Chapter 2 Becoming Fluent in Linguistics: Foundations for Grammar

Additional information and practice

Supplemental Morphological Processes (not included in the text)

Functional shift is a morphological process where a change in category (and meaning) takes place **without** adding an affix:

(1) We had *a bottle* of wine. We *bottle* our homemade wine. (sE)

(2) There is one *chair* at the table. Jill will *chair* our meeting tomorrow. (sE)

In (1), the word *bottle* underwent a functional shift from the noun *a bottle* to the verb *to bottle*. Once the functional shift has happened, the verb can now endure verb inflections such as past tense *-ed* form *bottled*. In (2), we have the same process: a noun being used as a verb. And again, once the functional shift from noun to verb has occurred, the verb can now feature verb inflection. You could, for instance, say *Jill chaired the meeting yesterday*.

What are some words during your lifetime that have gone through functional shift? In our lifetime, the word googol was a mathematical term for a number that is 10 to the 100th power, i.e., the largest number possible or an unfathomable number. It then became the official name of the search engine Google™, and shortly thereafter experienced the functional shift to a verb: *I googled the answer*.

Compounding is a process that combines free roots (e.g., words). The compound behaves like a single word in a sentence.

(3) *overrate*: preposition *over* + verb *rate*

(4) *madman*: adjective *mad* + noun *man*

(5) *headstrong*: noun *head* + adjective *strong*

This common word formation process can be semantically opaque (e.g., *software*) or transparent (e.g., *sunrise*). In English, the right part of the word is generally the head, which then determines the lexical category. In *madman*, *man* is the head, resulting in the compound being a noun; in *overrate*, *rate* is the head, resulting in the compound being a verb; and in *headstrong*, *strong* is the head, resulting in the compound being an adjective.

Note that some anomalies do exist; for instance, *sunrise* is a compound word consisting of the noun *sun* and the verb *rise*, and the compound is a noun. Compounding two nouns is also common: *seafood*, *bus stop*, and *lifespan* to name just a few. You can see that these compound nouns—once combined—can be spelled as one word (*lifespan*) or as two (*bus stop*). Either way, they behave as a single word in the sentence.

As the name suggests, **clipping** involves a process where a part of the word is clipped, i.e., cut off (from any direction). After the original word is clipped, it remains in the same lexical category and retains its meaning. Clipping ends of words is called **back clipping**:

(6) *sis* (N) from *sister* (N)

(7) *Tim* (N) from *Timothy* (N)

(8) *thru* (PREP, ADJ, or ADV from the word *through* (prep, ADJ, or adv)

(9) *ID* (V) from *identify* (V) (*The police IDed the assailant*.)

Removing initial portions of words is called **front clipping**:

(10) *phone* (N) from *telephone* (N)

(11) *gator* (N) from *alligator* (N)

If you remove portions from the middle of a word, it's called **middle clipping**:

(12) *flu* (N) from *influenza* (N)

(13) *fridge* (N) from *refrigerator* (N)

And if you remove portions from more than once location, it's called **complex clipping**:

(14) *op art* (N) from *optical art* (N)

Another word formation process is called **backformation;** it's a process where an affix is removed to create a new word. To determine if something is backformed, you must know the history of the word, or what linguists call the **etymology**. In the examples below, *babysitter* (the noun) existed first, and we backformed the verb *to babysit* by removing the *-er*. If *babysit* had been coined first, then we could have derived the noun via the word formation process of derivation (akin to *to teach* > *teacher*). Here are a few more examples:

(15) *emotion* (N) > *emote* (V)

(16) *intuition* (N) > *intuit* (V)

(17) *conversation* (N) > *conversate* (V)

(18) *lazy* (ADJ) > *laze* (V)

Reduplication is another word formation process that has a clue in its name: something gets duplicated. Specifically, a syllable structure is repeated. In English, this process tends to not be as productive as in other languages, but it's still fun! Can you come up with your own creative reduplications in addition to the examples below?

(19) *mama*

(20) *papa*

(21) *flip-flop*

(22) *willy-nilly*

(23) *topsy-turvy*

(24) *fuzzy-wuzzy*

Blending is when two (or more) words are combined to make a new word, and each word loses some part(s) in the process:

(25) *smoke* (N) + *fog* (N) > *smog* (N)

(26) *spoon* (N) + *fork* (N) > *spork* (N)

(27) *television* (N) + *photogenic* > *telegenic* (ADJ)

(28) *brother* (N) + *romance* (N) > *bromance* (N)

(29) *glamour* (N) + *grandma* (N) > *glam-ma* (N)

(30) *electricity* (N) + *execute* (V) > *electrocute* (V)

(31) *man* (N) + *explain* (V) > *mansplain* (V)

Acronyms, or **initialization**, consist of the first letters of the individual words in a phrase, which are taken to create a new word:

(32) *U*nited *S*tates of *A*merica > *USA*

(33) *L*aughing *o*ut *l*oud > *LOL*

(34) *G*reatest *o*f *a*ll *t*imes > *GOAT*

Borrowings are words that are taken from other languages. The label **borrowing** (or **loan word**) is a bit misleading, since it is not really borrowing, as we never give the words back.

(35) tacos (Spanish)

(36) sudoku (Japanese)

(37) zeitgeist (German)

(38) okay (Choctaw)

Creation/Coining refers to new words that are made up (i.e., coined) when something original is created or formed.

(39) nylon

(40) quark

(41) fleek

Note on quark: We're using it to refer to the subatomic particle. Note that the word quark can also be a borrowing from German for a particular kind of dairy product, which is way too hard to find in US grocery stores!

The word formation process called **eponym** is about words that are created from proper nouns, more specifically, from brand names. *Kleenex* has come to be a commonly used word for facial tissue, *bushhog* for a type of rotary mower, and *coke* for soda pop (especially in the southern part of the US).

And finally, **onomatopoeia** is a process where a word is created from naturally occurring sounds. Examples include *ruff-ruff* or *woof-woof* for the sound a dog makes (nearly all animal sounds fall within this category), *ow* for the response cry we say when we are hurt, and *bang* for the sound a gun makes. Onomatopoeia words are constricted by the language's phonological system, i.e., the sound structure of a language. For example, Japanese speakers use *wan wan* for a dog bark and *doki doki* for the sound of a heartbeat instead of *woof-woof* and *ba-boom ba-boom* that English speakers report.

Supplemental exercise: Word Formation Processes. Provide your own examples for each word formation process. Then, provide evidence for which word formation process you believe is at play in your examples.

a. Functional shift
b. Compounding
c. Clipping
d. Backformation
e. Reduplication
f. Blending
g. Acronym
h. Borrowing
i. Creation
j. Eponyms
k. Onomatopoeia