

Introduction to English  
Linguistics (Part 1)

Cornelius Puschmann, M.A.

[introling.ynada.com](http://introling.ynada.com)

Topics covered in the next two sessions

1. **Types of Morphemes**

2. Word formation

# Types of Morphemes

Session 6, Morphology

## Contents of this session

A few things we'll look at today:

1. Kinds of words
2. What's in a word?
3. Bound vs. free morphemes
4. Derivational morphology
5. Inflectional morphology

## Kinds of words

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**But what exactly is a word?**

## Kinds of words

*apple, run, happy, slowly, after, she, but, the*

## Parts of speech

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**Parts of speech** (also called *word classes* or *lexical categories*)

Nouns: *apple, house, boredom, Santa Claus*

Verbs: *run, fly, give, procrastinate*

Adjectives: *happy, blue, tall, young*

Adverbs: *slowly, frequently, often, less*

Prepositions: *after, under, by, despite*

Pronouns: *she, you, that, anyone*

Conjunctions: *but, and, or, while*

Determiners: *the, a, this, my*

## Content words vs. function words

**Nouns, verbs, adjectives** and **adverbs** are generally described as **content words** (or **lexemes**), because they give us some sort of information about the world. They allow us to name things, states and activities and describe them in detail.

**Prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions** and **determiners** have either a variable meaning (*you* does not refer to one particular individual) or no meaning outside of language at all (*and* is a bit like a kind of glue holding the parts of a sentence together). They are **function words**.

## What's in a word?

Sometimes words are made up of several parts:

*cat*

*cats*

Are those two different words?

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There is some variation to how this looks exactly:

*fish* + {PLURAL} = *fishes* (\*fishes)

*man* + {PLURAL} = *men* (\*mans)

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This does not produce new words, but a different **word form** (pl.)

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*daytime*

*girlfriend*

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*classroom = class + room*

*daytime = day + time*

*girlfriend = girl + friend*

## What's in a word?

There are also elements which are not words by themselves that we can add to generate new words from existing ones.

*soft*

*softly*

*work*

*worker*

*clever*

*cleverness*

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For example, adding **-ed** to a verb indicates past tense and adding **-ing** marks progressive aspect.

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*singer = sing + -er*  
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5. ...and sometimes they carry only grammatical information  
*birds = bird + -s (plural)*  
*walked = walk + -ed (past tense)*

## Types of morphemes

In linguistics terms, the qualities of morphemes are expressed with these distinctions:

- **free** (can stand alone) vs. **bound** (can't stand alone)
- **derivational** (generate new words) vs. **inflectional** (contain grammatical information)

## Free morphemes

**Free morphemes** are those morphemes that can stand on their own:

*university, Paris, car, apple, learn, run, hit, happy, green, quick, under, after, by, and, but, the, ...*

## Bound morphemes

**Bound morphemes** only occur attached to free morphemes:

**-s** (in *apple* - *apples*)

**-ed** (in *laugh* - *laughed*)

**-ly** (in *angry* - *angrily*)

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- ly (in *angry* - *angrily*)
- ize (in *category* - *categoryize*)

Not all bound morphemes are added at the end of a word - some occur at the beginning:

- untie
- recover
- defrost

## Affixes

Bound morphemes are usually referred to as **affixes**, because they are 'fixed' onto other morphemes. Affixes that are added at the beginning of a word are called **prefixes**; those that are added at the end of a word are known as **suffixes**.

Prefixes: un-, de-, re-, dis-, en-, ...

Suffixes: -ly, -able, -er, -izer, ...

Infixes (uncommon in English): absu-fuckin-lutely

## Derivational and inflectional morphemes

The distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes relates to the function they perform.

**Derivation** produces entirely new words (lexemes) by adding affixes

**Inflection** adds grammatical information to an existing word without changing its word class

## Derivation

In contrast to inflectional affixes, derivational morphemes allow us to create new words. Often the word class changes when derivational affixes are added to a lexeme. Derivational affixes can be prefixes or suffixes, while inflection in English only permits suffixes.

*happy* (ADJECTIVE)

*happily* (ADVERB)

*teach* (VERB)

*teacher* (NOUN)

courage (NOUN)

*encourage* (VERB)

## Derivation

In English, derivational prefixes have a noticeable tendency to change the meaning of a word, while derivational suffixes often change the word class. There are exceptions to this though.

*happy* - unhappy  
*activate* - deactivate  
*act* - react

*teach* - teacher  
*book* - bookish  
*sweet* - sweeten

## Inflection

Inflectional morphemes encode grammatical information. In English, inflectional morphemes are always suffixes.

- (1) *John plays* the piano
- (2) *I am singing* in the rain
- (3) *The two dogs* belong to Mike
- (4) *Lisa's* car broke down
- (5) *The mouse is eaten* by the cat

## Morphs, morphemes, allomorphs

The fact that plural number in English can be marked with several inflectional suffixes (-s, -en) or by no visible suffix at all points to a distinction you already know from phonology:

**morphs**

**morphemes**

**allomorphs**

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The fact that plural number in English can be marked with several inflectional suffixes (-s, -en) or by no (visible) suffix at all points to a distinction you already know from phonology:

**morphs**

a concrete part of a word that cannot be divided into smaller parts

**morphemes**

the meaning-distinguishing, abstract dimension of morphs, e.g. something like *the plural morpheme*

**allomorphs**

different realizations of the the same morpheme, e.g. -s, -en and nothing for the plural morpheme in *dogs*, *oxen* and *fish*

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**base:** reactions

**stem:** reaction (*s*)

**root:** (*re*) action (*s*)

The stem is the base with all inflectional suffixes removed, whereas the root is what remains after all affixes have been taken off.