

The Morphemization in English

Jiang Yi

China West Normal University,

Nanchong, Sichuan, China

E-mail: 2715956517@qq.com

Published: 15 June 2019

Copyright © Yi.

Abstract

Language is ever changing. One aspect of such a change reflects on the change of vocabulary of a language. In English, for example, we find new words almost in everyday life, especially in the modern age of Internet and social life. However, the formation of new words in our language is not at random. Rather they are created with rules. Morphology is the subfield of linguistics that studies the internal structure of words and interrelationships among words. So in order to study the formation of new words, we would better study morphemes first. As the smallest functional units in the composition of words, morphemes are changing over time. The process of creating a new morpheme is called morphemization, which is a common linguistic phenomenon going on in natural languages. This paper will describe some thoughts on morphemization, including the phenomenon of morphemization, the rules of creating a new morpheme, the characteristics of new morphemes, the sources of new morphemes and so on. Through these thoughts on morphemization, I have a better understanding of our extensive and magical language.

Keywords: Morphemization; new morphemes; rules; characteristics; sources

1. The Introduction of Morphemization.

In the book of *Linguistics: An Advanced Course Book*, Hu Zhuanglin and Jiang Wangqi(2015) reported that morphemization is the process of creating a new morpheme, Using a word or part of a word. This is a common linguistic phenomenon going on in natural languages, unfortunately largely neglected. I found that there was no mention of morphemization in many books of linguistics or morphology, especially the books published before 2000. So far this term is hardly found in the mainstream literature on morphology and word-formation in relation to Indo-European languages. However, the process has never ceased to function (Hu Zhuanglin& Jiang Wangqi,2015). Although Hu Zhuanglin and Jiang Wangqi did not mention the word morphemization in previous linguistic tutorials, they introduced the phenomenon of morphemization separately and in detail in the second edition of the *Advanced Course Book of Linguistics* (second Edition). More and more attention has been paid to the affection of morphemization on language. Therefore, the study of morphemization is very important to the understanding of word-formation and to the understanding of our increasingly rich language.

To study morphemisation, it's necessary to consider the concept of morpheme at first. According to Bauer (1983: 14), "a morpheme may be defined as the minimal unit of grammatical analysis". Therefore, a morpheme must have the following two properties: 1) it's the minimal meaningful unit of a language; 2) it's an agent in word formation process. These two properties are perfectly synthesized in Li Fuyin and Koenraad Kuiper's definition that "the term morpheme is used to refer to the smallest, indivisible units of semantic content or grammatical function which words are made up of"(Li and Kuiper,2003:23).

As we know, words play an important role in the human ability to use language creatively. A human vocabulary is a dynamic system, as we can add a word at will and use a finite number of words to deal with potentially infinite number of situations we encounter in the world. As under the influence of mythology, history, borrowings and daily social life, new morphemes appear constantly. And new morphemes can produce many different new words. Take -gate for example, we know a gate is a door in a fence or wall that people can go through to enter or leave a place. Originally, -gate is part of the American place name Watergate in Washington, D.C, related to a political scandal leading to the resignation of American President Nixon. Later, the form -gate was used to derive new words referring to any similar political scandal, like Koreagate, Irangate, Intelligence-gate and so on. The process of -gate developing as a word-forming element is morphemization, for -gate is no longer regarded as a word relating to the freestanding root morpheme gate but a new morpheme which can't stand alone and needs to be affixed to the end of a stem or base to form words. More examples can illustrate this phenomenon. -psych comes from the Greek word psyche, meaning "breath, life, soul." Then the morpheme created many new words. Psychology is the science of mind and behavior, and a psychologist treats or studies the mental problems of individuals and groups. Psychiatry is a branch of medicine that deals with mental and emotional disorders, and a psychiatrist (like any other doctor) may prescribe drugs to treat them.

However, the formation of new words in our language is not at random. Rather they are created with rules. Next, the paper will give a detailed introduction to the rules, characteristics and origins of new morphemes.

2. The Rules and Characteristics of New Morphemes.

Language is systematic and generative. Morphologically, one essential reason is that words are generative and the internal composition of words and the composition between words are not arbitrary but follow certain rules. So there are some rules and characteristics of creating new morphemes.

2.1 The Rules of Creating New Morphemes.

The appearance of new morpheme seems complicated and different in form, but to sum up, new morphemes are generally created in two ways:

The first rule of creating new morphemes is to use an existing word. Most these new morphemes come from mono-morphemic words. These morphemes are realized by one morph like bird, tree, green, sad, want, etc. These morphemes coincide with words as they can stand by themselves and function freely in a sentence. For example, in English we have a simple noun scope, meaning “to look at.” Then -scope along with some other words it sometimes stands for: telescope, microscope, periscope, and so on. And have you ever used a stereoscope, a device your great-grandparents probably enjoyed, which lets you look through a viewer at two slightly different photographs of the same thing, one with each eye, to enjoy the illusion that you’re seeing it in three dimensions. Another example, the English word long shows up in many compound terms such as long-suffering and long-winded.

