong in the major category). These major word classes are comprised of the words that carry the content or essential meaning of an utterance. They are often referred to as **content** or **form** words.

The **minor** category includes the minor word classes generally known as prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and determiners. These words serve primarily to indicate grammatical relationships and are frequently referred to as **structure** words.

Take a look at the following sentence:

(3) **Victoria ate a banana at the table.**

This sentence consists of seven words: four content words and three structure words. If you saw only **Victoria, ate, banana, table**, you could probably make an accurate guess as to the sentence’s intended meaning because these four content words are crucial for conveying sentence meaning.

The three structure words, *a*, *at*, and *the* show the grammatical relationships of the content words; *a* before *banana* tells us Victoria ate one thing, *at* tells us where Victoria ate the banana, and *the* specifies the thing, namely a specific table.

The minor category includes fewer words than the major category, as we will see in the next section. However, the structure words that comprise the minor category, are more difficult for ESL/EFL learners to master. Note that the structure words are more limited in number than the form words, but it is the structure words which cause more difficulties for ESL/EFL learners.

Open Word Classes

The major category is vast. It is so large because we frequently create new English words. Thus, the major word or form classes are called *open classes* because new words enter the language constantly. English is a language that readily borrows and invents new words, which generally enter the language as nouns, verbs, or adjectives.

How do new words enter the English language?

Often new words enter via informal language (slang or jargon) and with increased use become accepted into standard English.

- (4) The girls **dissed** Ashley during lunch.
- (5) People like to include **emoticons** in their e-mails.

The verb **dis** (or diss), meaning to make fun of, show disrespect to, or disobey, is used primarily in informal speech. It is a shortened form of “disrespect” and has come into standard American English from African-American English via rap music.

Let’s take another example. **Emoticons** refer to the icons used to display emotions in computer communications. The original emoticons consisted of keyboard characters such as :-) for happy or :-(for sad, but now also include ASCII glyphs. It is an invented word that combines the *emot* of *emotion* with the word *icon*.

Technology is a common source of new vocabulary. Words such as *mouse*, *surf*, *e-mail*, and *blog* are other examples of words that have taken on new meanings or been invented in relation to the computer.

Discovery Activity 4: To Word is Human

There are many new words that have entered the English language. Look at the list below of words that have entered English in the last 50 years or so.

1. How many of these words do you recognize?
 2. For those words you recognize, explain where you have seen and/or heard them.
 3. How comfortable do you feel using each word? Explain.
- (a) blading
 - (b) go postal
 - (c) spam
 - (d) televangelist
 - (e) cassette
 - (f) microwave
 - (g) to Google or to google

Discussion: Discovery Activity 4

- (a) blading: This is a shortened version of “rollerblading,” itself a new word that came into English with the invention of rollerblades. It falls into the same group

of words and follows the same grammatical rules and formation as other such words referring to sports activities: *go blading*, *go swimming*, *go riding*, *go fishing*.

- (b) *go postal*: The phrase originated in the 1990s when there were several instances of disgruntled United States postal workers shooting fellow employees. It has taken on the meaning of becoming violent or going berserk, the latter itself a borrowed expression first entering standard English in the early 1800s.
- (c) *spam*: Originally a proprietary name registered by Geo. A. Hormel & Co. in the late 1930s to refer to a canned meat product, the meaning expanded to include Internet junk mail in the 1990s.
- (d) *televangelist*: Derived from *tel* + *evangelist* to mean an evangelist holding religious broadcasts via television, which became popular starting in the early 1970s.
- (e) *cassette*: First used in the early 1960s to refer to a small flat closed case with two reels and a length of magnetic tape.
- (f) *microwave*: Although the term entered the language in the early 1930s, it came into common use in the mid-1960s/early 1970s as microwave cooking became popular.
- (g) *to Google/google*: In the late 1990s a new search engine, Google, was developed and quickly became one of the largest and most popular search engines on the web. The name is sometimes used as a verb, “to google” meaning “to search the web.” “To Google” is an example of a proper noun (the name of something) becoming a verb. Although generally written with a capital “G,” we also see it written with a small “g.”

One thing you may have noticed in doing this activity is that there are many common words that speakers may not recognize as being “new.” Second, new words are not necessarily always “informal” or “slang.” Finally, words can take on new meanings to meet the evolving needs of language users.

