

## MORPHOLOGY: THE STUDY OF WORD STRUCTURE AND ITS ROLE IN LANGUAGE FORMATION

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### *Abstract:*

Morphology an integral branch of linguistics, reveals the fascinating complexity of words. As we deal deeper into the world of morphemes, the basic building blocks of language, we discover the magnificent structures that shape our vocabulary. The purpose of this article is to examine morphology and the relationship between morphemes and word formation. Morphology studies the formation and diversity of words. It examines how morphemes can be combined to form new words or new word formations.

*Key words:* morphology, morphemes, types of morphemes, content vs functional morphemes, allomorphs.

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Morphology is a branch of linguistics that examines the grammatical structure of words, focusing on how words are formed and varied within the lexicon of a language. It explores the relationships between morphemes, the smallest meaningful units in a word, and how these units are combined to form new words or new variations of the same word. In morphological studies, a morpheme is distinguished from a lexeme, the latter being the smallest word unit that holds content meaning independently. Essentially, lexemes serve as the foundation for dictionary entries, while morphemes, though they may represent a word unit, can also take the form of affixes or parts of words that have functional but not content meaning.

For example, the words "plays," "played," and "playing" all stem from the lexeme "play." "Plays" can be broken down into the morphemes "play" and "-s"; "played" into "play" and "-ed"; and "playing" into "play" and "-ing." This process of forming words like "plays," "played," and "playing" from the lexeme "play" is called inflection, a key focus of morphological analysis. Moreover, it is important to note that some lexemes can be further reduced to their constituent morphemes.

### Morphemes and Their Types

To fully grasp morphology, it is crucial to understand morphemes. A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a language. There are two main categories of morphemes: free and bound.

#### Free Morphemes

Free morphemes can independently carry semantic meaning and do not require any prefixes or suffixes to have meaning. In other words, they can function as standalone words, such as "the," "boy," "run," and "luck." These morphemes function on their own without the need for additional elements.

#### Bound Morphemes

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Bound morphemes, in contrast, cannot stand alone and must be attached to other morphemes. Examples include morphemes like "-s," "un-," and "-y." Bound morphemes often take the form of affixes, a general term that encompasses prefixes (e.g., "re-" and "un-") and suffixes (e.g., "-s," "-ly," and "-ness"). In some languages, infixes, which are inserted into the middle of words, also exist, though they are rare in Modern English. Bound morphemes can be further divided into two subtypes: derivational and inflectional morphemes.

#### Derivational Morphemes

Derivational morphemes alter either the meaning or the grammatical category of a word, thereby deriving a new word. For instance, "un-" adds a negative meaning to a word, "-y" turns nouns into adjectives, and "-ness" converts adjectives into nouns.

#### Inflectional Morphemes

Inflectional morphemes, on the other hand, add grammatical information to a word, such as the "-s" in "runs," which indicates third-person singular in the present tense, or the "-s" in "boys," which signifies plurality.

In English, there are eight primary inflectional suffixes (often referred to as "inflections"):

- -s on verbs (3rd person singular, present tense): e.g., "he runs"
- -ed on verbs (past tense): e.g., "I walked"
- -ing on verbs (progressive aspect): e.g., "I was walking"
- -en on verbs (past participle): e.g., "I was beaten"
- -s on nouns (plural): e.g., "boys"
- -'s on nouns (possessive): e.g., "boy's"
- -er on adjectives (comparative): e.g., "quicker"
- -est on adjectives (superlative): e.g., "fastest"

Despite some phonological similarities, it is essential to distinguish between these inflectional suffixes. For example, the "-s" in "runs" (third-person singular verb), the plural "-s" in "boys," and the possessive "-'s" in "boy's" are coincidentally similar in form but serve different grammatical purposes. Additionally, the inflectional morpheme "-ing," as used in progressive verbs ("I am singing"), should not be confused with the derivational morpheme "-ing" used to form nouns from verbs ("Singing is enjoyable"). These may sound alike but perform different functions. Finally, spelling conventions, such as using an apostrophe to indicate possessive plurals (e.g., "boys'"), should not be confused with inflectional morphology, as the apostrophe is merely a spelling convention, not an inflectional marker.

To conclude, language encompasses a wide range of elements, from grammar to sentence structure, with words being the primary means of conveying meaning. Morphology, as a branch of linguistics, focuses on the structure of words, particularly morphemes—the smallest units of meaning in language. By studying morphology, we can better understand how words are formed, how they change through inflection and derivation, and how their individual components contribute to their overall meaning.

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