Morphology: 4th meeting

Studying morphemes

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Review of Derivation & Inflection

- The most crucial difference is that inflectional morphemes encode grammatical categories such as plural (*workers*), person (*works*), tense (*picked*), or case (*John’s*)

- **Derivation:**
  worker, useless, untruthfulness, curiosity, passivize

- **Inflection**
  She works, the workers, is colonializing, we picked, the children, John’s house
In English derivational morphemes can occur at either beginning or end of the base words whereas regular inflection is always expressed by suffixes. Only irregular inflection makes use of non-affixational means, as for example in *mouse* - *mice* or *sing* - *sang*. There is no inflectional prefix in English.
Derivation

- Encodes lexical meaning
- Is not syntactically relevant
- Can occur inside derivation: un-truth-ful-ness, dis-establish-ment-arian-ism
- Often changes the part of speech: careless, creativity, nationalize
- Is often restricted in its productivity
- Is not restricted to suffixation
Inflection

- Encode grammatical categories
- Is syntactically relevant
- Occurs outside all derivation: workers, colonializing
- Does not change part of speech
- Fully productive
- Always suffixational (in English)
The morpheme as the minimal linguistic sign

- Traditionally morpheme is conceived of as a unit of form and meaning.
- For example, the morpheme *un-* (as in *unhappy*) is an entity that consists of the content or meaning on the one hand, and the sounds or letters which express this meaning on the other hand.
- The part of the morpheme we have referred to as its ‘form’ is also called *morph*, a term coined on the basis of the Greek word for ‘form, figure’.
Examples of studying morphemes (1)

- The morpheme *un-* : [ʌn] = morph; ’not’ = meaning
- In complex words at least one morpheme is combined with another morpheme. This creates a derived word, a new complex sign, which stands for the combined meaning of the two morphemes involved.

  [ʌn] + [hæpi] = [ʌnæpɪ]
  ‘not’ + ‘happy’ = ‘not happy’

- The meaning of the new complex sign *unhappy* can be predicted from the meanings of its parts. Linguistic expressions such as *unhappy*, whose meaning is a function of the meaning of its parts are called **compositional**.
Examples of studying morphemes (2)

Not all complex words and expressions are **compositional**.

- *kick the bucket* ‘die’
- pairs such as *view* and *interview* (inter = ‘between’; interview ≠ ‘view between’)
- *late* = ‘after the due time’, and *lately* ≠ ‘in a late manner’
Problems with the morpheme: the mapping of form and meaning

1. Conversion: the process by which words are derived from other words without any visible marking (*to walk* - *a walk*, *to throw* - *a throw*, *water* - *to water*, *book* – *to book*).

This would force us to recognize morphemes which have *no* morph, which is impossible according to our basic definition of morpheme.

Thus we could speak of the presence of a **zero-morph** in the case of conversion (hence the competing term **zero-derivation** for conversion).
Problems with the morpheme: the mapping of form and meaning

2. Nonaffixational processes
   
   - For ex: Words that are derived from other words by truncation (e.g. *Ron, Liz, lab, demo*). What exactly is the morph (and where is it) that - together with the base word - forms the derived word in a compositional manner? What exactly is the semantic difference between *Ronald* and *Ron*, *laboratory* and *lab*?
   
   - In sum, truncations can be assigned a meaning, but the nature of the morph expressing that meaning is problematic.
Problems with the morpheme: the mapping of form and meaning

3. cases like two verbs *to fall* ‘move downwards’ and *to fell* ‘make fall’

- It could be argued that *fell* is derived from *fall* by the addition of a so-called *causative* morpheme ‘make X’.
- This idea is not far-fetched, given that the formation of causative verbs is quite common in English, but usually involves affixes, such as -ify in *humidify* ‘make humid’, or –en in *blacken* ‘make black’. But where is the causative morpheme in *to fell*?
- Obviously, the causative meaning is expressed merely by the vowel change in *fall vs fell* ([O] vs [E]) and not by any affix.
Problems with the morpheme: the mapping of form and meaning

4. In some expressions there is more than one form signifying a certain meaning (Such phenomena are instances of so-called extended exponence, because the forms that represent the morpheme extend across more than one element.)

A standard example from inflectional morphology is the progressive form in English (be + ing)

A similar situation holds for English diminutives, which are marked by a combination of truncation and suffixation
Problems with the morpheme: the mapping of form and meaning

5. there are frequently parts of words that invite morphological segmentation, but do not carry any meaning, hence do not qualify for morpheme status. Consider for example the following words, and try to determine the morphemes which the words may be composed of:

infer confer prefer refer transfer (monomorphemic words)

- A first step in the analysis of the data in (5) may be to hypothesize the existence of a morpheme -fer (a bound root) with a number of different prefixes (in-, con-, pre-, re-, trans-).

- However, if -fer is a bound root, it should have the same (or at least sufficiently similar) meanings in all the words in which it occurs.
  infer ‘to draw a conclusion’
  confer ‘to converse, talk together’
  prefer ‘to like better’
  refer ‘to send or direct (one) to a person, a book ... for information’
  transfer ‘to convey or take from one place, person, etc. to another’
Allomorphs and Allomorphy

- **Allomorphs**: different morphs representing the same morpheme
- **Allomorphy**: the phenomenon that different morphs realize one and the same morpheme
- For ex: When not spoken in isolation, the indefinite article *a* has two different morphs [ə] and [ən], and the definite article *the* equally has two morphs, [ðə] and [ð i]. When spoken in isolation (or sometimes when speakers hesitate, as in *I saw a ... a ... a unicorn*), each article has a third, stressed, variant, [eɪ] and [ð ɪ] respectively.