Closed Word Classes

The second category, which consists of the minor or structure word class words, are referred to as closed word classes. These classes are considered “closed” for several reasons. First, they consist of small numbers of words that change very little over long periods of time and have been in the English language for centuries. Despite the fixed number of structure words, it is these words, along with the inflectional morphemes, that cause the most learner difficulties.

Structure words are among the most common and frequently used English words. They include:

- prepositions (e.g. *in*, *on*, *at*, *of*, *from*),
- determiners (e.g. *a*, *an*, *the*, *this*, *that*, *these*, *those*);

- coordinator (e.g. *and*, *but*, *or*)
- pronouns (e.g. *it*, *his*, *you*, *them*, *mine*, *herself*)¹

Second, words in the closed classes are fixed and invariant which means they do not have other forms. There is only one form for the preposition *in*. In contrast, a noun, which is an open class word, can be plural or singular (e.g. *dog* or *dogs*).

Third, these words occur only in a narrow range of possible positions within a sentence and they must always accompany content words. There is no flexibility in word order. *The* must always precede a noun. It cannot follow a noun. We cannot choose to say *dog the* but must say *the dog*.

Finally, closed word classes have little lexical or semantic function. The job of these words is to establish logical relationships between the different parts of sentences.

What does “to show logical relationships in a sentence” mean?

For example, if we say, *I went **to** the store* this sentence has a different meaning than if we say, *I went **by** the store*. The only difference between the two sentences is the change of prepositions from *to* to *by*, but it is these words which indicate a difference in the relationship between *I went* and *the store*.

Because English depends on word order to show grammatical relationships, these structure words are essential sentence elements. Discovery Activity 5 further illustrates how prepositions function to signal grammatical relationships.

Discovery Activity 5: Prepositions and Grammatical Relationships

The following pairs of headlines have different meanings.

1. Explain how the inclusion or omission of a preposition changes the meaning of each pair of sentences.
2. Discuss what this tells us about prepositions and grammatical relationships.

Political Headlines:

- (1a) Iraqi Head Seeks Arms
- (1b) Head of Iraq Seeks Arms

Agriculture Headlines:

- (2a) Angry Bull Injures Farmer with Axe
- (2b) Angry Bull Injures Farmer Axe

¹ See Appendix E for more complete lists.

Headline News:

- (3a) Man Struck by Speeding Car
- (3b) Man Struck Speeding Car

Local News:

- (4a) Police Help Fire Chief
- (4b) Police Help to Fire Chief

Discussion: Discovery Activity 5

- (1a) One part of a body in search of other body parts!
- (1b) The political leader trying to buy weapons.
- (2a) The farmer was in possession of an axe. (A quick reading could also lead one to read the headline as the bull having the axe.)
- (2b) The farmer's family name is "Axe."
- (3a) The car hit the man
- (3b) The man hit the car
- (4a) The police assist the fire chief
- (4b) The police aided in the dismissal of the fire chief from his job.

As you saw in Discovery Activity 5, the addition or deletion of a preposition in the headlines in alters the meaning. The activity illustrates the importance of the role of structure words in establishing grammatical relationships. This role grows even more important as the complexity of the discourse increases. For ESL/EFL learners, some of the structure word classes can be among the most difficult to master.

We will now continue with a look at the traditional parts of speech that make up the major word category.

Overview: Major Parts of Speech

The next section is a brief overview of the major parts of speech comprising the major word category and provides the basis for our discussion on morphology.

Nouns

The traditional or standard definition of a noun is a word that refers to *a person*, *place*, or *thing*. On the surface, this definition has merit. We can easily come up with words that fit this definition of a noun:

Person	Place	Thing
boy	city	car
teacher	school	lesson
pilot	airport	wheel
nurse	hospital	bed
swimmer	beach	towel

If we expand *thing* to include two subcategories, tangible or (concrete) and intangible (or abstract) things, the list expands quickly:

Tangible	Intangible
car	philosophy
wood	adolescence
water	justice
horse	anger
medicine	suggestion

We can also differentiate another subcategory, that of proper nouns. Proper nouns are those nouns that name a person, place, or thing, and that are typically written with a capital letter:

Person	Place	Thing
Dr. Smith	Chicago	Pacific Ocean
Jane	Afghanistan	Mt. Everest
Professor Jones	Europe	Lake Tahoe
President Lincoln	Montana	Erie Canal
Ms. Peters	Everglades	The Sphinx
Spaniard	Pyrenees	Spanish

The basic definition of nouns works well to a certain point, and will provide a starting point in determining which words are nouns. However, as we will see in Chapter 3, it will be necessary to revise this definition to account for nouns that do not fit neatly into this initial definition.

