
AFRREV LALIGENS

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Vol. 1 (2) April-July, 2012:185-196

ISSN: 2225-8604(Print)

ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)

**Morphological Devices Shaping the Inquiry into the
Meaning of Life**

Chukwu, Ephraim, Ph.D.

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: ephraimchukwu@yahoo.com

Umera-Okeke, Nneka P., Ph.D.

Department of English Language and Literature
Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe
P. M. B. 1734, Onitsha
Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: nne.supreme@yahoo.com

Abstract

The media of language – spoken and written, observe basic principles of psychological conception of ideas and the subsequent encapsulation of these ideas in the physiological assemblage of meaningful sounds – consonants and vowels – ultimately manifesting in words. These words – simple described as free morphemes or complex described as combination of free

morphemes or of free and bound morphemes called affixes – are imbued with meaning. Without recourse to these language elements woven together to create larger elements – sentence, clause, phrase, inquiring into the meaning of life can be affected. This paper, therefore, delineates the devices underlining meaning – enquiry resulting in successful inquiry into the meaning of life. The paper also strives to appraise language use of the impossibility of creating literary or non literary texts (discourses) without knowledge of word formation and understanding the internal structures of words.

Introduction

Etymologically, morphology is a Greek derivation that resulted from the combination of words: “morph- means shape, form”, (Aronoff & Fudeman 1). According to these linguists, “morphology is the study of the form or forms. In biology, morphology refers to the study of the form or structure of organisms, and in Geology it refers to the study of configuration and evolution of land forms. In linguistics “morphology refers... to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed (1& 2). The constituents of words giving their internal structures, as well as their formation are technically called “morphemes.” “Morphemes are minimal meaningful units in the grammatical system of a language” (Jindal 70) or “the smallest linguistic pieces with a grammatical function” (Aronoff & Fudeman 2). The past tense marker –ed pronounced as [t] after voiceless sounds except [t] – map +ed = [t], look + ed = [t]; as [d] after voiced sounds, except [d] - sail +ed = [d], fame + ed =[d]; as [ɪd, əd] after [t] and [d] as in land + ed = [ɪd, əd], fend + ed = [ɪd, əd]. The ‘s’ plural marker pronounced as the hissing sound [s] after voiceless sounds, as [z] or buzzing sounds after voiced sounds, as [ɪz] after such hushing sounds as affricates [tʃ, dʒ], fricatives [s, z, ʃ, ʒ] – tape + s = [s], snake + s + [s]; dog + s = [z], fowl + s = [z]; church + es = [ɪz], judge + es = [ɪz]; and the various forms of negative marker ‘not’ pronounced differently – dis-, mal-, mis-, un-, il-, ir-, in-, im- are variants of “ed, s, and not.” They are technically called allomorphs or variants morphs of these morphemes. These variants perform both syntactic and semantic functions in the use of language. The semantic functions are performed by lexical or derivational morphology, while the syntactic functions are performed by inflectional morphology. The former changes the word class of a word it is added to; the latter does not do this, rather it shows the tense, the number, the mood, the case and the comparison of expressions.

Inquiry into the meaning of life must take cognizance of these linguistic forms otherwise it will be mere wild goose chase.

Morphological Devices Syntagmatically Stringed to Aid Inquiry into the Meaning of Life

The devices linearly arranged to aid inquiry into the meaning of life fall into two major divisions called free morphemes and bound morphemes. Chukwu explains free morpheme as equated to simple words, as elements that can stand unattended and be meaningful – boy, chair, true, book, etc are instances. Bound morphemes, he explains, cannot stand alone; rather it is attached to the free morphemes to draw out their meanings – ish, -ly, un-, dis-, etc (15) are examples.

Free morphemes are subdivided into lexical and functional morphemes. Free lexical morphemes “ is that set of ordinary nouns, adjectives and verbs which we think of as the words which carry the ‘content’ of message we convey ... and some examples are: boy, man, house, tiger, sad, long, yellow, sincere, open, look, follow, break” (Yule 76). Free functional morphemes consist “largely of the functional words in the language such as conjunctions, prepositions, articles and pronouns [such as] and, but, when, because, on, near, above, in, the, that, it”, Yule elucidates (76).

