



Word Formation

Understanding Important Terms

- ❑ **Word** – a speech sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing, that symbolizes and communicates a meaning and may consist of a single morpheme or a combination of morphemes. It can also be considered as the smallest unit of a sentence.
- ❑ **Complex Word/Derivative** - words that are composed by putting together smaller elements (words/morpheme/affix) to form larger words with more complex meanings
- ❑ **Morpheme** – are the indivisible basic units of language, much like the atoms in matter
 - ❑ **Free Morpheme** – such morphemes occur on their own. E.g. this, will, is, some, any
 - ❑ **Bound Morpheme** – such morphemes can occur only if attached to some other morpheme. E.g. un-, -ity, -ness
- ❑ **Base** – The part of a word to which an affix is attached. It gives the word its principal meaning. E.g. Beautiful has ‘beauty’ as base.
- ❑ **Root** – Refers to bases that cannot be analysed further into morphemes. E.g. in the word ‘unreliability’, ‘unreliable’ is base and ‘rely’ is root. Unreliable – Un + Rely + able
- ❑ **Affix** – one or more sounds or letters occurring as a bound form attached to the beginning or end of a base or inserted within a base. Types: Prefix, Suffix, Infix. In above example, ‘un’ is prefix; ‘able’ and ‘ity’ are suffix.

Processes of Word Formation

- ▶ *Word formation* refers to the ways in which new words are formed on the basis of other words or morphemes
- ▶ Primarily, there are three types of process of word formation:

Additive Process

1. Compounding
2. Blending
3. Affixation

Subtractive Process

1. Abbreviation & Acronym
2. Clipping
3. Back Formation

Miscellaneous

1. Coinage
2. Borrowing/Loan Words

Additive Processes: Compounding

- ▶ Technique of combining two or more free morphemes or words consisting of free morphemes
- ▶ Example - *blackbird, clock work, light bulb, notebook, bittersweet, uphill, fingerprint, touchpad*
- ▶ Compounds are written sometimes as one word (*sunglasses*), sometimes as two hyphenated words (*life-threatening*), and sometimes as two separate words (*football stadium*)
- ▶ In most compounds the rightmost morpheme determines the category of the entire word
 - ▶ *greenhouse* is a noun because its rightmost component is a noun
 - ▶ *spoon-feed* is a verb because *feed* also belongs to this category
 - ▶ *nationwide* is an adjective just as *wide* is
- ▶ Compounding is the most common type of word-formation in English

Additive Processes: Blending

- ▶ Blending is a type of word formation in which two or more words are merged into one so that the blended constituents are either clipped, or partially overlap
- ▶ The meaning of derivative word is often a combination of the original words
- ▶ Words formed by blending process are known as “portmanteau” words
- ▶ Example
 - ▶ *Documentary + Drama = Docudrama*
 - ▶ *Stay + Vacation = Staycation*
 - ▶ *Breakfast + Lunch = Brunch*
 - ▶ *Emotion + Icon = Emoticon*
- ▶ There are different ways of creating word blends:
 - ▶ By combining portions of two other words to make a new one. "camcorder" combines parts of "camera" and "recorder"
 - ▶ By joining a full word with a portion of another word . "motorcade" combines "motor" plus a portion of "cavalcade."
- ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ Fintech = Finance + Technology
 - ▶ Sitcom = Situation + Comedy
 - ▶ Emoticon = Emotion + Icon

Additive Processes: Affixation

- ▶ Process of adding a bound morpheme—or affix—to a word to create either a different form of that word or a new word with a different meaning
- ▶ Affixes are of three kinds:
 - ▶ **Prefix** - is a letter or group of letters attached to the beginning of a word that partly indicates its meaning. Examples: "anti-" to mean against, "co-" to mean with, "mis-" to mean wrong or bad, and "trans-" to mean across. Common prefixes are:
 - ▶ 'a-' Aside, aback, atheist
 - ▶ 'in-' Incomplete, Inactive, Inside, Inappropriate, influx
 - ▶ 'un-' unable, unpredictable, unfollow, unlike,
 - ▶ 'pre-' precondition, preliminary, pre-covid, prerequisite
 - ▶ Inter-, hyper-,ex-, dis-
 - ▶ **Suffix** - a letter or group of letters attached to the end of a word/root/base serving to form a new word . Example:
 - ▶ -ism : Criticism, humanism, professionalism, Hindusim
 - ▶ -ity : Ability, equality, compatibility, civility
 - ▶ -ment : movement, improvement, retirement, confinement
 - ▶ -ive, -ing, -ness, -ship
 - ▶ **Infix** - a letter or group of letters inserted within a word/root/base serving to form a new word or intensify meaning.
- ▶ English has no true infixes, but the plural suffix -s behaves something like an infix in unusual plurals like passers-by and mothers-in-law. Infixes Sometimes, insertion of an (often offensive) intensifier into a word, as in fan-freakin'-tastic, is also taken as infix

