

Vol 5 Issue 7 Jan 2016

ISSN No :2231-5063

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# International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

## *Golden Research Thoughts*

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**RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595**

**ISSN No.2231-5063**

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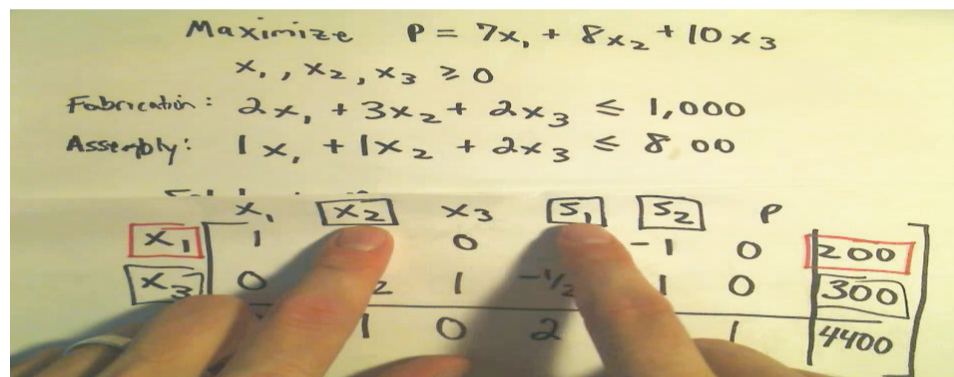
# Golden Research Thoughts

International Recognition Multidisciplinary Research Journal

ISSN: 2231-5063

Impact Factor : 3.4052(UIF)

Volume - 5 | Issue - 7 | Jan - 2016



M. Somathasan



## THE STUDY OF THE STRUCTURE OF WORDS IN ENGLISH: A TOOL BASED APPROACH



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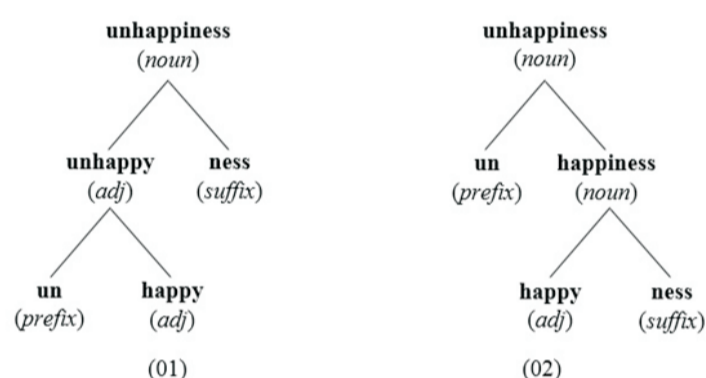
### ABSTRACT

Words are the basic building blocks of sentences. Words in English are of two types. They are simplex or simple word, i.e. it is internally quite simple such as flower, vase, table, fan, tea, spoon, etc. and complex word like unhappiness, unemployment, disappearance, etc. Complex words have a recognizable internal structure. For instance, the word unhappiness is complex because it has a visible internal structure, i.e. the word unhappiness can be broken down into three parts or morphemes: un+happy + ness. Though these three morphemes form the word unhappiness, there are some rules to be followed in its formation. They should be known by a student. Words are the units from which phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc. are constructed. Further, words are directly related to the vocabulary development which creates a significant portion when a learner of English reads and writes, and it is well known that reading and writing is quite important for a student in his daily activities. Without the knowledge of words and their structure, the vocabulary development in English will be low. As a result, the comprehending of a text will be somewhat difficult for a learner. At this juncture, it is understood that word knowledge, especially complex word and its structure are essential to be successful in English language development. Having considered these facts in mind, we develop a simple but effective learning tool for the study of the structure of words in English for the good side of the students.

