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ENG 235: *Morphology and Syntax of English* — Fall 2009: TUE & FRI 12.00-13.30  
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## EXERCISES 1: MORPHOLOGY I

1. Consult a large dictionary, such as *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* or *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, that gives the date when each word was first recorded. Find five words that were first used in the twentieth century. How many of them have meanings that would have been guessable by an adult English speaker on first encounter, and how many do not? Cite your source(s).

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

Source(s):

[The answers to this exercise vary widely, of course, depending on which words you chose; points will be reduced if the words are all of the same type, such as drawn from modern technology (*email, fax, etc.*) or science (*atom* and the like) — most points will be given if all five words come from different domains of life and vocabulary usage.]

2. Can you think of a reason why *-en* may attach to some adjectives but not to others?

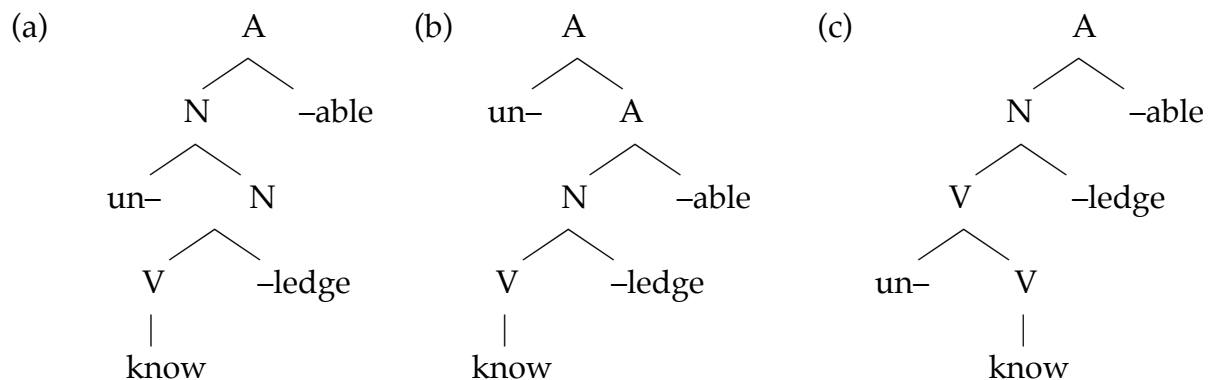
|                 |                 |                   |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| <i>blacken</i>  | <i>broaden</i>  | <i>stiffen</i>    | <i>ripen</i>    |
| <i>deafen</i>   | <i>tighten</i>  | <i>soften</i>     | <i>loosen</i>   |
| * <i>thinen</i> | * <i>longen</i> | * <i>slimen</i>   | * <i>highen</i> |
| * <i>nearen</i> | * <i>slowen</i> | * <i>narrowen</i> | * <i>noblen</i> |

The derivational suffix *-en* creates a verb out of a certain class of adjectives, namely those that (i) are monosyllabic and (ii) end in a stop (here: /d, t, k, p/) or fricative (here: /f, s/). It is thus phonologically conditioned.

Another possible answer (but one that is neither really good nor sufficient) would be that *-en*-affixation is semantically blocked by an existing verb, such as *lengthen* instead of \**-longen*, or an existing phrasal verb, such as *slow down* instead of \**slowen*. While appealing, this answer can't account for the impossibility of \**noblen*, and it misses a clear phonologically driven explanation that seems to be more general.

Note that an answer like "This affix cannot be attached to some adjectives because the result is ungrammatical" or along those lines, of which I've seen more than I could wish for, is nonsensical — or rather, tautological: It is *not* an explanation at all, but simply a redescription of the task! (I hope those of you who wrote this can see that now.)

3. Which is the proper derivation of *unknowledgeable*? Explain.



The right answer is (b) because the first new lexeme created is *knowledge* (an existing word in the English language) and the second, *knowledgeable* (also an existing word). And, of course, the meaning of *unknowledgeable* is 'not knowledgeable'. This prefix *-un* is thus not the reversative one but the one meaning 'not'.

In (a), the first new lexeme is also *knowledge*, but prefixing *un-* at this stage leads to *unknowledge* (which doesn't really exist but could mean 'reversal of knowledge' or even perhaps 'not knowledge'). The adjective should then mean something like the 'ability of having unknowledge' — not good and clearly not what *unknowledgeable* means!

As for (c), the first new lexeme is *unknow*, which again doesn't really exist but could denote the reversal of knowing. *Unknowledge* would then be the noun of that verb and the adjective *unknowledgeable* also denoting the 'ability of having unknowledge'...

## 4. Consider the following words:

|                    |                      |                   |                      |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| <i>disbelief</i>   | <i>dishonorable</i>  | <i>dislike</i>    | <i>discharge</i>     |
| <i>discomfort</i>  | <i>dispassionate</i> | <i>disconnect</i> | <i>disobey</i>       |
| <i>disharmony</i>  | <i>dismissive</i>    | <i>disclose</i>   | <i>distrust</i>      |
| <i>disorder</i>    | <i>disgraceful</i>   | <i>disinfect</i>  | <i>dishonest</i>     |
| <i>displeasure</i> | <i>disorderly</i>    | <i>disown</i>     | <i>discontinuous</i> |

- (a) What kinds of bases does the prefix *dis-* attach to? Give an example of each.