Adjectives

Adjectives are usually characterized as descriptive or modifying words because of their function in a sentence. Words such as *beautiful*, *hard*, *happy*, and *tall* come readily to mind. These are the content words that function to create descriptive images or add color and flavor. Multiple adjectives can be found in a sentence:

(5) He had never seen such a harsh, boring, yet beautiful and magical landscape.

The adjectives **harsh**, **boring**, **beautiful**, and **magical** all describe the noun *landscape*. The author has chosen to use pairs of opposing adjectives to fix the contradiction of the landscape in the reader’s mind.

Other types of adjectives and words used as adjectives will be examined more closely in Chapter 4.

Verbs

The first association many people make with the term “verb” is that of action, as in *run*, *drive*, *listen*, or *identify*. Verbs also refer to the state of something, as in *be* (*am*, *is*, *are*), or *feel*. English verbs may also indicate time. *We eat sandwiches* and *We ate sandwiches* refer to different times.

A sentence must always contain a verb. A verb and a noun are enough to form a complete sentence:

(6) I run. They walk. We listen.

A sentence can be long and complex, and yet still contain only one verb:

- (7) The long hot sultry day notwithstanding, the boys **wore** long, heavy shirts, denim pants, thick cotton socks and work boots.
- (8) Scrambling reluctantly up the slippery slopes of the muddy ravine, the strong-willed horse, although most decidedly fearful of the rider’s whip, **tossed** his head relentlessly.

English verbs can be difficult for ESL learners to identify since they often have noun forms that are exactly the same, as we saw in Discovery Activity 1. Learners might also think *scrambling* is a verb, and while it is a verb form, it is not a verb here (see Chapter 12). Context and structural clues help determine whether the verb or noun form is being used. The forms, functions, and structural characteristics of verbs will be examined in Chapters 5 and 6.

Adverbs

The common definition of an adverb is a word that describes or modifies a verb, an adjective, or another adverb. However, as we will see in Chapter 4, adverbs are difficult to characterize because the label *adverb* refers to many different kinds of words that perform a variety of functions. Essentially, adverbs can modify anything in a sentence. Adverbs are generally grouped into subcategories, according to their function, as for example we see in the following table.

manner	frequency	time and place
quickly	often	now
happily	always	here
silently	sometimes	later

There are other words and subgroups of adverbs; unlike the other parts of speech we have looked at however, there is not complete agreement as to which words should be classified as adverbs or placed in separate classes. The fact that the line or division between adjectives and adverbs is not always clear-cut also clouds the issue. Some adjectives end in *-ly*, the common adverb suffix (e.g. *deadly*, *lonely*, *kindly*), while some adjectives and adverbs have the same form (e.g. *early*, *fast*, *far*). Compare for instance:

adverb	adjective
Judy walks <i>fast</i> .	Judy is a <i>fast</i> walker.
Jason rises <i>early</i> .	Jason is an <i>early</i> riser.

(See Chapter 4 for further discussion).

At this point we will end our overview of the parts of speech comprising the major word categories and turn to look at morphology, the structure and form of words.

Section 2: Morphology

In Section 1 we discussed how words may look alike but have different meanings and/or functions that only become clear through the context in which they are used. In Section 2, we examine the parts that make up the words of English.

Many words that users think of as being a single word are actually more than that. The smallest unit of meaning is called a *morpheme*. A morpheme can be a single word or other independently meaningful units. For example, consider the word “book.” There is no smaller form of this word; in other words, this *book* cannot be broken into any other units. It is a single morpheme. Now consider these words:

bookworm bookish books

Most language users will easily recognize *bookworm* as two words (a compound word) consisting of *book* + *worm*. The other two words may be more difficult to recognize as actually consisting of two parts.