The category described as bound consists of two divisions: derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. The derivational morphemes are such affixes added to simple words or free morphemes to create new words of different word classes. Inflectional morphemes are also added to free morphemes, but they do not like the derivational morphemes change the word classes of the words they are attached. Inflectional morphemes ‘indicate aspects of the grammatical function of words ... [by showing] if a word is plural or singular, if it is past tense or not, and if it is a comparative or possessive form” (Yule 77). Examples

Derivations

Base form		derived form
Good	+	ness
True	+	-ly
Boy	+	-ish
Man	+	-ly

Inflections

English inflectional morphemes are eight according to Yulle (77):

‘s – possessive (singular)

s’ – possessive (plural)

Four verbs attached to verbs:

‘s’ attached to 3rd person singular (He/she/it)

-‘ing’ – present participle

‘-ed’ – past tense

‘-en’ – past participle

Two for comparison

‘-er’ for comparative

‘-est’ for superlative

These derivational and inflectional morphemes are the devices mapped on the lexical or free, or base, or root morphemes to create the forms of the words required. These words required are woven with the functional free morphemes to facilitate inquiry into the meaning of life.

Aspects of the Devices

Language study involves four planes or levels: phonetics/phonology, syntax, morphology and semantics. Phonetics and phonology studies sounds of language, syntax studies rules for arranging words in sentences, morphology studies rules of word formation and the internal structures of words and semantics studies the meanings of words and sentences (lexical semantics and sentential semantics). Every morphological device is meaning imbued. To inquire into the meaning of life, morphological devices – lexical free morphemes, functional free morphemes, and bound morphemes must be stringed linearly to encode and project intended meanings.

These devices are subsumed under two morphological scopes according to McCarthy in *Linguistics Encyclopaedis* (1991). These are inflection and word formation. The latter is subdivided into derivation and compounding/composition. The devices facilitating inquiry into the meaning of life along with their syntactic and semantic possibilities include these divisions together with many more explained below.

Inflection

This linguistic device for expanding words signals “grammatical relationships, such as plural, past tense and possession’ (Crystal 233, as well as present tense, comparison of adjective and adverb cases of nouns and pronouns. These functional roles do not change the grammatical categories of the root or word inflection is attached; rather the word changes form to reflect number, tense, comparison and case

Examples:

Number/Tense

Boy/boys talk – talks – talked – talked – talking

Car/cars write – writes –wrote –written-writing

Comparison

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
Good	better	best
Bad	worse	worst
Loud	loud + er	loud + est
Tall	tall + er	tall +est
Beautiful	more beautiful	most beautiful
Careful	more careful	most careful

Case of Pronouns

Subjective		Objective		Possessive		Possessive	
1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	1st	2nd
I	We	me	us	my	our	mine	ours
You	You	You	you	your	your	yours	yours
He/she/it	they	him/her/it	their	his/her/its	their	his/her/its	theirs

Source: Chukwu (p. 55).

Derivation

The creation of new English words from other words is called derivation. This process of word creation “is accomplished by means of a large number of small ‘bits’ of the English language ... called affixes” (Yule 69). Affixes – consisting of prefixes and suffixes include such morphemes as dis-, un-, mis-, il-, mal-, ir-, in- which signify ‘not’ and some others like ness, less, ful, ish,

etc which are attached to words like dis + loyal, un + fortunate, mis + normer, il + legal, mal + function, ir + relevant, in + ordinate, mad + ness, care + less, mind + ful, fool + ish, etc. Derivation is therefore a device used in English to create lexical words. It “generally results in a change in lexical meaning or lexical category of a particular word” (Aronoff & Fudeman 42).

Compounding

This is the coining of two roots or lexical free morphemes or simple word which can function independently to form one word. This word resulting from this combination “functions as single lexical unit, ... is pronounced as a single unit with one primary stress and is used grammatically as a single unit with the features of the word class to which the compound belongs” (Yadugiri 156). For example, the combination of:

Table + clothe = n + n = n (tablecloth)

Lawn + tennis = n + n = n (lawntennis)

Over + take = preposition + v = v (overtake)

Fund + raising = n + v = adj. (fundraising)

gives nouns, verb and adjective whose positional possibilities must reflect these parts of speech. Again, “compounds possess units of meanings. The meanings of the elements consisting of compounds are not separately determined ... the elements or free morphemes forming compounds combine to produce one semantic suggestion” (Chukwu 25).