**KEY WORDS:** simplex word, complex word, internal structure, morpheme, vocabulary development, learning tool

**INTRODUCTION**

Words can be *monomorphemic*, or made up of a single morpheme, such as *room* and *class*, or *polymorphemic*, made up of more than one morpheme, like *grammaticality* and *irresponsibility*. The larger a student's vocabulary, the more successful he is likely to be in his educational path. The knowledge in the structure of words helps the students not only unlock the meaning of the unfamiliar words, but compute the meaning of a sentence, as well. As far as the study of the internal word structure is concerned, knowing the morphemes or components in a word will help a learner of English in many ways: *figuring out the meaning of many new words, remembering the meaning of words, recognizing the families of words that are based on the same word parts, being a good speller, expanding his vocabulary, mastering the grammatical knowledge in English, etc.* Morphemes are usually defined as *the minimal meaning-bearing units of a language*; and morphology deals with the study of these meaningful parts, i.e. the structure of a word (Carlisle, 2004; Piper, 1998). For instance, the complex word *unhappiness* is formed from three morphemes which are *un-*, *happy*, and *-ness*. Here, *un-* and *-ness* are known as *affixes* while *happy* is called as base or root. Further clarifying, *un-* is called as prefix while *-ness*, *suffix*. All the *affixes* are called as bound morphemes and the base or root is known as *free morpheme* which contains the heart of the meaning of the word; and it is central to the building of new words. With the basic knowledge of these three morphemes in the word *unhappiness*, a student may think of two possible tree diagrams or representations for the formation of this word, i.e. the morphological structure of the word. The trees are diagrammed as follows:



In tree (01), the word *unhappiness* is first divided into two constituents, the adjective *unhappy* and the suffix *-ness*. Then the adjective *unhappy*, is divided into the prefix *un-* and the base (adjective) *happy*. But in tree (02), the word *unhappiness* is first decomposed into the prefix *un-* and the noun *happiness*; again the noun *happiness* is divided into the adjective *happy* and the suffix *-ness*. Out of these two trees, tree (01) is considered as the correct grammatical tree diagram because the prefix *un-* always goes with adjectives and not with nouns which is the case in tree (02). Thus, it is clear that a student is subjected to select the correct tree, i.e. the grammatical one while comparing the possible trees or representations of a word. To select the correct grammatical tree or representation, a student of English should equip the knowledge in *affixes*, i.e. the knowledge in prefixes and suffixes, and of affixation which is the knowledge of the systematic linear order of morphemes in a complex word. McCarthy and Prince (1986) state that there are two basic types of affixes: prefixes and suffixes.

**Prefixes:**

Prefixes like *im-*, *in-*, *dis-*, *un-*, *ir-*, etc. are small but meaningful letter groups added to the

beginning of a word to create a new word or lexeme; and they change the meaning and/ or grammatical class of the word. For example, the prefix *dis-* makes the word *appear* become *disappear*. *Appear*(verb) and *disappear*(verb) are two separate lexical entries in a dictionary. Thus, the prefix *dis-* is called as a *derivational prefix* which helps to form a new word *disappear*, but it maintains the grammatical category of the word, i.e. no changes in the word class by the addition of the prefix *dis-* to *appear*. Further, linguistic studies say that not only *dis-* but all the prefixes are also known as derivational ones even if the grammatical category of the word may be the same. Unlike *appear* and *disappear* both reflecting the same word class, a verb, the word *forest* is a noun and the word *deforest*, a verb. Here *de-* is the derivational prefix and also class changing one. Prefixes appear as entry words in the dictionary and they have a hyphen to remind us that something else follows them. For example, the prefix *un-* in *unkind* is followed by the base *kind*. Some combining forms can also be used like prefixes. For instance, the word *pro-French* uses the prefix *pro-* 'in favour of' and the word *Anglo-French* uses the prefix *Anglo-* 'English'.

Knowing the meaning of the prefixes, together with the meaning of common base words or Greek or Latin roots, will give students of English the tools for unlocking the meanings of hundreds of complex words. In addition to knowing these prefixes directly, it is a good idea and highly appreciated to explain prefixes and their meanings when students face them in vocabulary development throughout their learning process.

The following are the main prefixes used in English language, together with the kinds of meaning they contribute.