Bookish can be broken down into *book* + *ish*, and *books* into *book* + *s*. Most language users would probably not consider *-ish* and *-s* meaningful units. Nevertheless, although *-ish* and *-s* are not “words,” they are independently meaningful units. They change the meaning (and sometimes the class) of a word. Both *book* and *bookworm* are nouns. *Bookish* is an adjective that describes a person as in “He’s a bookish person.”

Likewise, *books* can be broken down into two parts, *book* + *s*. Adding *-s* to certain words (nouns) indicates that there is more than one, as in *books*, *computers*, *days*, *shoes*, *pens*, and *geraniums*. This plural *-s* can also be added to *bookworm* to form *bookworms*. *Bookworms* now consists of three meaningful units: *book* + *worm* + *s*.

Discovery Activity 6: Decoding Morphemes

Look at the following words.

1. Break the words down into the smallest possible meaningful units.
blizzard
frighten
teacher
often
truthful
2. When you have finished, think about whether or not it was easy to find the smallest possible meaningful units. What reasons can you give for your answer?
3. When you have finished, check yours answers in a dictionary.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 6

In addition to introducing you to learning how to distinguish morphemes, Discovery Activity 6 also showed that there are two kinds of morphemes, *bound* and *free*.

Bound and Free Morphemes***What are bound and free morphemes?***

We call words such as *blizzard*, *never*, *amaze*, or *grace* **free morphemes** because they are meaningful units that can stand alone. They do not need to be attached or bound to another morpheme in order to have meaning.

Endings (suffixes) such as *-ful*, *-ment*, or *-er*, or markers (inflections) such as *-s* need to be attached or bound to other meaningful units. Since they cannot occur alone and function only as parts of words, they are called **bound morphemes**. Frequently several morphemes, both bound and free, occur in the same word as in:

undeniable un + deny + able

Undeniable consists of two bound morphemes *-un* and *-able* and the free morpheme *deny*. (The “y” changes to “i” in accordance with English spelling rules.)

backpacks back + pack + s

Backpacks is a compound word consisting of two free morphemes *back* and *pack* and the bound morpheme *-s*.

There are many compound words or words consisting of two free morphemes in English. Usually the *-s* bound morpheme can be attached to these words.

compound word	+ -s
firehouse	firehouses
workshop	workshops
schoolbook	schoolbooks
lifestyle	lifestyles

Are suffixes and prefixes morphemes?

We saw above that *-able* attaches at the end of *deny* and *un-* attaches to the front of *deny*. *-able* is a suffix and *un-* is a prefix. Both are bound morphemes. As a group, these morphemes are called **affixes**. We further distinguish what kind of affixes they are by where they occur. If they come before another morpheme, they are called **prefixes**. If they come after, they are called **suffixes**. Some common affixes are:

prefixes		suffixes	
<i>dis-</i>	disinherit	<i>-less</i>	groundless
	disclaimer		fearless
	disregard		thoughtless
<i>inter-</i>	interdependent	<i>-ness</i>	kindness
	international		blindness
	interchange		happiness
<i>bi-</i>	bisect	<i>-ate</i>	graduate
	bipartisan		frustrate
	binary		congratulate
<i>un-</i>	unclear	<i>-able</i>	reasonable
	unsure		debatable
	unreal		changeable

Derivational and Inflectional Morphemes

Are there different types of bound morphemes?

Bound morphemes can be divided into two groups: **derivational** morphemes and **inflectional** morphemes. Derivational morphemes are lexical morphemes. They somehow either change the class a word belongs to or change the semantic meaning of a word. We have looked at such words as *undeniable* and *renewal*, which have derivational morphemes.

Inflectional morphemes, on the other hand, are grammatical morphemes and do not change the class to which a word belongs nor its semantic meaning. They provide grammatical information about a word. For example an “s” added to a noun such as *chair* in English changes that noun from a singular word to the plural word *chairs*.

Derivational Morphemes

Derivational morphemes are lexical morphemes. They have to do with the vocabulary of the language. These morphemes form an open set to which new words or word forms are frequently added. Derivational morphemes can come at the beginning (prefix), or at the end (suffix) of a word, and more than one can be added to a word:

Disagreement: **dis** + agree + **ment**

dis-: prefix meaning opposite

-ment: suffix that changes the word class to a noun and that refers to an action, process, or means.

