

A morpheme is the minimum meaningful unit in the utterance of a language. e.g. actor /æktə/ has two morphemes. /ækt/ is one and /ə/ is another. Here /ə/ is considered as a separate morpheme because in actor 'er' has the same meaning as it has in dancer /dænsə/.

But the above mentioned definition cannot be accepted in all classes. For there are examples of elements whose status as morpheme is not disputed even though they cannot validly be said to have any independent meaning. One infinite marker 'to' in 'I have to go' is one standard example. The other example is of the auxiliary 'do'. Of these elements is fully determined by the syntactic construction. They cannot make an independent contribution to the meaning of the sentence.

So we conclude that the meaning-fulness is not a necessary condition for morphemehood. This illustrates the independence of syntax from semantics. The morpheme is a syntactic unit not a semantic one. It is not definable in terms of the semantic notion of meaningfulness. We can, therefore, revise the previous definition of morpheme in this way, 'morpheme is the minimum grammatic unit in the utterance of a language'.

Morpheme may also be defined in terms of allomorphs.

Allomorphs → It frequently happens that a particular morpheme is not represented everywhere by the same morpheme but by different morphs in different environments. These alternative representations of a morpheme are called allomorphs. e.g. plural morphemes /-s/ in /kæts/, /-z/ in /dɔgz/ and /-z/ in /hɔ:slz/.

Allomorphs are of two types:

1) Phonemically Conditioned Allomorphs → When the allomorphs are conditioned by the phonetic nature of the preceding phoneme, they are said to be phonologically conditioned.

Example → The three allomorphs of the plural morpheme are represented by /-z/ in /dɔgz/, /-s/ in /kæts/ and /-ɪz/ in /hɔ:slz/. Here all the three allomorphs are phonologically conditioned because each occurs after a clearly defined situation.

11) Morphologically Conditioned Allomorphs → When allomorphs is determined by the specific morpheme or morphemes forming the context, rather than by phonological features, it is called morphologically conditioned: i.e. /ɔn/ which only occurs with three morphemes. They are ox /ɔks/, brother /brʌðə/ and child /tʃɪld/

Now we can define a morpheme in terms of allomorphs too, 'A morpheme is a class of allomorphs which are semantically similar and in complementary distribution.'

Types of Morpheme:

- 1) Root Morpheme → Root-morpheme is the ultimate to all cognate words i.e. the element of a word which remains after the removal of all flexional endings, formatives etc. ex- fan /fæn/ book /bʊk/ tap /tæp/
- 2) Affixal Morpheme → Affixal morphemes are subsidiary to root morphemes as /-s/, /-z/, /-iz/.

 - a) Prefixal Morphemes → Prefixal morphemes are those which precede the root-morpheme with which they are most closely associated. Example → un /ʌn/ in unable /ʌneɪbəl/, re /ri:/ in refill /ri:fl/
 - b) Suffixal Morphemes → Suffixal morphemes are those affixal morphemes which follow the root-morpheme with which they are most closely associated. e.g. /-iz/ in /sɪfɪkɪz/ & /-iz/ in /gəʊnɪz/

- 3) Stem Morpheme → Affixal morphemes may be added directly to the root-morphemes and one or other morphemes. All these morphemes are called stem morphemes. So, a stem morpheme is any morpheme or combination of morphemes to which an affixal morpheme can be added. Examples → friends /frɛndz/ contains a stem morpheme /frɛnd/ which is also a root-morpheme and an affixal morpheme /z/. Friendships /frɛndʃɪps/ contains an affixal /-s/ and a stem friendship, which is, however, not a root since it consists of two morphemes. Here friend is a root-morpheme equivalent to a stem-morpheme because 'ship' has been added to it.
- 4) Compound Morpheme → Some words contain two or more root-morphemes. They are said to be compound-morphemes. As School Boy /skul-

/bɔi/ is a compound morpheme containing two root-morphemes /skul/ and /bɔi/.

5) Unique morpheme → Some morphemes are of special kind and are known as unique morphemes. As in Cranberry /krænbəri/, Cran /kræn/ is a unique morpheme. Here berry /bəri/ recurs in strawberry /strɔ:bəri/ raspberry /ræzibəri/ and so on.

Though /kræn/ does not occur except in this combination, it clearly carries a meaning. It is also different from strawberry or raspberry. Here it might be difficult to describe the meaning of /kræn/ but it is easily demonstrated in a fruit market. So, it's unique morpheme.

6) Zero Morpheme → This was first suggested by Sanskrit grammarians. A zero morpheme of the noun plural morpheme has been assumed by some to occur in a word like sleep (plural) - "The sheep are grazing". Here sheep is (singular) + Ø (zero morph) = sheep (plural), but it is absent in "The sheep is grazing". It would be unclear whether or not it is present in "The sheep must graze" since the sentence is ambiguous.

7) Inflectional Morpheme → It is that morpheme by adding which to certain ending of the root morpheme, expresses certain grammatic relationship and functions. e.g. → love /lʌv/ loves /lʌvz/ & loving /lʌvɪŋ/. In these examples if in root morpheme /lʌv/, singular allomorph /-z/ or /ɪŋ/ is added, the meaning of word does not change from the root morpheme.

8) Derivational Morpheme → It is that morpheme which forms new words from the existing root morpheme e.g. Adjective from Noun - /ɪ/ morpheme, critical /krɪtɪkəl/ from critic /krɪtɪk/ Noun from verb - or /ɪ/ morpheme - singer /sɪŋə/ from sing /sɪŋ/ Adjective from verb - able /əbəl/ morpheme acceptable /əkseptəbəl/ from accept /əksept/

Derivational Morphemes are of two types:

1) Class Maintaining Derivational Morpheme

2) Class Changing Derivational Morpheme

Class changing - like 'ly', 'ness' etc. change the class (the part

of speech) of the stem. Thus, nice is an adjective, but the suffix 'ly' converts it into an adverb - nicely. Similarly 'good' is an adjective but addition of 'ness' converts it into a noun "goodness".

On the other hand, some derivational prefixes/suffixes like -hood, ship, un etc do not bring about a change of class. Thus both 'likely' and 'unlikely' are adjectives; both 'man' and 'manhood' are nouns. Such derivations are called class maintaining derivational morphemes.