Lecture 6

Morpheme. Word-Structure

I. Morpheme

Morphemes are the smallest indivisible two-facet units composite words are made of, e.g. teach-er, kill-joy. A morpheme can occur in speach only as a constituent part of the word. It may have different phonetic variants (allomorphs):

decision – attention; inactive – illegal. Its meaning varies too: childish – reddish; encircle – enrich.

Morphemes form an autonomous subsystem of language units. Each

morpheme has its norm of combinability with certain other morphemes, cf.: break-age, develop-ment – break-ment, develop-age. Morphemes may be homonymous (motherly - quickly), synonymous (inactive - unhappy), antonymous (useful - useless).

Affixal morphemes carry lexical and grammatical meaning. Functional

affixes belong to grammar, they build word-forms: ask-ed, long-er. Lexicology is mainly interested in derivational affixes, as they build words: boy-hood, boy-ish, boy-like. lexical morphology deals with two different problems: word-structure (segmentation of words into morphemes) and word-formation (making new words with the help of morphemes).

II. Meaning in Morphemes

Lexical meaning of morphemes may be analysed into denotational and

connotational components. The denotational meaning in affixes is more

generalized than in root-morphemes, e.g. –er carries the meaning the doer of the action: reader, teacher, singer. All endearing and diminutive suffixes bear a heavy emotive charge: -ie (girlie, dearie); -ette (kitchenette). Many stylistically marked affixes are bookish or scientific: a- (amoral); -oid (rhomboid).

All suffixes and some prefixes possess grammatical (part-of-speech)

meaning: -ness (emptiness) carries the nominal meaning of thigness. Root-

morphemes do not possess any grammatical meaning: in the root-morpheme man-

(manly) there is no grammatical meaning of case and number observed in the word man.

Grammatical and lexical meaning in suffixes are blended: -er (teacher) carries the meaning thingness (noun) and the doer of the action.

In all polymorphemic words their constituent morphemes possess two more types of meaning: differential and distributional. Differential meaning distinguishes a word from all others containig identical morphemes: in the word teacher the root teach- differentiates it from other words beginning in teach (teaching). Distributional meaning is the meaning of the order and arrangement of the constituent morphemes: ring-finger, singer. A different arrangement of the same morphemes will change the meaning of the word or make the word meaningless: finger-ring, er-singer.

III. Classification of Morphemes

By the degree of their independence morphemes are classified into free and bound. Free morphemes may occur alone and coincide with word-forms or

immutable words: at, by, water- (water, watery). Bound morphemes occur only in combination with other morphemes: dis- (dislike), -y (watery). Most roots are free but some are bound: cran- (cranberry). Affixes are always bound. Some morphemes occupy an intermediate position between free and bound:

1. semi-affixes: -man (postman), half- (half-eaten);

2. combining forms: tele- (television), graph (autograph);

By their frequency morphemes are classified into recurrent and unique.

Recurrent morphemes are found in a number of words: sing-ing = sing- (singer,

sing-song) + -ing (walking, drawing). Unique morphemes are found only in a

given word: pock (pocket).

By their activity in the language affixes are subduvided into productive and non-productive. Productive affixes are used to build new words: -ism (escapism), - ize (nationalize). Non-productive affixes do not build new words: -th (growth), - ous (monotonous).

By their position in the word affixes are subdivided into prefixes and

suffixes. A prefix stands before the root and modifies its lexical meaning: kind – unkind. In some cases it changes the word‘s grammatical or lexico-grammatical meaning: sleep (noun) – asleep (stative). A suffix follows the root, modifying its lexical meaning and changing the word‘s grammatical or lexico-grammatical meaning: appear (verb) – appearance (noun). The suffix renders a very general meaning and is often fused with the root semantically.