

Module II. Lecture 9

Word structure

Plan

1. Segmentation of words into morphemes
2. Classification of morphemes
3. Procedure of morphemic analysis
4. Morphemic types of words

1. Segmentation of words into morphemes

A morpheme is the smallest meaningful constituent of a linguistic expression. In English, morphemes are often but not necessarily words. Morphemes that stand alone are considered roots (such as the morpheme *cat*); other morphemes, called affixes, are found only in combination with other morphemes. For example, the *-s* in *cats* indicates the concept of plurality but is always bound to another concept to indicate a specific kind of plurality.

This distinction is not universal and does not apply to, for example, Latin, in which many roots cannot stand alone. For instance, the Latin root *reg-* ('king') must always be suffixed with a case marker: *rex* (*reg-s*), *reg-is*, *reg-i*, etc. For a language like Latin, a root can be defined as the main lexical morpheme of a word. These sample English words have the following morphological analyses:

- "Unbreakable" is composed of three morphemes: *un-* (a bound morpheme signifying "not"), *break* (the root, a free morpheme), and *-able* (a bound morpheme signifying "an ability to be done").
- The plural morpheme for regular nouns (*-s*) has three allomorphs: it is pronounced /s/ (e.g., in *cats* /kæts/), /ɪz, əz/ (e.g., in *dishes* /dɪʃɪz/), and /z/ (e.g., in *dogs* /dɒgz/), depending on the pronunciation of the root.

2. Classification of morphemes

Morphemes are divided into two large groups: lexical morphemes and grammatical (functional) morphemes. Both lexical and grammatical morphemes can be free and bound. Free lexical morphemes are roots of words which express the lexical meaning of the word, they coincide with the stem of simple words. Free grammatical morphemes are function words: articles, conjunctions and prepositions (the, with, and). Bound lexical morphemes are affixes: prefixes (*dis-*), suffixes (*-ish*) and also blocked (unique) root morphemes (e.g. *Fri-day*, *cran-berry*). Bound grammatical morphemes are inflexions (endings), e.g. *-s* for the Plural of nouns, *-ed* for the Past Indefinite of regular verbs, *-ing* for the Present Participle, *-er* for the Comparative degree of adjectives.

Every morpheme can be classified as free or bound:

Free morphemes can function independently as words (e.g. *town*, *dog*) and can appear within lexemes (e.g. *town hall*, *doghouse*).

Bound morphemes appear only as parts of words, always in conjunction with a root and sometimes with other bound morphemes. For example, *un-* appears only when accompanied by other morphemes to form a word. Most bound morphemes in English are affixes, specifically prefixes and suffixes. Examples of suffixes are *-tion*, *-sion*, *-tive*, *-ation*, *-ible*, and *-ing*. Bound morphemes that are not affixed are called cranberry morphemes.

The grammatical or functional morphemes are those morphemes that consist of functional words in a language, such as prepositions, conjunctions determiners, and pronouns. For example, *and*, *but*, *or*, *above*, *on*, *into*, *after*, *that*, *the*, etc. Affixes are those bound morphemes that naturally attach different types of words and are used to change the meaning or function of those words. For example, *-ment* in *payment*, *enjoyment*, *entertainment* *en-* in *enlighten*, *enhance*, *enlarge*, *'s* in *Joseph's*, *Lora's* *-ing* *reading*, *sleeping*, *singing*, etc.

3. Procedure of morphemic analysis

Studying the principles of word-formation in English is achieved by different analytical procedures. The simplest of these is the morphemic analyses, which splits a word into its component morphemes and states their types and number. The word "*girlishness*" could be thus analyzed into three morphemes: of which the first is the root "*girl-*" and the other two are suffixes "*-lish-*" and "*-ness*".

The morphemic analysis helps to classify words into root-words, consisting of but one morpheme (root or stem), such as "*girl*"; derived words combining a root with one or more affixes, as "*girlish*" and "*girlishness*"; compound words, made up of two or more stems as "*girl-friend*"; and compound-derivatives, originating from a phrase as "*old-maidish*", derived not from "*old*" and "*maidish*" –which does not exist in English – but from "*old maid*" and "*-ish*". Therefore the affix is common in both stems in a compound derivative word. The morphemes into which a word is split by the morphemic analysis are defined in it as ultimate constituents (UC).

All English words fall under two classes: segmentable and non-segmentable words. The procedure generally employed for the purposes of segmenting words into the constituent morphemes is known as the method of Immediate and Ultimate constituents. Immediate constituents are any of the two meaningful parts forming a larger linguistic unit. The analysis into immediate constituents (ICs) was first suggested by L. Bloomfield and later developed by many linguists. IC analysis is a purely synchronic procedure showing the morphological motivation or the derivation pattern of the word according to which it is formed. In other words, the IC analysis shows in which sequence new morphemes were added on in the process of word-formation.

The idea behind the IC analysis is that a larger linguistic unity is always formed of two meaningful parts. Each of the parts may, or may not, be further analyzable. The result of the IC analysis could be represented by a tree diagram, the resulting morphemes forming its terminal branches. The IC analysis is based on the dichotomic (binary division) principle, that means that a word to be analyzed is

cut, at each successive step, into but two parts. Just where the cut is made depends on how strong the connections between the morphemes are. If possible each part is then cut into two again, and the process is repeated until the results are the individual morphemes, or the ultimate constituents (UC).

Taking the word *ungentlemanly* as a sample, we first observe that there are many similar words in English (*unwomanly, untimely, unusually*), and many more contain *un-* as their first element (*uncertain, uneasy, unnatural*). Therefore, the first step is to separate the prefix *un-* from the rest of the word resulting in *gentlemanly*. There are two possibilities for the next move: *gentleman + -ly* or *gentle + -manly*. Both produce two meaningful parts: however, *gentle + manly* does not seem to reflect the derivational history of the word and the mutual attraction of *gentle* and *man* seems to be much stronger than in *gentleman* and *-ly*. *Gentle* is next separated from *man* and the final step is *gent + le*, as English has both *brittle, little, subtle* and *gently, genteel, gentry* – although this is not a productive derivational pattern.

4. Morphemic types of words

According to the number of morphemes words are classified into monomorphemic and polymorphemic. *Monomorphemic* or *root-words* consist of only one root-morpheme. *Polymorphemic words* consist of root and non-root morphemes. According to the number of root-morphemes all polymorphemic words are divided into two groups: *monoradical* or one-root words and *polyradical* words which consist of two or more roots.

According to the type of affixes monoradical words fall into three subtypes: *radical-suffixal, radical-prefixal* and *prefixo-radical-suffixal* words. *Radical-suffixal* words consist of one root-morpheme and one or more suffixal morphemes. *Radical-prefixal* words consist of one root-morpheme and a prefixal morpheme.

Prefixo-radical-suffixal words consist of one root-morpheme and prefixal and suffixal morphemes. *Polyradical words* fall into two types: (1) polyradical words of two or more roots with no affixal morphemes and (2) polyradical words containing at least two roots and one or more affixal morphemes.

Questions for discussion

1. Give the definition of English morphemes
2. What is the main distinguishing feature of the morphemes?
3. How are they classified? Give examples
4. What are the main criteria of morphemic analysis?
5. What is the difference between monomorphemic and polymorphemic words?
6. What are the polyradical words? Give examples

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