The addition of a derivational **suffix** often, but not always, changes the part of speech of a word.

Noun	→	Adjective	Verb	→	Noun
child		childish	realize		realization
face		faceless	establish		establishment
trend		trendy	conform		conformity

Sometimes a derivational **suffix** will only change the meaning of a word, but not the class:

Adjective	→	Adjective	Noun	→	Noun
economic		economical	fellow		fellowship
politic		political	progress		progression

Derivational **prefixes** only change the meaning of a word, never the class:

Adjective	→	Adjective	Verb	→	Verb
forgettable		unforgettable	appear		disappear
essential		nonessential	finish		refinish

It is not always easy to divide words into morphemes, since some of them are not recognizable today as individual parts of words. Many of these morphemes have their origins in Latin and Greek word forms that are unfamiliar to most people today. The English word *correlation*, for instance, consists of the morphemes *cor* + *re* + *lation*. Most modern speakers of English would have difficulty identifying the three morphemes. The morpheme *cor* is actually a derivative of *com*, meaning “together,” *re* meaning “back or again” + *latus*, meaning “brought.”

Breaking down words to such a degree is not very important for ESL/EFL learners. The most important point in teaching derivational morphology is to help learners to recognize the more common affixes and their functions. Learning the meanings of derivational morphemes can be a powerful tool for developing one’s

vocabulary, whether the person is a native speaker or an ESL/EFL learner. For example, having learners understand that the suffix *-tion* usually tells us that the word is a noun can be helpful in deciphering new words. Teaching ESL/EFL learners common derivational morphemes is also more productive than learners trying to memorize long lists of vocabulary words.

Inflectional Morphemes

Inflectional morphemes, in contrast to derivational morphemes, are a small closed set of eight grammatical morphemes. These eight add little or no content, but serve a grammatical function such as marking plural or tense. Inflectional morphemes change the form of a word without changing either the word category it belongs to or its meaning:

cat → cats
walk → walked

The addition of “s” to the noun *cats* indicates that more than one cat is being referred to. The “ed” at the end of “walk” indicates a past action.

The eight English inflectional morphemes are:

The 8 English Inflectional Morphemes			
Morpheme	Grammatical Function	Attaches to	Example
-s	plural	noun	desks, chairs, boxes
-’s	possessive	noun	the boy’s hat, the cat’s tail
-s	third person singular	verb present tense	She drives. He talks. It walks.
-ed	regular past tense	verb	He talked.
-ed	regular past participle	verb	She has walked.
-ing	present participle	verb	She is driving.
-er	comparative	adjective/adverb	taller, faster
-est	superlative	adjective/adverb	tallest, fastest

Inflectional morphemes are always the last morpheme of a word. They are always suffixes. Only one inflectional morpheme can be added to a word. The only exception to this is noun plural *–s* plus possessive. In written English, this is reflected by moving the apostrophe to after the *–s*:

- (9) The boy’s book = a book belonging to one boy.
- (10) The boys’ book = a book belonging to more than one boy.

Inflectional morphemes are essential for the correct production and understanding of grammatical or structural elements of utterances. The crucial difference between following pair of sentences, for instances, is reflected only by the additional of one inflectional morpheme.

I walk to school. **versus** I walked to school.

Do ESL/EFL learners have trouble with these 8 inflectional endings?**► *Learner difficulties***

Although English has relatively few inflectional morphemes, some of the most frequent learner errors are in the correct use of these inflections. ESL/EFL students for example, will frequently omit the third person singular ‘s or the omit the past tense *-ed* and produce sentences such as:

**she like cats.*

**we walk home yesterday.*

You will note that the two sentences above are preceded by an asterisk (*). Throughout the text, when you see an asterisk before a sentence, it means that the sentence following it is incorrect or ungrammatical.

The omission or incorrect use of these eight inflectional morphemes is another central focus of this book. We will see more examples of the difficulties ESL/EFL learners have with these inflectional morphemes in later chapters.

Redundancy in Language

In most languages, there is a feature that we call *redundancy*. The term redundancy refers to any feature that provides the same grammatical information that another one already provides. In other words, when more than one grammatical clue or marker is required to reveal grammatical information, it is called redundancy.

