

Morphemes

A morpheme may be defined as *the minimum unit of meaningful sound*. Here the morpheme is different from the phoneme, since the phoneme is a minimum unit of distinctive sound. So the phoneme distinguishes meanings, although by itself, it has no meaning. For example, each of the two words [pit] [bit] has meaning, but the [t] by itself has no meaning and the vowel /i/ also has no meaning; but although the consonants /p/ /b/ have no meaning, but they distinguish the two different meanings of the two words /pit/ and /bit/. Thus /pit/ is a hollow in the ground and /bit/ means “a small piece”

So each of the two words has a separate meaning, and each word is a morpheme. Each of the morphemes has three distinctive sounds, three phonemes.

Words

A word may have one or more morphemes. In the word *player*, we have two morphemes: *play* is one morpheme, and *-er* is another morpheme, since *-er* means “the one who plays” The suffix. *-er* changes the verb *play* into a noun. Because *-er* comes after the word *play*, it is called a suffix and since *player* is a noun, and *play* is a verb we call the suffix *-er* a derivational morpheme, since it changes the class of the word.

In a word like *books*, we have the morpheme *book*, and the suffix *-s*; the suffix *-s* tells us that the word *books* is plural, but *-s* does not change the class of the word: *book*, and *books* are nouns. So, we say the *-s* is an inflectional suffix.

Morphemic Analysis

A word in English may be simple or complex. It is simple when it is made only of one morpheme:

a an the cold heart very

But most English words are complex words for: example, the word: *governments* is made of three morphemes: the verb

govern and the derivational suffix *-ment*, and the inflectional suffix *-s*, indicating the plural. The derivational suffix changes the verb into a noun, and the *-s* suffix does not change the class of the word; but it gives the plural of the word.

Some words have prefixes that change the meaning of the word. So we have the adjective *-able* when we add the prefix *un-* the word becomes *unable*, which has the opposite meaning of *able*.

The word, *ability*, has the derivational suffix *-ity* that makes a noun; and the word *ability* is made up of two morphemes. The word, *abilities*, has 3 morphemes: *abil*, *iti*- and *-es*. The word *inability* also has three morphemes *in-* as a prefix *abl-* as the adjective, and *-ity* making a noun.

The word *abil-* is called the base, and we notice that it is different in pronunciation from *able*, but both have the same meaning. So we say that the morpheme has two allomorphs: one is *able* /eybl/ and the other is /æbili~/. Some morphemes may have one shape; the word, *coldness*, has the same allomorph as in *cold* /kowld/, and *coldness* /kowldnəs/.

But, the word *nation* has two allomorphs /néyʃn/ and /næʃən/ in *national*.

Exercises

Exercise I

Analyze the following words into: base, derivational suffixes, and inflectional suffixes:

lemonade- priesthood- slavery- complaints- delivery- bakeries- idealistically- wisdom- violent- deception

Exercise II:

Show the allomorphs in each couple of these words giving the phonetic symbols:

(deceive- deception) (supreme- supremacy)

(decide- decision) (rite- ritual)

Exercise III:

Give the morphemic analysis of these words:

reformation resoluteness- distinction responsible-
reasonableness- respectful revolutionary- backwardness-
introductions.

Arabic Morphology

In Arabic we have many kinds of *infixes*. Generally these *infixes* are vowels. So in the word /ka-t-a-ba/ we have the three consonants /k-t-b/ and the infix pattern /a-a/. The three consonants indicate the general idea of writing and the vowel pattern /-a-a-/ indicates the present tense. The vowel /-a/ at the end is a suffix indicating the 3rd person singular meaning *he*. In Arabic morphology, the third person singular is called an *implied pronoun* /mustatir/.

The *infix* may be a consonant, which is part of a geminate as we have in the word /çallama/ meaning. *He taught*. Comparing /calima/ with /çallama/, we find that the *infix* /-l-/ changes the meaning from *He knew* to *He taught*.

So, the word /çallama/ could be interpreted as made up of 4 morphemes: /ç-l-m/ and /a-i-/, and /-l-/ which means repetition, and /-a/ indicating the 3rd person singular.

Arabic nouns also have prefixes, as we have in the word /mucallimun/ meaning: the person who teaches; and here we have the prefix morpheme /mu-/, and the consonant morpheme /c-l-m/, and the infix morpheme /-l-/, and also the vowel morpheme /-a-i-/ for the 3rd person; and finally the inflectional suffix morpheme /un/, indicating the nominative case as subject /marfūc/ مرفوع

I- Give the number of morphemes in each of these words:

Kitābun- radiya- rakibnā- sādiqum- ʔaṣābun

Lataktubunna- ʔabwābun- nawāfiḍ- rāḥatun- yaktubūna
masters- kidneys- parental- entrances- reformer
transformations- professionalism- reflections- reinforces-
realizations.

