

# 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 /-eɪz/, /-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

One	Two	Three	Four
And			
Boy	Boy-s		
Hunt	Hunt-er	Hunt-er-s	
Hospital	Hospital-ize	Hospital-iz-ation	Hospital-iz-ation-s
Gentle	Gentle-man	Gentle-man-ly	Gentle-man-li-ness

## Methods of Word Formation

## 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*, *jalapeño* (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?

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As a trademark, the word Xerox should always be used as an adjective, followed by a noun, and it is never used as a verb. If Xerox, however, is used as a verb, we believe you.  
Because Xerox continues to get more things, actually making for itself and its business copiers.

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## 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 has two or more related meanings
- "Janus words": identical word but with opposite meaning (e.g., *cleave*)