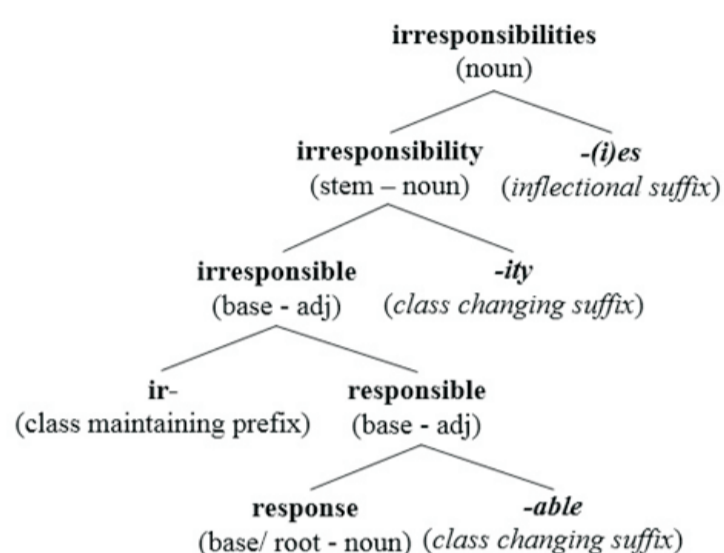
S.No	Prefix	Meaning	Examples
01.	un-	'opposite of' 'remove something'	<i>unclear,</i> <i>unnecessary</i> <i>undress, unscrew</i>
02.	re-	'again,' back'	<i>rewrite, re-apply</i>
03.	il-, im-, in-, ir-	'not', 'opposite of'	<i>illegal, im possible</i> <i>intolerant,</i> <i>irregular</i>
04.	dis-	'not', 'opposite of' 'remove something'	<i>disqualify, discover</i> <i>disarm,</i> <i>disambiguate</i>
05.	en-, em-	'cause to'	<i>enjoy, embed</i>
06.	de-	'to reverse something'	<i>deform, deactivate</i>
07.	mis-	'to do something wrongly'	<i>misunderstand,</i> <i>misuse</i>
08.	inter	'between'	<i>international, inter-racial</i>
09.	non-	'not', 'opposite of'	<i>non-violence,</i> <i>nonfiction</i>
10.	pro-	'in favour of'	<i>pronoun, pro-democracy</i>
11.	pre-	'before'	<i>prefix,</i> <i>predetermined</i>
12.	anti-	'against', 'opposed to'	<i>anti-virus, anti-malaria</i>
13.	extra-	'beyond'	<i>extraordinary,</i> <i>extra-curricular</i>
14.	post-	'after'	<i>post-2009,</i> <i>postgraduate</i>
15.	mid-	'middle'	<i>mid-semester,</i> <i>midnight</i>
16.	fore-	'before'	<i>forehead, foresee</i>
17.	under-	'below', 'too little'	<i>underground,</i> <i>underestimate</i>
18.	semi-	'half'	<i>semi-final,</i> <i>semicircle</i>
19.	sub-	'under', 'lower'	<i>submarine, subway</i>
20.	trans-	'across'	<i>transport, transmit</i>

**Suffixes:**

Suffixes such as *-ness, -ful, -or, -s, -ly*, etc. are small but meaningful letter groups added to the end of a word, i.e. added at the right edge of a word, to create another word; and they change the lexical meaning and grammatical class of the word; or they purely encompass the grammatical inflections of the word or lexeme. For example, the suffix *-ness* makes the word *kind* become *kindness*. *Kind* (adjective) and *kindness* (noun) are two separate lexical entries in a dictionary. Thus, the suffix *-ness* is called as a *derivational suffix* which creates a new word and is, in this case, a *class changing one*. Derivational suffix may also be a class maintaining one. For instance, the suffix *-hood* is attached to the word *child* (a noun) and the result word is *childhood* which is also a noun. Further, suffixes can also be *inflectional ones*, i.e. they are bound morphemes occurring after a stem producing different forms in the paradigm of the same word, i.e. they can show only the grammatical inflections or limitations of the word, and do not change the grammatical category of the word to which they attach and not to create new dictionary entries. For instance, the word *plays* has two parts or morphemes which are *play*, a stem, and *-s*, the suffix. Here the suffix *-s* shows the grammatical marking, that is, the subject of the sentence in which the said verb (*plays*) is used, is in the third person singular simple present tense. On this basis, this suffix is known as an inflectional suffix. In English language, the inflectional suffixes are only eight: two are attached to the category of nouns, four to verbs, and two to the category of adjectives and some adverbs. It is known that only English nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs-all open classes of words- take inflectional suffixes. They are illustrated as follows:

Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives
1. Possessive <i>-’s</i> <i>Siva’s money</i>	3. 3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular <i>Siva talks.</i>	7. comparative <i>-er</i> <i>Siva is taller.</i>
2. Plural <i>-s</i> <i>five flowers</i>	4. past tense <i>-ed</i> <i>Siva talked.</i>	8. superlative <i>-est</i> <i>Siva is the tallest.</i>
	5. present participle <i>-ing</i> <i>Siva is talking.</i>	
	6. past participle <i>-ed/ -en</i> <i>Siva has talked.</i> <i>Siva has taken.</i>	

Stating shortly, suffixes are of two types: derivational suffixes and inflectional suffixes. Derivational suffixes are again divided into two classes – class maintaining suffixes and class changing suffixes. Further, derivational suffixes form the new lexemes or words in English. Inflectional suffixes are always class maintaining ones and show the grammatical functions. The types of suffixes are diagrammatically shown with an example of the complex word, *irresponsibilities* below.