II- Analyze the following words into their constituent morphemes:

1- Manliness- return- mindful- stronger- purposefully-
pursuits- fruitlessly- hardships- swimmers- surroundings.

sāfara- kutibat- rabaṭū- yarbaḥ- mālun mālatā- katabna-
ʔlaʔard- ʔayyamun- ʔar-raʔ su

2- Indicate the morphemes:

Humanitarian- finalized- trembling – forgiveness- forgetfully-
undoubtedly.

raʔaynāhum- ziyāratikum- malābisuhu- jamiʕatunā
faʔasqaynākumūh.

The Parts of Speech System

If we look at the parts of speech in English, from the point of view of inflections, we find that we have the noun as a part of speech, and this is the first class. Then the second class is the pronoun. It is a separate class because it has many different forms. We have one form for the subject, another form for the object, and a third form for the possessive. For example, we have "I" as subject "me" object, "my" as genitive (possessive); we also have "he" as subject and "his" possessive.

The third class in English is the verb, which has its inflectional system.

If we look at the adverb in English, we find that it has no inflections, and may not be considered a separate part of speech. The only difference between adjective and adverb is the suffix "ly" which is not an inflectional suffix. It is a derivational suffix. We can derive the adverb from the adjective in English by adding "ly" e.g. slow- slowly. So the adverb in English can be grouped together with the prepositions and conjunctions in one class that we may call particles, as we have in Arabic. So we may end up by having five parts of speech in English (1) noun (2) pronoun (3) verb (4) adjective (5) particle. The class of particles would include the adverb, conjunction, preposition and article.

What is a Morpheme in Arabic?

A morpheme has been defined as the smallest meaningful unit of language. A word may be made up of one morpheme or more. In English a morpheme is a continuous sequence of phonemes. But in Arabic it is a discontinuous sequence of phonemes; and this is one of the main differences between Arabic and English morphology. For example, in the word "discontinuous" we find that there is a base "-tin" from Latin *tinere* "to hold" and the prefix "dis-", the prefix "con-" and the

suffix “-ous” The two prefixes change the meaning of the word and each has a special meaning. The prefix “dis-” means opposite, the prefix “con-” = within. The suffix “-ous” is a derivational suffix that changes the verb into an adjective. All these morphemes, whether they are prefixes or suffixes or a base, are continuous sequences of phonemes.

But in Arabic we do not have continuous sequences of phonemes as we have in English; so, for example, if we have the two words /kitāb/ and /kātib/, we find that the two words are different in meaning. The consonants in both words are identical. So if there is a difference in meaning, it is the result of the difference in the vowel pattern. Thus the word /kitāb/ has the vowel pattern /i-ā/, which gives us the meaning of “book” in English; but the word /kātib/ has the vowel pattern /ā-i/ which gives us the meaning of “writer”. So, each of these two vowel patterns has a different meaning and so each vowel pattern is a morpheme. But it is not a continuous morpheme. So this vowel pattern is given a new name, and that is “discontinuous morpheme”.

Again if we look at the consonants in the previous two words /kitāb/ and /kātib/, we find that they are three in each and they have the same meaning. The meaning is “something related to writing”. These three consonants are also a discontinuous morpheme. The three consonants in Arabic are sometimes called the root (base). This root is usually made up of three consonants, which are discontinuous.

So, one basic difference between English and Arabic morphology is that in English the word may be one morpheme at least, but in Arabic it must be two morphemes at least.

Contrastive Morphology

English is a West European language that belongs to the Germanic family of languages. These languages as a whole used to have many inflections in the past but have lost many of them. English is a good example of the loss of many

inflections. That is why we call English an “analytic” language. Languages in general may be divided into two big classes: analytic and synthetic. The progress of English has been a gradual change from being a synthetic language to becoming analytic. Because of the importance of inflections, language has to get a grammatical feature as a substitute; this substitute in *English is word order*. So *English is a word-order language*. This means that we know the *subject* from the object in English by looking at the sentence. If it comes after the verb it is *object*.

The situation is different in Arabic, because it is not a *word-order* language. *Arabic is an inflectional language*. The function of *word-order* in English is taken over by inflections in Arabic. This means that word order is not important in Arabic; in an Arabic sentence we know the subject by looking at the inflectional suffix.

In the same way, we know that the object has the accusative inflectional suffix: e.g. in ʔarsala rrajulu xitāban (ʔrrajulu) is the subject and (xitāban) is the object because each of these has its inflection and the word order is unimportant.