Morphology

A Closer Look at Words

What's Morphology?

"**is the study of forms**" (Yule,1996:75)

The word *morphe* originally comes from Greek means *form*.

Also it was originally used in biology, but since the middle of 19th century, has also been used to describe that type of investigation which analyze all those basic ' elements' which are used in a language. So what we describe as 'elements' in the form of a linguistic message are known as *morpheme*.

Morpheme, Allomorph, morph

1- Morpheme

What's morpheme?

"morpheme is the smallest syntactic unit" (Aitchison: 1993:53)

Morphemes vary in size. The essential criterion is that a morpheme can not be cut up into smaller syntactic segments.

e.g   talk, talks, talker, talked, talking

must consist of one element *talk* and a number of other elements such as *–s, -er, -ed, -ing.*

Types of Morphemes

There are different types of morphemes:

1. **Free** morpheme: it is the morpheme which can occur by itself . Such as *walk*, *open*…etc…

2. **Bound** morpheme: is attached to another. Such as *anti-* , *-ed* , *- ly*. We can say all affixes in English are bound morphemes.

Free morphemes fall into two types:

A. **Lexical Morphemes**: set of ordinary nouns, adjectives, and verbs which are words that carry the ' content' of message we convey. For example, boy, sad, look…etc… Lexical morphemes are treated as ' open class of words'

B. **Functional Morphemes**: consist of the functional words in the language such as conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and pronouns. For example, and, but, when on, near, above, the…etc…They are described as ' closed class of words'

Bound morphemes also have two kinds:

A. Inflectional Morphemes: provides further information about an existing lexical item, it doesn't change the syntactic behaviour of an item.

   e.g.   *-ed* in look*ed* (provides past tense)

   - *s* in talk*s*   (indicates plural)

B. Derivational Morphemes: it's the morpheme which entirely creates the new word.

e.g   *-y* in cloud (N.)   ⟶   cloud*y* (Adj.)
-ness in good (Adj.)   ⟶   goodn*ess* (N)

2- Morph, Allomorph

Morph

If consider the 'phones' as the actual phonetic realization of ' phonemes', then we can propose 'morphs' as the actual forms used to realize 'morphemes'.

e.g.

cat is single morph realizing lexical morpheme.

cats consists of two morphs; realizing the lexical morpheme, and the inflectional morpheme.

Allomorph

Sometimes a morpheme may have more than one phonological form known as allomorphs. Allomorph is said to be **phonologically** conditioned, and **lexically** conditioned.

-In **Phonologically** conditioned: each allomorph occurs in a predictable set of environments, e.g., the plural morpheme in English, usually written as '-s', has at least three allomorphs: /-**z**/ , /-**s**/ , /-**iz** /.

/-z/ after most voiced phonemes e.g do**g**s

/-s/ after voiceless phonemes   e.g ca**t**s

/-iz/ after sibilants   e.g dishes

-In **Lexically** conditioned: the form of allomorph seems to be accidental, linked to particular vocabulary item.

e.g., *oxen*, *sheep*, *gees* they function as plurals in the same way as *cats*, *dogs* but they are not marked as plurals in the same way. Each one has to be learnt separately.

Problems in morphemic analysis

While we presented good deal of information about morphemes, but there are some problem with what we have presented. So far, we have only considered examples of English words in which the different morphemes are easily identifiable as separate elements, e.g., the inflectional morpheme *–s* is added to cat and we get *cats*.

But what is the inflectional morpheme which makes *sheep* the plural of *sheep*?
Also what is the inflectional morpheme which makes *went* the past tense of *go*.

The same thing is true concerning derivational morphemes. As we know *–al* is the derivational suffix as in **institional**. If *–al* is derivational suffix in **legal** what's the stem? Is it **leg**? No, it isn't.

To get clear picture about English morphology, we should have to take account of both **historical** influences and effect of **borrowed** elements. For example, there is no derivational relationship between forms of *law* and *legal* or *mouth* and *oral*. The first ones are from Old English forms while the latter ones are borrowed from Latin. Each to be learn **separately**.

What is affixation?

- **Affixation is the morphological process whereby an affix is attached to a root or stem.**

- **An affix is a bound that is joined before, after, or within a root or stem.**

- **A root is the portion of a word that is not further analyzable into meaningful elements, being morphologically simple,**

- A **stem** is the root or roots of a word, together with any derivational, to which inflectional are added.

Derivation versus inflection

The difference between derivational and inflectional morphemes is important to know. An inflectional morpheme never changes the grammatical category of a word, e.g., old and old*er* are adjectives. The – *er* inflection creates different form of adjective.

Derivation versus inflection

However, a derivational morpheme changes the grammatical category of a word, e.g., the verb teach becomes noun *teacher* if we add derivational morpheme – *er*.

Note:

- When there is a derivational suffix and an inflectional suffix attached to the same word, they always appear in that order; first the derivation then the inflectional, e.g., *teach-er-s*.

References:

1- Aitchison, Jean. (1993).<u>Linguistics</u> (4th ed.).UK: Hodder & Stoughton.

2- West, Fred. (1975). <u>The Way of Language: An Introduction</u>. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

3- Yule, George. (1996). <u>The study of language</u> (2nd ed.).UK: Cambridge University Press.

4- www.sil.org/linguistics/GlossaryOfLinguisticTerms/WhatIsAffixation.htm