Subtractive Processes: Abbreviation and Acronym

- ▶ Abbreviation is the shortened form of a word or phrase
- ▶ Most commonly abbreviation is formed using first few letters of a word or the important letters of a word
- ▶ Example
 - ▶ Titles – Mr. Ms. Mrs. Dr. Col. Gen.
 - ▶ Months – Jan. Feb. Mar.
 - ▶ Units – kg. gal. oz. in. ft. hr. min. sec.
- ▶ Abbreviation can also be formed by using initial letter of words in a name or phrase
 - ▶ BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation
 - ▶ CBSE – Central Board of Secondary Education
- ▶ An acronym is a word formed from the initial letters of a name or by combining initial letters of a series of words. However, it denotes a combination pronounced as a word rather than as just a sequence of letters
- ▶ Examples
 - ▶ NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 - ▶ RADAR - Radio Detection and Ranging
 - ▶ UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Subtractive Processes: Clipping

- ▶ It is the process of forming a new word by dropping one or more syllables from a polysyllabic word
- ▶ Simply saying, clipping refers to part of a word that serves for the whole
- ▶ Clipped form generally has the same denotative meaning as the word it comes from, but it's regarded as more colloquial and informal
- ▶ Examples
 - ▶ ad from advertisement
 - ▶ phone from telephone
 - ▶ Cellphone from cellular phone
 - ▶ Sci-fi from Science fiction
 - ▶ Lab from laboratory
 - ▶ Exam from examination
 - ▶ Gas from gasoline

Subtractive Processes: Back Formation

- ▶ Process of forming a new word by removing actual or supposed affixes from another word.
- ▶ Simply, a back-formation is a shortened word (such as edit) created from a longer word (editor)
- ▶ It is also called "back-derivation"
- ▶ Example
 - ▶ *singular noun 'pea' from the older English plural 'pease'*
 - ▶ *the verb 'burgle' from the older English noun 'burglar'*
 - ▶ *the verb 'diagnose' from the older English noun 'diagnosis'*
 - ▶ *'Edit' from 'Editor'*
 - ▶ *'beg' from 'beggar'*
 - ▶ *'vaccinate' from 'vaccination'*
- ▶ "There is nothing in the forms themselves that enables one to distinguish between affixation and back-formation: it's a matter of historical formation of words rather than of their structure" - Huddleston and Pullum (*A Student's Introduction to English Grammar*)

Miscellaneous: Coinage

- ▶ Coinage is the word formation process in which a new word is created either deliberately or accidentally without using the other word formation processes and often from seemingly nothing
- ▶ This is a very rare and uncommon method to create new words, but in the media, people try to outdo each other with more and better words to name their products
- ▶ Writers also contribute to language by coining new words
- ▶ It may also refer to extension of a name of a product from a specific reference to a more general one. This is called 'generification.' Example, Kleenex, Xerox, Kodak, Google etc.
- ▶ A few new words added to English in 2021 – PPE, Contactless, vaccine passport, cloud kitchen, body-shame, suhoor, transphobe, digital nomad, Southern Ocean

Miscellaneous: Borrowing/Loan Words

- ▶ It is the word formation process in which a word from one language is borrowed directly into another language. The resulting words are known as 'loanwords'
- ▶ For example, the following common English words are borrowed from foreign languages:
 - algebra – Arabic
 - bagel – Yiddish
 - cherub – Hebrew
 - chowmein – Chinese
 - galore – Irish
 - murder – French
 - jungle – Sanskrit
 - paprika – Hungarian
 - pizza – Italian

Exercise

Let us look at a number of words that fall into the domain of word-formation and a number of words that do not:

A	B	C
Employee	Greenhouse	Chair
Inventor	Team manager	Neighbor
Inability	Truck driver	Matter
Meaningless	Blackboard	Great
Suddenness	Son-in-law	Promise
unhappy	pickpocket	Discuss