**Words, Words, Words**

Morphology & Semantics

ENG 315
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**Morphology and Semantics** take up the question “How do we form words and assign them meaning”?

- Morphology: studies the formation of words
- Semantics: studies the meaning of words
- A broad label that covers both morphology and semantics is **lexicography**

**Morphemes & allomorphs (CEEL 198)**

- Morphemes: smallest unit of language that carries information about meaning or function (compare to phoneme)
- Allomorphs: variant form of a morpheme. E.g., plural morpheme has the allomorphs /-ez/, /-z/, and /-s/ (compare to allophones)

**Words consist of one or more morphemes**

- Simple words: one morpheme
- Complex words: two or more morphemes
- **Bound and Free Morphemes**
  - Bound: cannot stand on their own (e.g., "-er")
  - Free: could stand on their own (e.g., "boy")

**An Example**

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<td>Gentle-man-ly</td>
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**Methods of Word Formation**

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A note on Folk Etymology (FE)

- FE is a process in which someone makes an incorrect guess about a word’s origin
- FE is often based on plausible cognates and narrative
- FE common in non-academic contexts
- Famous examples: “Sirloin” and “tip”
- Reminder: much etymology is speculative

Derivation (use of affixes; e.g., “helper” morphemes) (CEEL 128)

- Prefixes: e.g., ex-, un-, re-, trans-, de-, post-, mini-, e-
- Suffixes: e.g., -able, -ment, -dom, -nik, -wise, -ee, -holic
- Don’t confuse derivation with inflection. (Inflection doesn’t create a new word but rather shows a grammatical subclass of the root)

Compounding: combining existing English words (CEEL 129)

- e.g., mailbox, lipstick, ballpoint pen, hatchback car, daycare center
- In general, the last term in a compound word dominates for purposes of inflection (the “head” morpheme) (exceptions include “mother-in-law,” “attorney general,” etc.)
- Compounds formed from Greek and Latin elements (particularly used for inventions)

Compounding with Greek and Latin Roots

- e.g., Greek σκοπος (watcher) yields stethoscope, telescope; τηλε (far) yields telegraph, telephone, television
- Some purists objected to words that combined the Greek and Latin. e.g., automobile

Loan words

- Words taken from other languages (CEEL 126-127)
- Some modern examples include chauffeur, garage (French); patio, rodeo (Spanish); enchilada, jalapeno (North American Spanish); vodka, perestroika (Russian); robot (Czech); soy, samurai (Japanese); pajamas (Indian)
Some Loan Word Issues

- At what point do loan words fall under prevailing phonological rules and cease to be pronounced as foreign words?
- Or begin to be inflected like native words?
- The generous use of loan words is a key characteristic of English from its earliest history.

Clipping

- shortening a longer word
- e.g., bus, phone, email, fax
- Compare to phonological ellipsis

Coinages or Neologisms

- Invented words: e.g., mazola (maize oil), novocain (new cocaine)
- Acronyms: e.g., scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), radar (radio detecting and ranging)
- Reverse acronyms (start with word and invent phrase that results in that word)

Initialisms (CEEL 120)

- Usually based on existing words
- e.g., TV, PJs, USA

Blends (or portmanteaus) (CEEL 130-31)

- two words telescoped into one
- e.g., electrocute [electric + execution], chortle [chuckle + snort], chunnel [channel + tunnel], brunch, smog, motel
Commonization / Eponyms (Words from Proper Names): (CEEL 154-55)
- From brand names: e.g., kleenex, xerox, hoover, coke
- From place names: e.g., tabasco, limousine, canter, charleston
- From specific names: e.g., sandwich, shrapnel, quisling, boycott, crapper, platonic
- From general names: John (e.g., john for toilet), Jack (e.g., lumberjack, jack-of-all-trades, jackass), Tom (e.g., tomcat, tomboy, tomfool)
- When do eponyms cease to be capitalized?

Backformations (CEEL 120)
- make new word by omitting from a longer word what is incorrectly thought to be an affix or other morpheme
- e.g., burglar > burgle, groveling > grovel, editor > edit

Echoic (Onomatopoeia)
- e.g., bang, burp, bobwhite, zipper

Words & Meaning
- Denotation/Connotation
- Compare to euphemism/dysphemism
- Synonyms: words that have the same denotation
- Antonyms: words with opposite denotation
- Homophony: words sound alike but have two different meanings
- Polysemy: words have two or more related meanings
- "Janus words": identical word but with opposite meaning (e.g., cleave)
Old Words Made New

- Semantic shifts: change in word’s meaning
  - e.g., broadcast, kick off, album, dial (vb)
- Functional shifts (or conversions): change in word’s part of speech
  - For instance, nouns as verbs (e.g., contact, impact); transitive to intransitive verbs (e.g., commit, transform); verbs as nouns (e.g., quote)
  - usually polysemous meanings

Words Shifts

- Extension or Generalization: word’s meaning broadens
  - e.g., decimate, great, nice, lovely, dilapidate
- Contraction or Narrowing: word’s meaning contracts
  - e.g., starve, nickel, doctor

Change in Connotation (or “association”)

- Pejoration: word’s association declines
  - e.g., knave (from OE chafa (boy))
- Amelioration: word’s association improves
  - e.g., knight (from servant to near nobility)
- See examples in exercise