

A quick introduction to .. MORPHOLOGY!

- Morphology - study of the structure of word parts and word formation.

What is a word? What do you know when you know a word? The average high school graduate knows approx. 60,000 words. However, if you think about it, the “word” is a rather slippery building block for language because words usually have more than one meaning. Linguists therefore further classify language by morphemes (the smallest unit of linguistic meaning or function in a language). Here are some interesting examples:

“boy”	one morpheme
“girls”	two morphemes (<i>girl</i> + plural ‘s’)
“men”	two morphemes (<i>man</i> + plural infix)
“boyish”	two morphemes (<i>boy</i> + <i>ish</i>)
“crocodile”	<u>one</u> morpheme (try dividing it up into meaningful parts and you can’t!)

- Morphemes are either bound (cannot occur unattached; e.g. *-ly*, *-est*, *-s*) or free (can stand alone, e.g., “boy”, “run”).
- Free morphemes are either open class (content or lexical words), i.e. your basic nouns (“turkey”) adjectives (“lovely”), verbs (“describe”) and adverbs (“slowly”) OR ... closed class (function or grammatical words), such as articles (“the”), prepositions (“over”), and pronouns (“them”).
- Open class words change all the time, but you can’t make “new” function words!
- Bound morphemes are either derivational (change word class categories, e.g. from verb à noun, as in “run” à “runner”) or change basic meaning (e.g. “cool” à “uncool”) -- OR -- inflectional (serve syntactic functions such as “third person singular” (-s), or the present progressive tense “-ing”).
- In English, derivational morphemes are either prefixes (e.g. “prepaid”), suffixes (e.g., “establishment”), or [more rarely!] infixes (e.g., “women”).

Here is a nice example of infixing from Bontoc (Philippines):

“fikas” (strong)	à	“fumikas” (to be strong)
“kilad” (red)	à	“kumilad” (to be red)

Q: If “selow” means “jealous” in Bantoc, how would you say “to be jealous?”

- Morphophonemic rules -- What a fancy term! It just means that a given morpheme can be shaped by phonological rules. For example, notice that English “plural s” really assumes THREE sound forms:

“cat”	à	[kQt̩s]	
“road”	à	[rodz]	<u>Note:</u> We never make mistakes like “[kQt̩lz]”*
“bridge”	à	[ÈbrIdZIz]	