The second rule of creating new morphemes is using a segment of a word (generally a monosyllabic word). Take geo- for instance, the morpheme comes from the Greek word for “earth.” Geography is the science that deals with features of the Earth’s surface. Geologists study rocks and soil to learn about the Earth’s history and resources. Geometry was originally about measuring portions of the Earth’s surface, probably originally in order to determine where the boundaries of Egyptians’ farms lay after the annual flooding by the Nile River. Then there are other examples like -gate from (Watergate), -scape from (landscape), and -bot from (robot).

2.2 The Characteristics of New Morphemes.

A newly morphomized form should have the characteristics of morphemes.

Firstly, since it is a morpheme, the newly form should be productive, which can be used to create new words with stems or bases. For instance, the morpheme -logy, meaning “the study of”, comes from biology in physiology, methodology, ideology, cardiology, etc. Another example is the morpheme grad-, which comes from the Latin noun gradus, meaning “step” or “degree”. The morpheme has given us many words such as gradation, degrade, gradient, retrograde and so forth.

Secondly, the form should have no part of speech even though the original form was a word. Take -speak and up- for example, the original word speak is a verb and up a preposition. But in the following words: Clintonspeak, computerspeak, cyberspeak, the morphomized form -speak functions as noun suffix. And for these words: upcoming, uptown, uptake, the form up- functions as noun prefix.

The same is true of the new morphemes info- from information and e-from electronic, both functioning as formative with no relation to the original part of speech.

Thirdly, semantically new morphemes may keep the meanings of their parent words. For example, hyper means “above or beyond,” so hyper- often means the same things as super-. Hyperinflation is inflation that is growing at a very high rate. Hyperlink is a link from a hypertext file to another location or file. Hypertension is a common disorder in which blood pressure remains abnormally high. More examples are like e- as in e-book, e-commerce, e-readingroom, and mono- as in monoxide, monogamy, monologue, monopolize and so on. More often than not, the new morphemes may acquire new meanings as -gate in prisoner-gate and zipper-gate, and -in as in teach-in and wed-in. In the former case, -gate, which is not politically oriented, means “infamous event,” and in the latter, -in has no connotation of “protecting” but simply “a mass gathering.” Nevertheless, their identity as affixes or combining forms is still arguable, yet there seems to be no disagreement that these forms have morphemic status-resultant of morphemization.

3. The sources of New Morphemes.

In the era of globalization and information, language is constantly developed and enriched. In the process of language enrichment and development, vocabulary is the most sensitive and active factor. Therefore, morphemization is becoming more and more obvious, which has aroused the interest and attention of us language learners. The source of the new morpheme is diversified. The sources of morphemization are analyzed in detail with a large number of English morphemes as examples. There are three main sources for the production of new morphemes.

3.1 New Morphemes from Mythology and History.

The morphemized forms may be produced through mythology or history. Besides, many morphemes may acquire new meanings by the process of mythology or history as -gate exemplified above.

Take olymp- for instance, There is a mythology relating to the morpheme. The Greek gods lived high atop Mt.Olympus, which allowed them to watch what went on in the human realm below and intervene as they saw fit. They insisted on being properly worshiped by humans, but otherwise tended to threaten the affairs of these weak and short-lived creatures almost like a sport. So Olympian describes someone who seems “lofty” and “above it all,” as if surveying a scene in which other people appear the size of ants. The Olympic Games were first celebrated in the 8th century B.C., at the religious site called Olympia (far from Mt. Olympus), and Olympian today actually most often refers to Olympic athletes. In addition, circu- comes from the Latin word circus, meaning “circle.” So a circus is traditionally held under a round tent. A circuit can be a tour around an area or territory, or the complete path of an electric current. The circumnavigate means “to navigate around” -- often around the world.

3.2 New Morphemes from Borrowing.

One of the main reasons why languages change is that they come into contact with other languages, which act upon and influence each other in a wide range of ways. And the borrowing of words is one of the outcomes (Schendl: 2003, 55). Trask (2000: 309) points out that one consequence

of large-scale lexical borrowing is that a language can acquire new phonemes and new morphological patterns as a result of borrowings.

English never prevents words from other languages from being injected into English. Many morphemes are from French, Latin, Greek, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, Hindi or other languages. These new morphemes produced by Borrowings are constantly pouring into English vocabulary, which makes English vocabulary stronger and stronger.

For instance, super-, a Latin prefix meaning “over, higher, more than,” has become one of the most familiar prefixes in English, one of those prefixes that we use to create new words all the time: supermodel, superpowerful, superjock, supersize, supersweet -- the list goes on and on. Another example micro-, from the Greek mikros, meaning “small,” is a popular English morpheme. A microscope lets the eye see microscopic objects, and libraries store the pages of old newspapers on microfilm at 1/400th of their original size. And we continue to attach micro-to lots of familiar words. Most of us could figure out the meaning of microbus and microquake without ever having heard them before. Scientists often use micro- to mean “millionth”, thus, a microsecond is a millionth of a second, and a micrometer is a millionth of a meter.

