

More about English affixes

Besides the sound(-variants) and the meaning of an affix, we have further knowledge about the properties of affixes. First, we'll look at some of the demands an affix can make on its base. In particular affixes typically only attach to words of a certain *lexical category*, or *part-of-speech*.

Take for instance the suffix *-able*. We know that it can attach to certain words, but not others: *drink - drinkable, imagine - imaginable, walk - walkable*, but *happy - *happyable, chair - *chairable, quick - *quickable, ...*

For now we'll only be concerned with three different parts-of-speech, nouns (N), adjectives (A) and verbs (V). We can discern these categories according to both their syntactic and their morphological properties.

Part of speech

Syntactic tests

Complete the sentences with just one word (exception: in the case of some verbs, you'll have to add an object as well).

N I saw the _____ .
 I'm thinking of the _____ .

A He/She/It seems _____ .

V I want to _____ .

Morphological tests

Some morphological changes can only apply to words of a certain category.

N If you can form a plural of a word, it's a noun.

A If you can add the comparative suffix *-er* to a word or use the form 'more word' (where 'word' stands for the word you want to test), then the word is an adjective.

V If you can form a different tense (for instance by adding the past tense morpheme), then the word is a verb.

With these tests we can now look back at our *-able* data above, and see that *-able* only attaches to verbs (*drink, imagine, walk*) but not adjectives (*happy, quick*) or nouns (*chair*).

Our knowledge about *-able* so far:

type of affix suffix
pronunciation [əbəl]
meaning 'can be Ved' (where V stands for the meaning of the verb)
part-of-speech attaches to verbs, returns adjectives (we'll write V → A as a shorthand)

*happyable, *fastable
*chairable, *bike rackable

drinkable	I want to <u>drink</u> the water.	The water seems <u>drinkable</u> .
moveable	I want to <u>move</u> my couch.	Your couch seems <u>moveable</u> .
walkable	I want to <u>walk</u> that distance.	That distance seems <u>walkable</u> .

Other English affixes

re- prefix

attaches to verbs, but not nouns or adjectives:

write	V:	I want to <u>write</u> .	write – wrote	rewrite
read	V:	I want to <u>read</u> .	read – read	reread
happy	A:	He seems <u>happy</u> .	happy – happier	*rehappy
quick	A:	It seems <u>quick</u> .	quick – quicker	*requick
door	N:	I saw the <u>door</u> .	door – doors	*redoor
quirk	N:	I saw the <u>quirk</u> .	quirk – quirks	*requirk

resulting complex word is a verb:

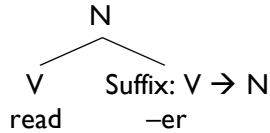
rewrite	I want to <u>rewrite</u> .	rewrite – rewrote
reread	I want to <u>reread</u> .	reread – reread

-er suffix V → N

write (V, see above)	writer (N: I saw the <u>writer</u> . can be pluralized: writer – writers)
read (V, see above)	reader (N: I saw the <u>reader</u> . can be pluralized: reader – readers)

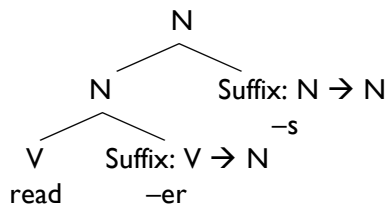
Morphological trees

Morphological trees represent the internal structure of morphologically complex words.



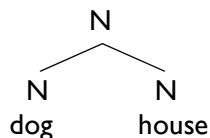
This tree represents the information that the verb *read* has joined with the suffix *-er*, which attaches to verbs and creates nouns, to form the complex word *reader*, a noun.

Just as complex words can serve as bases for attaching further affixes, trees can be part of more complex trees, as shown below



This tree represents that the complex word *reader* now has joined with another suffix *-s*, the English plural morpheme, to form the word *readers*. The tree representation of morphological structures gives us a good way to visualize what we know about the internal structure of a word.

On the homework, there's one case we haven't mentioned in class yet, the word *doghouses*. One part of this word is the word *doghouse*; *doghouse* is a compound – a word where multiple roots join to form a new word, here *dog* and *house*. Represent the structure of *doghouse* as below.



(This is called a noun-noun compound, because both roots are nouns. Actually, words of many other lexical categories participate in compounding as well: *greenhouse*, *yellow jacket*, *spoon-feed*, *jumpsuit*, *middle aged*, *fake nice*, ...)