Initialisms: Alphabetisms and Acronyms

Initialism “is the use of the initial letters of words (HIV, YMCA), or sometimes of syllables (TB, TV, PJS ‘pajamas), as words” (Algeo 258). He further gives the reason for this aspect of clipping: Usually the motive for this clipping is either brevity or catchiness” Two types of initialisms are distinguished: alphabetism and acronyms. Alphabetisms also called abbreviations are “formed from the initial letters in a phrase or name and are read or pronounced letter by letter, e.g., B.A, M.Sc., AD” (Jindal 93). Acronyms, Jindal explains, are “formed from the first letter of each word and are normally pronounced as a word, e.g., LASER, RADAR, AWOL, etc. This device therefore is adopted to represent complex phrase that would

otherwise have created verbosity if written in full. In addition to brevity and catchiness, initialisms present a creative use of language.

Blending/Blends

This device also introduces the creative use of language to capture different ideas/concepts being referred to together. Blends are formed by taking the “initial and final segments of two or more words” (Chukwu 33). Some instances of blends as supplied by Algeo (262) and Fromkin et al (98) are:

Smog	from	smoke and fog
Motel	„	motor and hotel
Urinalysis	„	urine and analysis
Brunch	„	breakfast and lunch
Informercial	„	information and commercial

Backformation

This is a “reduction process” (Yule 67). It “is the process of removing a suffix from the end of a complex word” (Chukwu 35). According to Yule, “a word of one type (usually noun) is reduced to form another word of a different type (usually a verb).” Verbs are therefore derived from certain nouns when the suffixes of such nouns are deleted. Yule gives examples of this device demonstrating creative use of language to display inquiry into the meaning of life.

Noun words	Deleted suffixes	New Words
Television	-ion	televise
Donation	-ion	donate
Option	-ion	opt
Liaison	-on	liaise
Worker	-er	work
Editor	-or	edit
Conductor	-or	conduct
Burglar	-ar	burgle
Peddlers	-ers	peddle

Clipping

Clipping is a process of deleting or “subtracting one or more syllables from a word. This shortening sometimes occurs at the beginning of a word, at the

end of a word or at both ends of a word”, (Jindal 93). Chukwu gives instances of clipping:

- At the beginning of Words

Word clipped	After clipping
Telephone	phone
Aeroplane	plane

- At the end of words

Word clipped	After clipping
Laboratory	lab
Facsimile	fax
Photograph	photo
Professor	prof
Advertisement	ad

- At both ends of words

Word clipped	After clipping
Influenza	flu
Refrigerator	fridge
Azikiwe	Zik

Reduplication

This is a morphological process that repeats or copies all or part of a word to produce a new one, e.g., wishy-washy, teensy-weensy, hurly-burly (Fromkin et al 592). Reduplication can involve initial consonant difference, medial vowel contrast and repetition of both elements:

Initial consonant	walkie – talkie, higgledy-piggledy, hanky – panky, ragtag, hoity-toity, hobnob
Medial Vowel contrast	criss-criss, zig-zag, riff-raff, see-saw
Repetition of both elements	goody-goody, bye-bye

Source: (Chukwu pp. 38-39)

Coinage

Coinage is “the invention of totally new terms” (Yule 64). Fromkin et al gives instances of sources for inventing new words. Advertising industry

creates new words to serve some purpose – Kodak, nylon, Orlon, and Dacron. Also, in computer speech processing, new words are coined to take care of components. Similarly, “Greek roots borrowed into English have provided a means for coining new words. *Thermos* “hot” plus *metron* “measure” give us “thermometer”. From *akros* “topmost” and *phobia* “fear”, we get *acrophobia* – dread of heights...”

Borrowing

This refers to “a linguistic form taken over by one language or dialect from another” (Crystal 56), or “the taking over of words from other languages” (Yule 65). Yule further explains that “ the English language has adopted a vast number of loan-words from other languages including alcohol (Arabic), boss (Dutch), croissant (French), lilac (Persian), piano (Italian), pretzel (German), robot (Czech), tywon (Japanese), yogurt (Turkish) and zebra (Bantu).