Of course, modern English is still constantly receiving the injection of "borrowings". The highly informationalized modern society and frequent international contact make foreign words greatly enriched English vocabulary. They have been integrated into English language and are deeply rooted.

3.3 New Morphemes from Modern Social Life.

The language is a living language, a reflection of social life and a form of expression. It is constantly changing with the changes of society. Vocabulary is the most active and sensitive factor in language, and the changes and development of society will inevitably lead to its development. With the emergence of new things, new ideas and new problems, a large number of new words come into being. Therefore, morphemization is ubiquitous in social life and never cease to function.

In recent years, many new words are created by adding to the suffix -ization. For example, the dollarization refers to a worldwide currency substitution phenomenon in which the dollar crosses national boundaries and replaces other countries' currencies as the medium of transaction, unit of account and storage of value in the countries concerned. There are other words like desertification (natural disasters that change from vegetable-covered land to barren lands), globalization (A process in which advances in technology, especially the development of international trade, brings countries around the world into close contact) and so forth. -land is also a popular suffix, Such as adland (Advertising circles) and cyberland (Internet world). Many prefixes are also widely used, such as the prefix cyber-, which is intended to be "computer," now refers to things related to the Internet. Many of new words such as cybercafe, cybercrime, cyberforensics, cyberfraud, cyberporn are created.

4. Conclusion

Every living language is in a continuous state of variation across time, and language change occurs at all levels of linguistic systems, including sounds, word structure, sentence structure, etc. As the smallest units of a language, morphemes are not stable. Thus the morphological systems of a language are dynamic. In English, there exists a type of morphological change called "morphemisation". As the English language develops, more and more new morphemes have emerged through morphemisation. Moreover, some multi-morphemic words show a tendency to function as affixes and become productive sources of new words. As a type of linguistic change, morphemisation becomes more and more popular in English. Hence it's a linguistic phenomenon that should not be ignored. In this course paper, I present some thoughts on morphemization in English from several aspects, including the phenomenon of morphemization, the rules of creating a new morpheme, the characteristics of new morphemes and sources of new morphemes and so on.

The process of morphemization in language is not at random. Rather the formation of new morphemes is created with rules. New morphemes are generally created in two ways, by using an existing word or using a segment of a word. Examples are offered as *speak*, *bound*, *some*, *proof*, *-ition*, *mini-*, *sur-*, etc., all of which can combine with a lot of other words to coin new words. Besides, through the process of morphemization, the newly morphomized form should have characteristics of morphemes. It should be productive; the form should have no part of speech; and new morphemes may keep the meanings of their parent words. Take *speak* for example. This word has always been considered to be a verb that always stands alone. However, it now can be used as a bound morpheme to combine with nouns to form new words. Nouns formed in this way refer to the language in which a particular subject is discussed or to the way that someone characteristically speaks. The following are some examples: *Clinton-speak*, *bureau-speak*, *cyber-speak*, *computer-speak*, *Woolf-speak*, *teacher-speak*, *lawyer-speak*, *artspeak*. In those words, *speak* is no longer a free morpheme. Instead, it functions like a suffix and has become a productive source of new words.

The production of new morphemes comes from many sources. One of the main sources is that they come into contact with other languages, which act upon and influence each other in a wide range of ways. And the borrowing of words is one of the outcomes (Schendl: 2003, 55). Examples are *astro-*, *electro-*, *-phile*, *-phobe* and so on. These combining forms are actually extracted morphemes from words of Greek and Latin origins, which are used as building blocks for constructing words. English has created technical and scientific terms with combining forms extracted from Greek and Latin on a massive scale. In addition, the history and social life also influence the formation of new morphemes. For example, *techno-* originally means "art, craft and skill". For the continuous updating and development of science and technology, the form mostly shows up in dozens of words about technology, such as *techno-thriller*, *techno-pop*, *techno-globalism*, *techno-economic* and so on.

Through these thoughts on morphemization, I have a better understanding of the formation of English words and the production of new words. It also lays the foundation for my future study of English language.

References

- [1] P.H. Matthews; Rongge Wang. (2000 August). *Morphology*. Beijing : Foreign language teaching research press.
- [2] Mary Wood Cornog. (2010). *Merriam-Webster's Vocabulary Builder*. Merriam-Wabster, Incorporated Springfield, Massachusetts.
- [3] 胡壮麟;姜望琪主编. (2015 July). *语言学高级教程* (第二版.北京: 北京大学出版社, (21世纪英语专业系列教材) .
- [4] Andrew Radford 等著; 周流溪导读. (2000). *语言学教程*. 北京: 外语教学与研究出版社.
- [5] 苏立昌编著. (2009 October). *英语语言学导读*. 天津: 南开大学出版社,
- [6] 董晓敏. (2003). 外来词音节语素化的文化语言阐释. *语文研究*, (1): 30-32.
- [7] 冯波. (2007). 汉英语素化的对比研究. 华中师范大学.
- [8] 石小红, 石晶. (2010). 浅析英语新词的来源. *佳木斯大学社会科学学报*, 28(01): 140-141.