

MORPHEMES: TYPES AND USAGE

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Annotation: Morphological icons are images, patterns or symbols that relate to a specific morpheme. For children with dyslexia, it has been shown to be an effective way of building up a word. The word 'inviting' as an example is made up of two commonly used morphemes, 'in-' and '-ing'.

Key words: concept, morpheme, affix, suffix, meaningful, roots, morphology.

A **morpheme** is the smallest meaningful constituent of a linguistic expression. The field of **linguistic** study dedicated to morphemes is called morphology

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.

Classification

Free and bound morphemes

Main article: Bound and free morphemes

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.

Classification of bound morphemes]

Bound morphemes can be further classified as derivational or inflectional morphemes. The main difference between them is their function in relation to words.

Derivational bound morphemes

- Derivational morphemes, when combined with a root, change the semantic meaning or the part of speech of the affected word. For example, in the word *happiness*, the addition of the bound morpheme *-ness* to the root *happy* changes the word from an adjective (*happy*) to a noun (*happiness*). In the word *unkind*, *un-* functions as a derivational morpheme since it inverts the meaning of the root morpheme (word) *kind*. Generally, morphemes that affix (i.e., affixes) to a root morpheme (word) are bound morphemes.

Inflectional bound morphemes[\[edit\]](#)

- Inflectional morphemes modify the tense, aspect, mood, person, or number of a verb or the number, gender, or [case](#) of a noun, adjective, or pronoun without affecting the word's meaning or class part of speech. Examples of applying inflectional morphemes to words are adding *-s* to the root *dog* to form *dogs* and adding *-ed* to *wait* to

form *waited*. An inflectional morpheme changes the form of a word. English has eight inflections.¹

Allomorphs [\[edit\]](#)

[Allomorphs](#) are variants of a morpheme that differ in form but are semantically similar. For example, the English plural marker has three allomorphs: /-z/ (*bugs*), /-s/ (*bats*), or /-ɪz, -əz/ (*buses*). An allomorph is a concrete realization of a morpheme, which is an abstract unit. That is parallel to the relation of an allophone and a phoneme.

Zero-bound-morpheme

Zero-morpheme

A zero-morpheme is a type of morpheme that carries semantic meaning but is not represented by auditory phoneme. A word with a zero-morpheme is analyzed as having the morpheme for grammatical purposes, but the morpheme is not realized in speech. They are often represented by /[∅](#)/ within glosses.

Generally, such morphemes have no visible changes. For instance, *sheep* is both the singular and the plural forms; rather than taking the usual plural suffix -s to form hypothetical **sheeps*, the plural is analyzed as being composed of *sheep* + -[∅](#), the null plural suffix. The intended meaning is thus derived from the co-occurrence determiner (in this case, "some-" or "a-").

In some cases, a zero-morpheme may also be used to contrast with other inflected forms of a word that contain an audible morpheme. For example, the plural noun *cats* in English consists of the root *cat* and the plural suffix -s, and so the singular *cat* may be analyzed as the root inflected with the null singular suffix -[∅](#).

Content vs. function

[Content morphemes](#) express a concrete meaning or *content*, and function morphemes have more of a grammatical role. For example, the morphemes *fast* and *sad* can be considered content morphemes. On the other hand, the suffix -ed is a function morpheme since it has the grammatical function of indicating past tense.

Both categories may seem very clear and intuitive, but the idea behind them is occasionally more difficult to grasp since they overlap with each other.^{[121](#)} Examples of ambiguous situations are

the preposition *over* and the determiner *your*, which seem to have concrete meanings but are considered function morphemes since their role is to connect ideas grammatically. Here is a general rule to determine the category of a morpheme:

- Content morphemes include free morphemes that are noun, adjectives, and verbs and include bound morphemes that are bound roots and derivational affixes.

- Function morphemes may be free morphemes that are prepositions, pronouns, determiners, and conjunctions. They may be bound morphemes that are inflectional affixes.

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