Conversion

Conversion, also called zero affixation, category change or functional shift, is “assigning the base to different word class without changing its form” (Quirk and Greenbaum 430). In other words, a word can function as a noun or a verb, a noun or an adjective without changing its form. Examples:

The police <u>release</u> culprits	–	vb
The ordered his <u>release</u>	-	n
The <u>bottle</u> is on the table	-	n
They <u>bottle</u> up their feelings often	-	vb
The <u>empty</u> room is dusty	-	adj
They often <u>empty</u> the contents of the containers.	-	vb

Implication of the Devices to inquiry into the Meaning of Life

Taxis in phonetics and linguistics “refer to the systematic arrangements of units in linear sequence at any linguistic level. The commonest terms based on this notion are: phonotactics, dealing with the sequential arrangement of sounds; morphotactics with morphemes; and syntactic with higher grammatical units than the morpheme” (Crystal 458). The morphological devices inherent in a language observe the rule of morphotactics which shows the orderly arrangement of morphemes to produce complex words,

phrases, clauses and sentences which are aspects of syntactic. The free lexical morphemes, the free functional morphemes and the bound morphemes technically subdivided as derivations and inflections and functionally described as affixes (prefixes and suffixes) are orderly woven together to encode conceived ideas emanating from the minds/brains. Separating these technical devices from languages will make sentences constructions a mirage. The complications of these devices in aiding inquiry into the meaning of life are therefore fundamental.

Language Independence or Completion

Morphotactics is the term describing the systematic arrangement of these devices in a language. Their presence is indispensable in showing that a language is complete with them. The independence of a language is recognized only by the presence of units to which recourse should be made to express any idea or reaction.

Meaning Conveying

Morphemes functions syntactically and semantically. A morpheme cannot be subdivided otherwise these functional roles will be distorted. Lexical morphemes are the content words which contain the meaning of concepts. The functional morphemes serve as strings linking the content words to convey meaning or to present the structure required in a language. The bound morphemes create new words with different meanings. These devices therefore serve as vehicles conveying ideas arising from thoughts.

Vehicle of Thought

Sapir defines thought “as the highest latent or potential content of speech, the content that is obtained by interpreting each of the elements in the flow of language as possessed of its very fullest conceptual values” (14). Interpreting each of the elements in the flow of language whose contents are thought involves interpreting the morphological devices serving as the linguistic elements of language facilitating the encapsulation of thought. These devices are adopted to weave linguistic units morphotactically and syntactically to aid inquiry into the meaning of life.

Syntactic Completeness (well-formedness)

The grammar of a language comprises five units hierarchically arranged according to their ranks: morpheme, word, phrase (group), clause and

sentence. The morpheme is the only one that is attached to the other four units to express word class changing (derivation) or to express number (singular/plural), tense (past/present), comparison (positive, comparative and superlative), case (subjective, objective, possessive). These morphological devices are fundamental in language, otherwise grammaticality and well-formedness will not be realized.

Language Understanding

Understanding the rules of language sequencing – phonotactics, morphotactics, syntactics - aids communication. Deviation from the inherent rules for arrangement falsifies meaning, distorts structure, and presents strange morphophonological realization. The morphological devices distributionally positioned correctly aid interlocutors' understanding, writer-readers' understanding, speaker-audience understanding, and logical and chronological account of events.

Conclusion

Inquiry into the meaning of life naturally is affected by lexical and sentential constructions of a language. However, these constructions cannot be achieved without making use of these devices imbued with semantic and syntactic functions. Literary writers, journalists, law makers, law interpreter, politicians, scholars, scientists, etc make use of these devices to put across discovered, invented, imagined and intuitive ideas.

Works Cited

- Algeo, John and Ryles Thamos. *The Origins and Development of the English Language* (5th ed) Boston, MA 02210, USA: Wadworth 25 Thomas Place, 2004.
- Aronoff, Mark and Fudeman, Kirsten. *What is Morphology?* Maldem MA: Blackwell Publishing,
- Chukwu, Ephraim. *Words: Formations and Structures*. Enugu: John Jacob's Classic Publishers Ltd, 2007.
- Crystal, David. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. (5th ed). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003.
- Fromkin, V. Rodman R. and N. Hyams. *An Introduction to Language*. (7th ed). Boston, Massachusetts: Thomson/Heinle, 2003.

- Jindal, D.V. and Syal Pushpinder. *Introduction to Linguistics: Language, Grammar and Semantics*. (2nd ed). New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India Private Ltd., 2008.
- Michael, J. McCarthy. "Morphology" in Kirsten Malunkyaer (Ed.) *Linguistics Encyclopaedia*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Quirk, Randolf & Greebaum, Sidney. *A University Grammar of English*. Harlow, Essex: Longman, Pearson Education Ltd, 2000.
- Sapir, Edward. *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace World Inc., 1949.
- Yagugiri, M. A. *Making Sense of English: A Textbook of Sounds, Words and Grammar*. New Delhi: Vwa Books Private Ltd, 2008
- Yule, George. *The Study of Language*. (2nd ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.