Discover Activity 7 will help you understand the notion of redundancy more clearly.

Discovery Activity 7: Redundancy

Examine the following two sentences.

1. Which of the two sentences is incorrect or ungrammatical in Standard American English?
2. Underline those elements in the sentence you choose that make it ungrammatical.
 - (a) Yesterday, two teachers expressed their feelings about John’s grade.
 - (b) Yesterday, two teacher express their feeling about John’s grade.

Discussion: Discovery Activity 7

The second of the two sentences (marked with an *) is an ungrammatical Standard American English sentence.

- (a) Yesterday, two teachers expressed their feelings about John's grade.
- *(b) Yesterday, two teacher express their feeling about John's grade.

In Sentence (b), the nouns *teacher* and *feeling* have not received the plural inflection *-s*. Even though the sentence provides other clues that indicate the nouns are plural (e.g. *two*, *their*), Standard American English still requires this plural *-s* inflection.

The number *two* and the *-s* inflection on *teachers* both serve to indicate that *teachers* is a plural noun. Either one of these markers would be enough to mark the noun as plural, but English requires both markers in order for the sentence to be grammatical, even though the sentence would be understandable with only one of the two plural markers.

Another example of redundancy is the use of *yesterday* and the past tense inflection *-ed* to indicate the past time reference of this sentence. While the use of the *yesterday* is enough to show past time reference as in (a), the lack of the past tense inflection *-ed* causes the sentence to be an ungrammatical English production because it does not meet the redundancy requirements of the language.

Why do I have to understand inflectional endings and what do they have to do with redundancy in terms of teaching ESL/EFL?

► *Learner difficulties*

For ESL/EFL learners, the inflectional endings require at least some explicit language instruction. These inflectional endings are not always obvious to ESL/EFL learners, especially if something comparable does not exist in their native language so they need to be exposed to the idea that words must change form in certain instances.

Another reason that ESL/EFL learners need explicit instruction regarding these forms is that they may not “hear” the inflectional endings because the sound of them is reduced. By this we mean that inflectional endings do not receive stress in a word, so learners may not always be aware of them. For example, the past tense *-ed* of the verbs in the following paragraph is barely pronounced in natural speech.

When Margaret *arrived* at work, she noticed that her left tire was low. She called a mechanic who *discovered* a nail in the tire. He *pulled* the nail out and *patched* the hole.

Furthermore, as we have just discussed, English requires redundancy. We saw this illustrated in Discovery Activity 7, where the sentence required the use of the past *–ed* together with the time marker, *yesterday*, and the plural inflection *–s* together with the plural word *two*. As other languages do not necessarily have equivalent forms and structures, learners from such languages may have difficulty mastering the use of inflectional derivations. ESL/EFL learners who are speakers of languages that do not have tense markers find it difficult to remember to use the *–ed* past tense inflection on a verb. They instead tend to rely on time adverbs such as *yesterday* or *last month* to indicate past time reference. Similarly, such learners may also have difficulty remembering to use the *–s* plural inflection on nouns when the sentence includes such plural markers as *two* or *many*.

Summary

Word classes are grouped into two categories, closed and open

Closed	Open
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● structure or grammatical words● provide information as to the grammar or organization of a sentence● have little or no lexical (content) meaning● the number of words is relatively fixed; new words are rarely added	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● content words● have grammatical function, e.g. subject of a sentence● convey important lexical (content) meaning● new words are constantly being added● and/or formed following the grammatical constraints of English● derivational endings can provide new meaning or change the word class of a word meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● do not share any formal features such as specific derivational endings that make them identifiable as members of particular word classes. There is nothing, for example about the form of the words <i>a</i>, <i>an</i>, <i>the</i> to identify them as articles, nor about the form of the words <i>by</i>, <i>without</i>, <i>from</i>, or <i>on</i> to identify them as prepositions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● often share derivational forms that make them identifiable as members of particular word classes. For example, words ending in <i>–ment</i> are nouns as in <i>basement</i>, <i>replacement</i>, <i>advancement</i>, <i>management</i>.

