

Inflectional vs. Derivational Morphemes Handout

Ling 201

Inflectional

- An *inflectional morpheme* is added to a noun, verb, adjective or adverb to assign a particular grammatical property to that word such as: tense, number, possession, or comparison.
- Examples of inflectional morphemes are:
 - Plural: -s, -z, -iz
Like in: cats, horses, dogs
 - Tense: -d, -t, -id, -ing
Like in: stopped, running, stirred, waited
 - Possession: -'s
Like in: Alex's
 - Comparison: -er, -en
Like in: greater, heighten
*note that -er is also a derivational morpheme so don't mix them up!!
- These do not change the essential meaning or the grammatical category of a word. Adjectives stay adjectives, nouns remain nouns, and verbs stay verbs.
- In English, all inflectional morphemes are suffixes (i.e. they all only attach to the end of words).
- There can only be one inflectional morpheme per word

Derivational

- *Derivational* morphemes tend to change the grammatical category of a word **but not always!**
- There can be multiple derivational morphemes per word and they can be prefixes, affixes, or suffixes. For example, the word "transformation" contains two derivational morphemes: trans (*prefix*) -form (*root*) -ation (*suffix*)
- Some examples of derivational morphemes are:
 - -ful like in 'beautiful' => beauty (N) + ful (A) = beautiful (A)
 - -able like in 'moldable' => mold (V) + able (A) = moldable (A)
 - -er like in 'singer' => sing (V) + er (N) = singer (N)
 - -nes like in 'happiness' => happy (A) + nes (N) = happiness (N)
 - -ify like in 'classify' => class (N) + ify (V) = classify (V)

Determining Derivational vs. Inflectional Morphemes

Derivational

- If it changes the part of speech, it **must** be derivational.
- If it is at the beginning of a word, it **must** be derivational

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- If it is followed by one of the inflectional morphemes listed above, it **must** be derivational.
- If there is an inflectional morpheme, then every other morpheme **must** be derivational (since only one inflectional morpheme is allowed per word).

Inflectional

- If it adds a particular grammatical property like tense, number, possession, or comparison, it **must** be inflectional
- This is related to productivity: if it is adding a grammatical property, it is productive.