**The prefix *dis-* attaches to bases of category noun (*belief*), verb (*own*), and adjective (*honorable*). (Alternative answer: It attaches to simple/roots and complex bases/stems.)**

- (b) What kinds of roots does the prefix *dis-* attach to? Explain.

**The prefix *dis-* attaches to roots of category noun and verb only. All adjectives are derived bases, such as *passionate* (whose root is a noun) or *continuous* (verb). (NB: For this to work, *honest* must be derived, such as bound root *hon-* plus *-est*.)**

- (c) Is *dis-* a category-maintaining or category-changing prefix?

***Dis-* is a category-maintaining prefix, since it never changes the category, but as a derivational affix, it changes the meaning of the word, of course — it creates a new lexeme.**

- (d) What are the two meanings of the prefix *dis-*? Name and give an example from the list above of each of the two meanings.

**The meaning is ‘negative’ (*disbelief*) or ‘reversal’ (*disinfect*).**

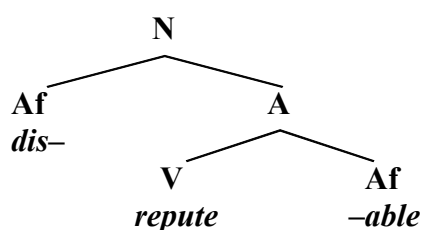
- (e) In addition to derivation, what process of word formation is involved in the formation of the following words?

|                |                 |                   |                  |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|
| <i>disarm</i>  | <i>distrust</i> | <i>dismember</i>  | <i>disfigure</i> |
| <i>disband</i> | <i>discolor</i> | <i>discourage</i> | <i>disbar</i>    |

**These words also show conversion (or zero derivation), presumably from N to V. Note that conversion takes place before attaching the prefix *dis-*!**

- (f) Draw a tree diagram showing the derivation of the word *disreputable*.

**The correct tree diagram is the one below. Note that the root is the verb *repute* — not the noun, since *-able* attaches to verbs and creates adjectives, but not to nouns.**



NB: It is not formed by attaching *-able* to *disrepute*, since the meaning of *disreputable* is “Lacking respectability, as in character, behavior, or appearance” (*American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn., 2000, from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/disreputable>) — that is, it clearly is the adjective denoting ‘not [*dis-*, outer affix] capable[*-able*, inner] of being reputed [root]’.

## 5. Consider the following words:

|                   |                   |                      |                    |
|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| <i>illegal</i>    | <i>ineligible</i> | <i>inactive</i>      | <i>imbibe</i>      |
| <i>irrelevant</i> | <i>intolerant</i> | <i>indeterminate</i> | <i>immature</i>    |
| <i>impossible</i> | <i>insecure</i>   | <i>illogical</i>     | <i>irregular</i>   |
| <i>immoral</i>    | <i>infamous</i>   | <i>imbalance</i>     | <i>injudicious</i> |
| <i>impatient</i>  | <i>injury</i>     | <i>ingrate</i>       | <i>incongruous</i> |

(a) Determine the allomorphs of this derivational prefix.

The allomorphs of this derivational prefix are *il-*, *im-*, *in-*, and *ir-*.

(b) Determine the conditioning factors for each of the allomorphs.

The allomorph *il-* appears when the base begins with /l/ (better: with a lateral liquid), the allomorph *ir-* appears when the base begins with /r/ (better: with a rhotic liquid), the allomorph *im-* appears when the base begins with /m, b, p/ (better: with a bilabial); allomorphy is conditioned by regressive (or anticipatory) assimilation of manner of articulation: The allomorph *in-* appears in all other cases.

(c) Decide on the underlying (or “elsewhere”) form of this morpheme from which the other allomorphs are derived. Justify the base form.

The underlying form of this morpheme is *in-*, since it is the elsewhere form and as such the least restricted and at the same time most productive one. The allomorphic *in-* prefixation rule can be formulated as follows:

$$\begin{array}{l} in- \rightarrow im- / \_\_\_ [bilabial] \\ \quad \quad \quad il- / \_\_\_ [lateral] \\ \quad \quad \quad ir- / \_\_\_ [rhotic] \end{array}$$

(d) State the meaning of the morpheme.

The meaning of this morpheme is ‘negative, not’. In this sense, it negates the meaning of the base it attaches to as a prefix — and its form depends on the phonological environment, where the conditioning factor is the base-initial sound (see answer to (b)).

(e) Why are the forms *ignoble* and *ignominious*, which presumably contain the same prefix, a problem? Try to account for this problem. (Hint: Look up the etymologies of these words.)

At first glance, one may be led to the hypothesis that there is an additional allomorph, *ig-*. The problem would be that this putative *ig-* attaches to bases starting with a nasal and as such should be realized as the allomorph *in-* (see (b) above). Taking into account the etymology of *ignoble* (‘*in-* plus *noble*’, but originally derived from *gnobilis*) and *ignominious* (‘*in-* plus *nomen*’, originally from *gnoscere*), the ‘g’ is not pronounced and perhaps something like progressive assimilation applies (the ‘n’ of *in-* plus the initial sound of the base); this means that there is not another putative allomorph *i-* either.