

Some Principles of Morphological Analysis

Here we will discuss some principles of Morphological Analysis

(1) **Principle 1**

In the comparison of two or more words (word-forms) if the two words have a common phonological form and a common semantic form, the common form is to be considered a morph, and the remaining form is either another morph or it is a form awaiting an analysis.

This is a minimal analysis and almost universally accepted. For example, suppose we consider the two words:

- (2) a. dark
b. darkness

The phoneme string /dark/ 'dark' is common to both forms, and share a common semantic value. By principle 1 /dark/ is to be initially analyzed as a morph, which we can assign to the morpheme {DARK}. The remaining string, /nɪs/ ('ɪ' we shall let represent an unstressed high central vowel) 'ness', and assign it to the morpheme {NESS}.

In another example, consider:

- (3) a. paint
b. repaint

Again, the string /pent/ 'paint' occurs in both words and has a common semantic value. Therefore, 'paint' is analyzed as the morpheme {PAINT}, and 're' is analyzed as the morpheme {RE}.

There can be three or more morphs in a paradigm:

- (4)
- a. walk
 - b. walk+ed
 - c. walk+s
 - d. walk+ed
 - e. walk+ing

Here, “walk” is a morph, {MORPH}, and there are four suffixes that are each a morph, each one belonging to a different morpheme.

(5) **Principle 2**

If two or morphs share a common function and they differ on phonological grounds, they are allomorphs belonging to a common morpheme.

There are three phonemically distinct allomorphs for the present tense verb in modern English:

- (6)
- a. talks = /taks/
 - b. plays = /ple:z/
 - c. bitches = bɪtʃɪz/
 - d. raps = /ræps/
 - e. digs = /dɪgz/
 - f. laughs = /læfs/
 - g. snoozes = /snuzɪz/
 - h. sits = /sɪts/
 - i. judges = /ʒʌʒɪz/
 - j. sees = /siz/
 - k. nabs = /næbz/
 - l. hisses = /hɪsɪz/
 - m. washes = /waʃɪz/
 - n. rids = /rɪdz/
 - o. rouges = /ruʒɪz/
 - p. loves = /lʌvz/

The penultimate word rouges is relatively uncommon. It means ‘to apply rouge.’ Very few words in English end in the sibilant /ʒ/.

The words are listed randomly. They should be reorganized to help in determining the phonological context which determines the distribution of the inflectional suffixes. The best way to do this is to rearrange the words in three columns, where each column contains the list of words that end in /s/, and then /z/, and finally /ɪz/:

(7) Table 1

Table 1:

I	II	III
taks	n bz	bɪtʃɪz
r ps	d gz	snuzɪz

Table 1:

I	II	III
s ts	plez	
l fs	siz	hiz
	r dz	waɕiz
	lavz	ružiz

Start with column I. Note /s/ is always preceded by a voiceless consonant. Since /s/ is itself voiceless, it is a very reasonable claim to say that the allomorph /s/ must follow a voiceless consonant. The name for this type of distribution is assimilation--voiceless assimilation.

Now go column II. Note that the final phoneme preceding the ending is a voiced consonant or a vowel (a tensed diphthong). This is a case of voicing assimilation.

Next go to column III. There is an extra vowel in each example. Is the vowel part of the stem or is it part of the ending? We need some more information before we can reach a reasonable conclusion. Determine the basic stem if possible, and look for other forms of the stem with affixes. In all four of the above cases, the stem has the same structure as the stems of the verbs in the other two columns: (S)CVC. Before concluding that /bič/ is the stem for the first one and so forth, look at the past tense forms: /bičt/, /snuzd/, /žʌžd/, /hist/, /wašt. There is no vowel preceding the past tense ending. It now reasonable to claim that the third allomorph of the third person singular present ending is /iz/. What determines its distribution? Note that /iz/ follows a sibilant (a grooved fricative: s, z, š, x, x, and ž). It seems like a reasonable hypothesis to claim the vowel is (was) inserted to break up having two sonorants in a row.

This concludes the third person present tense allomorph discussion and analysis. There are no known irregular forms of this morpheme.

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Go to top of file-
Deriving Verb in English 2
323 Course Outline

-This page last updated 19 JA 2004

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