Morphology 2nd. Year / 1st.lecture Definition and Examples of English Morphology

Morphology is the branch of linguistics (and one of the major components of grammar) that studies word structures, especially regarding morphemes, which are the smallest units of language. They can be base words or components that form words, such as affixes. The adjective form is *morphological*.

Morphology Over Time

Traditionally, a basic distinction has been made between *morphology*—which is primarily concerned with the internal structures of words—and *syntax*, which is primarily concerned with how words are put together in sentences.

"The term 'morphology' has been taken over from biology where it is used to denote the study of the forms of plants and animals ... It was first used for linguistic purposes in 1859 by the German linguist August Schleicher (Salmon 2000), to refer to the study of the form of words," noted Geert E. Booij, in "An Introduction to Linguistic Morphology." (3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2012)

In recent decades, however, numerous linguists have challenged this distinction. See, for example, *lexicogrammar* and lexical-functional grammar (LFG), which consider the interrelationship—even interdependence—between words and grammar.

Branches of and Approaches to Morphology

The two branches of morphology include the study of the breaking apart (the analytic side) and the reassembling (the synthetic side) of words; to wit, *inflectional morphology* concerns the breaking apart of words into their parts, such as how suffixes make different verb forms. *Lexical word formation,* in contrast, concerns the construction of new base words, especially complex ones that come from multiple morphemes. Lexical word formation is also called *lexical morphology* and *derivational morphology*.

Author David Crystal gives these examples:

"For English, [morphology] means devising ways of describing the properties of such disparate items as *a, horse, took, indescribable,*

washing machine, and *antidisestablishmentarianism.* A widely recognized approach divides the field into two domains: *lexical* or *derivational morphology* studies the way in which new items of vocabulary can be built up out of combinations of elements (as in the case of *in-describ-able*); *inflectional morphology* studies the ways words vary in their form in order to express a grammatical contrast (as in the case of *horses,* where the ending marks plurality)." ("The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language," 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, 2003)

"The analytic approach has to do with breaking words down, and it is usually associated with American structuralist linguistics of the first half of the twentieth century....No matter what language we're looking at, we need analytic methods that are independent of the structures we are examining; preconceived notions might interfere with an objective, scientific analysis. This is especially true when dealing with unfamiliar languages.
"The second approach to morphology is more often associated with theory than with methodology, perhaps unfairly. This is the synthetic approach. It basically says, 'I have a lot of little pieces here. How do I put them together?' This question presupposes that you already know what the pieces are.