As far as the suffixes are concerned, certain suffixes are associated with certain word classes. For example, the suffixes *-able* and *-ness* appear at the end of many adjectives like reasonable, remarkable, happiness, usefulness, etc. The suffix *-ist* is used to create many nouns like linguist, scientist, artist, etc. The following are the most common suffixes associated with the major word classes.

**Noun suffixes:**

-age	<i>mileage, postage</i>	-al	<i>natural, removal</i>
-ant	<i>accountant, informant</i>	-dom	<i>freedom, kingdom</i>
-ee	<i>employee, trainee</i>	-er/-or	<i>teacher, inventor</i>
-ism	<i>communism, terrorism</i>	-ist	<i>activist, motorist</i>
-ity	<i>opportunity, unity</i>	-ment	<i>environment, government</i>
-ness	<i>kindness, willingness</i>	-ship	<i>friendship, relationship</i>
-tion	<i>dictation, migration</i>	-ance,/-ence	<i>reliance, dependence</i>
-sion	<i>suspension, intension</i>	-ive	<i>relative, narrative</i>
-ery	<i>slavery, drudgery</i>	-ess	<i>waitress, lioness</i>
-let	<i>booklet, piglet</i>	-ster	<i>gangster, gamester</i>

**Verb suffixes:**

-ate	<i>congratulate, activate</i>	-en	<i>darken, widen</i>
-ify	<i>beautify, identify</i>	-ise/-ize	<i>realise, modernize</i>

**Adjective suffixes:**

-able	<i>reasonable, remarkable</i>	-al	<i>musical, physical</i>
-ful	<i>meaningful, successful</i>	-ish	<i>boyish, foolish</i>
-less	<i>careless, homeless</i>	-like	<i>catlike, godlike</i>
-y	<i>cloudy, rainy</i>	-ate	<i>fortunate, passionate</i>
-ous	<i>joyous, spacious</i>	-ic	<i>phonemic, linguistic</i>

-ly *friendly, daily*                      -ive *corrective, active*

**Adverb suffixes:**

-ly *carefully, quickly*  
 -wards *backwards, onwards*  
 -wise *clockwise, lengthwise*

**Internal structure of words:**

A word is best defined in terms of *internal stability* and external mobility; and further it has the internal cohesion and is indivisible by other units; a word may be modified only externally by the addition of prefixes and suffixes. Morphologically complex words consist of a root-morpheme and one or more affixes. As far as the structure of the complex word is concerned, there have been two basic accounting approaches. In the word such as untied, first we can store the individual morphemes *un-*, *tie*, and *-d*, along with their meanings or grammatical function, and then combine them to give first [un + tie], then [[un + tie] + d]. This is the concept or model proposed by Halle (1973). In this model, Halle states that a morpheme is essentially like a morphologically simple (monomorphemic) word, stored in the lexicon. And it is one of the first explicit statements of generative morphology. Morpheme position in a complex word can vary by a range of parameters, i.e. the position depends on the levels of affixes, especially suffixes. Inflectional suffixes always follow the derivational ones if both occur in a word, which makes sense if it is thought of inflections as suffixes on fully formed words. For instance, the words *decentralizations* and *lecturers* contain a number of derivational affixes and an inflectional suffix at the end of each word. The prefixes and suffixes found in these two words are diagrammatically labelled in the following way:

**decentralizations**

[[[ de-V/V[[[ centre ]<sub>N</sub> -al<sub>N\Adj</sub>]Adj] -ize<sub>Adj\N</sub>]V]V -ation<sub>V\N</sub>]N -s<sub>NN</sub>]N

Here, the affixes *-al*, *-ize*, *-ation*, *de-* are derivational and the suffix *-s* is inflectional.

**lecturers**

[[[ lecture ]<sub>V</sub>-er<sub>V/N</sub>]N -s<sub>N/N</sub>]N

Here, the suffix *-er* is a derivational one and the suffix *-s* is inflectional.

