INNOVATIVE PUBLICATION
Journal of Effective Learning and Sustainable Innovation
Vol.2 №5 (2024). May
innovativepublication.uz

# THE MORPHEMIC STRUCTURE OF A LANGUAGE

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**Abstract:** This article delves into the various types of morphemes and elucidates the distinctions between them. Additionally, it delves into the semantic structures of linguistic units, drawing parallels between words and morphemes as lexical entities. Morphemes, being integral components of words, are discussed in terms of their role within linguistic constructs. For instance, while some words comprise a solitary morpheme, others may consist of multiple morphemes. Through this exploration, the article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the nuanced components that contribute to language formation.

**Key words:** sound, root, position, observe, lexical, , semantically, occur, comprehensive understanding, lexical entities.

## INTRODUCTION

Describing a word as an independent entity within language, possessing a specific meaning associated with a particular sound arrangement, capable of grammatical functions, and able to form a sentence independently, allows us to differentiate it from another fundamental language unit: the morpheme. While a morpheme similarly associates meaning with sound, it lacks autonomy. Morphemes exist solely within words, never independently, even though a word may consist of only one morpheme. Additionally, morphemes cannot be further divided into smaller meaningful units, defining them as the smallest meaningful language units. The term "morpheme" stems from the Greek roots "morphe" meaning "form" and "-eme," a suffix adopted by linguists to signify the smallest distinctive unit. This makes the morpheme the smallest meaningful unit of form within language, denoting recurring discrete units of speech.

An "affix" is a type of bound morpheme that attaches either before or after a base word. When it attaches before a base, it's termed a "prefix." Examples include ante-, pre-, un-, and dis- as seen in words like antedate, prehistoric, unhealthy, and disregard. Conversely, when an affix attaches after a base, it's referred to as a "suffix." Examples of suffixes include -ly, -er, -ism, and -ness, illustrated in words like happily, gardener, capitalism, and kindness.[1]

Derivational affixes are a subset of affixes that modify the meaning of a word by expanding upon its base. In the given examples, adding the prefix un- to "healthy" changes its meaning to "not healthy," while adding the suffix -er to "garden" transforms it from a place where plants grow to a term referring to "a person who tends a garden." Notably, in English, all prefixes are derivational, whereas suffixes can be either derivational or inflectional.

**DISCUSSIONS AND SOLUTIONS**

In English, there exist numerous derivational affixes, whereas there are only eight inflectional affixes, all of which are suffixes. These inflectional suffixes serve various grammatical functions when added to specific word types. Examples include -s for noun plural, -'s for noun possessive, -s for verb present tense third person singular, -ing for verb present participle/gerund, -ed for verb simple past tense, -en for verb past perfect participle, and -er for adjective comparative.

The study of word structure can be approached on two levels: morphemic analysis and derivational or word-formation analysis. A word is the fundamental unit of the language system, serving as the largest unit on the morphological plane and the smallest on the syntactic plane. Similar to words, morphemes are lexical units, but they are the smallest meaningful units of form and lack autonomy, existing solely as parts of words.[2]

Morphemes can be classified both semantically and structurally. Semantically, they can be categorized as root-morphemes (roots and non-root affixes) and affixational

morphemes. Structurally, morphemes can be free (able to stand alone without changing meaning), bound (always part of words and never occurring independently), or semi-free/semi-bound (functioning both as affixes and as free morphemes in certain contexts).

Additionally, morphemes can exhibit different phonemic shapes. In word clusters like "please," "pleasing," "pleasure," and "pleasant," the phonemic shapes of the word show complementary distribution or alternation with each other. Variations of a morpheme that manifest alternation are termed allomorphs.

An allomorph is a variant form of a morpheme occurring in a specific linguistic context, characterized by complementary distribution, meaning they cannot appear in the same environment simultaneously.[3]

Regarding the types of meaning, it's commonly understood that some morphemes lack grammatical meaning, distinguishing them from words. For instance, the morpheme "man-" in "manful" or "manly" lacks the grammatical features of case and number observed in the word "man."

In English, many words consist of a single root-morpheme, implying that most morphemes possess lexical meaning, particularly root-morphemes. For example, the lexical meaning of "boy" in words like "boyhood" or "boyish" illustrates this point.

Affixal morphemes typically have a more generalized lexical meaning. Additionally, root-morphemes don't inherently convey part-of-speech meaning, unlike derivational morphemes where the lexical and part-of-speech meanings can blend together.

Morphemes can possess specific meanings of their own, such as differential and distributional meanings. Differential meaning helps distinguish one word from others with identical morphemes. Roots consist of a single morpheme, while stems can have multiple morphemes, including affixes. For instance, in "quirkiness," "quirk" is the root, and "quirky" is the stem, containing two morphemes.[4]

**CONCLUSION**

Identifying morphemes isn't solely reliant on the structure of a word but also involves considering its meaning. For instance, while the word "relate" might appear composed of two morphemes, "re-" (a prefix) and "late," they don't correspond to the meanings associated with "to feel sympathy," "to narrate," or "to be connected by blood or marriage." Conversely, in "rename," the morpheme "re-" does signify the repetition of the action "name."

Moreover, the length of a word isn't indicative of its morphemic composition. Despite "Madagascar" being lengthy and seemingly having morphemes like "mad," "gas," and "car," it doesn't. Conversely, some short words contain multiple morphemes.

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