

Degree iii, (English Honours)

Paper – VIII

Section – 3

Subject- Linguistics

Morphology—Definition, Different types of Morpheme, allomorphs.

Morpheme and its Various Types

Minimal unit of grammatical structure, such as the four components of **unfaithfulness**, are called morphemes. **Telephones** has three morphemes [**tele**], **phone**, and { **-s** } while **telephone** has two and **phone** has one. Morphemes are customarily described as minimal units of grammatical analysis—the units of lowest rank out of which words, the units of next highest rank are composed. So, morphemes are those distinct, minimal syntactical units which form words. They can also be defined as the minimal units of meaning out of which meaningful words are composed in various ways.

A morpheme is thus is distinct linguistic form. It is a minimal unit of speech that is recurrent. It has a grammatical function. It is symmetrically different from other phonemically similar or identical linguistic forms, and is not divisible or analysable into smaller forms. If we try to break

and analyse a morpheme into its constituents, it loses its identity, and we end up with a sequence of meaningless noises, e.g., nation (**na+tion, nati-on**). Analysing the morpheme leads us straight into the realm of phonology.

Morphemes may or may not have meaning may or may not have a **phonological representation**. [**un-**] has a **negative meaning in unfriendly, unhealthy, unable, unemployed** and many other words, but is meaningless in under. [**-er**] has a constant meaning in **teacher, heater, reader, writer, speaker, pointer, leader**, etc. but it would be difficult to pin down any constant meaning for spect in respect, inspect, circumspect, pro in **pro-test, professor, prospective, process, proceed** etc. in plural words like **sheep, fish** we have two morphemes in each words; the first morpheme in each case has a phonological representation but the second one has no phonological representation and is called **zero morpheme**. Morphologically the plural noun sheep is [**sheep**] + { }, that is to say that the word sheep is made up of two morphemes sheep+ a plural morpheme which is present in the meaning but is not physically present in the meaning but is not physically present in spelling and pronunciation.

A morpheme may be monosyllabic as { **man** } and { **a/an/ the** } or polysyllabic as { **happy** } and { **nature** }.

A morpheme has been called a **grammatical moneme** by Martinet.

Another synonym for the morpheme is **glosseme**.

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