Morphemes

Morphemes are the simplest unit of a word

- They cannot be divided into smaller units, e.g. *work*, *for*, 's
 - There are open class and closed class morphemes
 - Open class morphemes can take derivational and inflectional morphemes
 - There are free morphemes and bound morphemes,
 - Free morphemes are words that can stand on their own, e.g. *board*, *live*
 - Bound morphemes must be attached to another word, e.g. *-s* (*boards*), *-able* (*livable*)
-

Derivational Morphemes

Characteristics of Derivational Morphemes

- They can change the part of speech or word class to another, e.g. the addition of the suffix *-able* changes a noun to an adjective: *reason* → *reasonable*, *measure* → *measurable*
 - They can remain the same part of speech but change the lexical meaning, e.g. the addition of the prefix *un-* simply changes the meaning to “opposite”: *conscious* and *unconscious* are both adjectives but with the opposite meaning; *home* and *homeless* are both nouns but with different meanings through the addition of the suffix *-less*.
 - More than one derivational morpheme can be added: *unworkable* → *un* + *work* + *able*
-

Inflectional Morphemes

Characteristics of Inflectional Morphemes

- They provide grammatical information to open class words, e.g. plural of nouns, possessive of nouns, tense and aspect of verbs, and comparison and contrast of adjectives and adverbs.
 - Inflectional morphemes come only at the end of words, e.g. *wide* → *wider*; *sing* → *sings*.
 - Only one inflectional morpheme can be added, except the possessive “s” after a plural noun. This second “s” is only obvious in written English, e.g. *The boys’ dog* = One dog belonging to more than one boy.
 - These are the most difficult morphemes for ESL/EFL learners to master.
-

Practice Activities

Activity 1: Identifying the Major Parts of Speech

Look at the paragraph and answer the questions.

During the respectful, appreciative buzz of voices that followed the speech, General Montero raised a pair of heavy, drooping eyelids and rolled his eyes with a sort of uneasy dullness from face to face. The military backwoods hero of the party, though secretly impressed by the sudden novelties and splendors of his position . . .

(Conrad, J. (1994). *Nostromo*. (p. 109) London: Penguin Books.)

1. Identify the major parts of speech in the following paragraph. Write N for noun, V for verb, Adj for adjective, and Adv for adverb.

N V Adv

Example: The boy rode quickly.

2. Think about which major part or parts of speech occur most frequently.
 - Do you think this is typical? Explain.

Optional Follow-up

3. Find another paragraph in a book, magazine, or newspaper. Identify the major parts of speech in the paragraph you selected.
 - Do your findings support or not support your response to #2? Explain why, if you can.

Activity 2: Redundancy

In Discovery Activity 8, we saw how English requires redundancy. However, such redundancy is not true in all languages. Some languages have no inflectional morphemes.

1. Discuss what kinds of problems ESL/EFL learners who come from languages without inflectional morphemes might have in learning and using English inflectional morphemes for tense (*-ed*) and plural (*-s*).

Activity 3: Derivational Morphemes

1. Look at the words in the list below.
2. On a sheet of paper, write the derivational morphemes for the words in the list.
3. Explain which derivational morphemes you found that identify the class to which a word belongs.
4. Discuss the meaning of each derivational morpheme you identified.

- Limit your examination to common derivational morphemes. Do not look at obscure and/or forgotten roots.
- Keep in mind that you are looking for derivational morphemes that will help your students decode meaning and function.

Example:

partnership: partner + ship The suffix *-ship* is only used with nouns. *-ship* refers to position or skill as in *professorship* or *penmanship*.

- a) partnership
- b) unhappy
- c) biology
- d) brutalize
- e) journalist
- f) terrible
- g) positive

Activity 4: More Decoding of Morphemes

It is not always easy to distinguish morphemes, especially bound versus free. Try this activity if you would like more practice in distinguishing morphemes.

Examine the following list of words.

1. Identify the different morphemes that make up each word.
2. Label the different morphemes as **B** for bound and **F** for free.

Example:

breakwaters break = F water = F s = B

- a) neighborhood
- b) fashionable
- c) forecasters
- d) aorta
- e) bartend
- f) usually
- g) renewal
- h) inaccessibility

Grammar for Teachers

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Speakers

DeCapua, A.

2008, XVIII, 444 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-76331-6