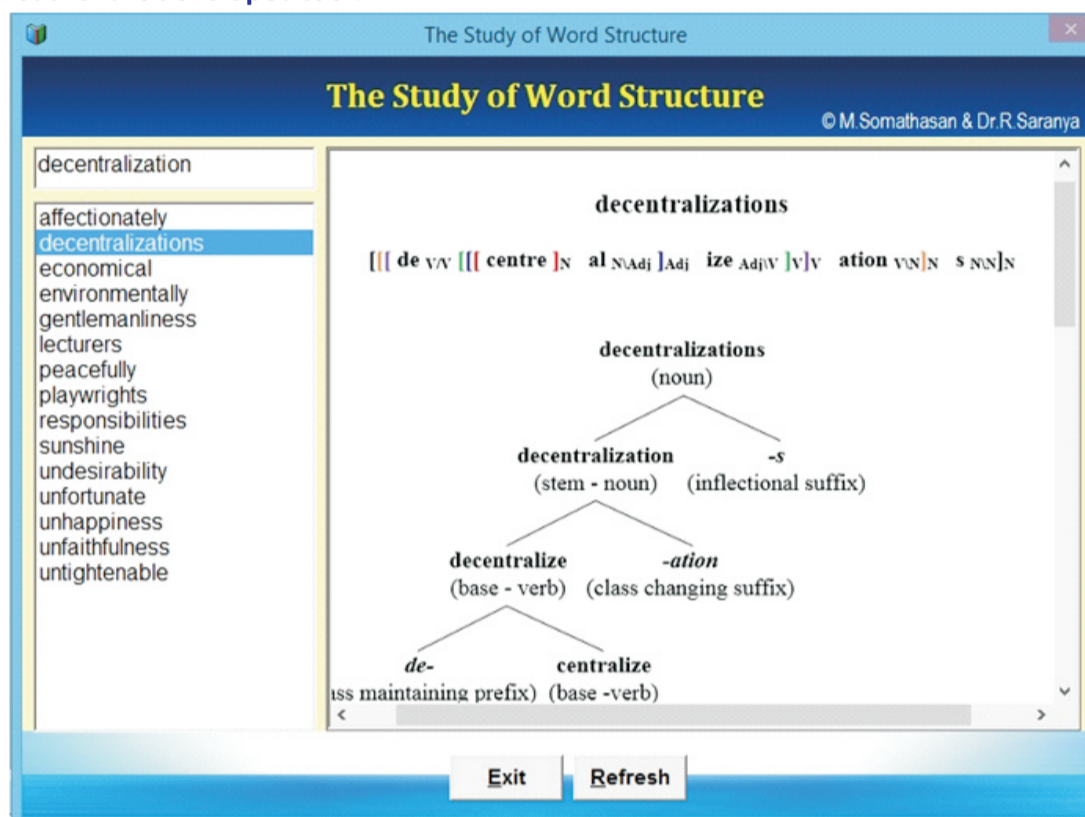
**Methodology:**

To study the structure of words, the varieties of complex words were taken into consideration. Such words were collected from English text books used in schools and universities, newspapers, story books, and magazines. The collected words were separated based on the number of morphemes. Then they were structurally analyzed and fed into the computer program written in vb6. The program is not only a user-friendly one but an effective learning tool as well. In the program, the words were listed and when a user clicks a word, he can understand the clear structure of the word and he would come to know the way in which it is formed, i.e. the bracketed labelled representation and a clear tree diagram. Further, he will be familiar with the meaningful arrangement of morphemes or word parts to get a word with a sense. It is believed that this tool will definitely help a learner of English come to know the



meaning of new words.

Sample visual of the developed tool:



**Conclusion:**

The knowledge of the structure of a complex word depends on the knowledge of base/ stem/ root and affixes. For example, knowing prefixes can help a student with his spelling. While taking the prefix *mis-* (bad,wrong), it ends with an -s. When it is added to the base words that startwith “s”, the new words will have two s’s together:mis + spell = misspell and mis + speak = misspeak. Now a student can come to know why those words have two s’s together: one ends the prefix; the other one starts the rootword.A complex word has more than one morpheme: one will be the base or root or stem, i.e. a free morpheme; and the others are bound morphemes which are attached to the base or root or stem. For example, the word *computations* contains three morphemes: *compute* + *ation* + *s*. While studying about the structure of this word, the root is *compute* which is a free morpheme and the base for the word *computation* which comes from *compute* by the addition of the derivational suffix *-ation*, a class changing one. Then *computation* is the stem for the word *computations* which is inflected for plural form from the word *computation* by the addition of the inflectional plural suffix, -s. When a student comes to know the structure of the words, it will be easy for him to unlock or understand the new word he encounters. That is why, it is said that a useful strategy for determining the meaning of an unknown word is to “take apart the word and think about the parts”.This is one important way students build and develop English vocabulary. The developed tool helps the students in two ways: first they can know the structure of a complex word in the bracketed labelled form and second a properly drawn tree diagram makes the students understand the structure of the words more precisely. By utilizing the tool, the

students will not only get a thorough knowledge about the internal structure of complex words but also the spellings of the words in English language.

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