

Modern

English

Word

Formation

**The aim** of this work is to teach students to be word-conscious, to be able to guess the meaning of words they come across from the meaning of morphemes, to be able to recognize the origin of this or that lexical unit.

**The task** of the work is to show the ways of word building, i.e. affixation, suffixation, compounds, statives, vowel and consonant alternations and conversion.

**Topical interest.** This work is of topical interest because English is a living growing language. The system of its sounds is subjected to various changes, the words and word combinations undergo changes. The most noticeable and most appreciable transformations occur in words that form part of English, that is in its vocabulary.

**\* It is a matter of common knowledge that the vocabulary of any language is never stable, but is constantly changing, growing and decaying. The changes in the vocabulary of the language are due both to linguistic and extra-linguistic causes, which are determined by the social nature of the language.**

**The intense development of science and technology has lately given birth to a great number of new words such as ‘computer’, ‘cyclotron’, ‘radar’, ‘psycholinguistics’, etc.; the conquest and research of outer space started by the Soviet people contributed words like ‘sputnik’, ‘lunokhod’, ‘babymoon’, ‘moon-car’, ‘spaceship’.**

**It is significant that the suffix -nik occurring in the noun ‘sputnik’ is freely applied to new words of various kinds, e.g. ‘flopnik’, ‘mousenik’, ‘woofnik’, etc.**

**\* The ways in which new words are formed, and the factors which govern their acceptance into the language, are generally taken very much for granted by the average speaker to understand a word, it is necessary to know how it is constructed, whether it is simple or complex, that is whether or not it can be broken down into two or more parts.**

**We are able to use a word which is new to us when we find out what object or notion it denotes. Some words, of course, are more understandable than others.**

\* **Unfathomable =  
negative prefix + adjective forming suffix =  
cannot be fathomed.  
Knowing the pattern, we can easily guess the meaning of a  
word**

**although there are lots of other words which look similar, for  
instance,**

**unfashionable and unfavourable for which this analysis will not  
work.**

**We accept as quite natural the fact that although we can use  
the**

**verbs 'to pipe', 'to drum' and 'to trumpet', we cannot use the  
verbs 'to**

**piano' and 'to violin'.**



# \* An unabridged English dictionary contains about 600 000 words

The bad news is that even if you have an excellent vocabulary, you know only a small percentage of those words. The good news, however, is that you can increase your vocabulary throughout your life. The even better news is that once you have learnt a new word, it is yours for life. It will always be stored away, ready to be recalled the next time you have a conversation or write a letter or composition.



\* **Some words have many different meanings.**

Let's take, for example, the word 'titanic' in the following sentences. 1. The Titanic sank in the North Atlantic on an April night in 1912 after hitting an iceberg. 2. The enemies were locked in a titanic struggle. You can tell from the first sentence that Titanic is a ship and from the second sentence that 'titanic' means "having great size, force or power.



**\* Context clues can help us learn the meaning of a word. The context of a word is the sentence, the surrounding words, or the situation in which the word appears.**

**There are several types of them.**

**1. Definition or restatement is defined in the sentence ,e.g.**

**We read a collection of fables, short stories that teach a lesson.**

**2. The meaning of the word is made clear by the example, e.g.**

**Bombay is a populous city; one way the Indian government has tried to ease the overcrowding there is to build a second Bombay**

**.**

**3. Comparison. e.g. Joseph has always been amiable – almost as friendly as his older brother Mark.**

**( As introduces a comparison between Joseph’s disposition and that of his older brother.)**

**4. Contrast. e.g. The mayor’s popularity, soared to its highest point, but the city council’s dropped to its nadir. ( A contrast is drawn between the highest point of the mayor’s popularity and the lowest point, the nadir, of the city council’s.**



## \* Means of word-forming

English is a living, growing language; new words are constantly being added. English words come from many sources. Some come from the dead language Latin, and others come from ancient Greek. Knowing the words and parts of words borrowed from Latin and Greek can help us understand the meaning of many English words. In general, English words are of two kinds:

those that can be analysed into smaller parts:  
untimely

**those that cannot**  
**time, face, feel**

\* The words of the first kind, which can be divided, are made up of parts called

**prefixes**

**roots**

**suffixes**

They offer clues

to the meaning of the words.

**A root**

is the part of a word that carries the basic meaning.

**A prefix**

is one or more syllables placed in front

of the root to modify the meaning of the root

or to form a new word.

# *Prefixation*

- \* PREFIXES HAVE BROAD GENERAL MEANINGS LIKE ‘NOT’, ‘UNDER’, ‘AGAINST’ AND ANY OF THEM MAY APPEAR IN HUNDREDS OF DIFFERENT WORDS. BECAUSE PREFIXES OFTEN HAVE MORE THAN ONE MEANING, THEY CAN BE HARD TO INTERPRET.

**The main function of prefixes is to change the lexical meaning of the same part of speech.**

There are 51 prefixes in the system of Modern English word formation.

# *Suffixation*

In Modern English, suffixation is mostly characteristic of noun and adjective formation, while prefixation is mostly typical of verb formation. The distinction also rests on the role different types of meaning play in the semantic structure of the suffix and the prefix. The part-of-speech meaning has a much greater significance in suffixes as compared to prefixes which possess it in a lesser degree.

Due to it, a prefix may be confined to one part of speech as, for example, *enslave*, *encage*, *unbutton*, or may function in more than one part of speech as *over-* in *over kind*, *overfeed*, *overestimation*.

Unlike prefixes, suffixes as a rule function in any one part of speech often forming a derived stem of a different part of speech as compared with that of the base, *e.g. careless - care; suitable - suit, etc.* Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that a suffix closely knit together with a base forms a fusion retaining less of its independence than a prefix which is as a general rule more independent semantically, *e.g. reading- 'the act of one who reads'; 'ability to read'; and re-read — 'to read again'.*

# \* There are two kinds of suffixes:

grammatical provide a grammatical signal of some kind but don't greatly alter the basic meaning of the word and those that, by being added, create new words. The endings

are suffixes

of the first kind. Grammatical suffixes are important in grammar, but in vocabulary we are more concerned with the second kind of suffixes – those that make new words – derivational suffixes.

# Grammatical

*-s, -ed, -ing*

# Derivational

*-ly, -ence, ize, -hood*



# *Classification of suffixes*

Derivational suffixes can be classified according to the parts of speech.

Old English	MEANING	EXAMPLES
- DOM	STATE, RANK, CONDITION	SERFDOM, WISDOM, KINGDOM
- NESS	QUALITY, STATE	GREATNESS, TALLNESS
- th	ACT, STATE, QUALITY	WARMTH, WIDTH, GROWTH
- ER	DOER, MAKER	HUNTER, DANCER, READER
Foreign suffixes (Latin, French, Greek)		
- AGE	PROCESS, STATE, RANK	PASSAGE, BONDAGE
- ANCE (ENCE)	ACT, CONDITION, FACT	ACCEPTANCE, DIFFERENCE

# *Noun suffixes*

- ARD	ONE THAT DOES	DRANCARD, WIZARD
- ATION	ACTION, STATE, RESULT	OCCUPATION, STARVATION
- CY	STATE, CONDITION	ACCURACY, CAPTAINCY
- ESS	FEMININE	WAITRESS, LIONESS, TIGRESS
- IST	DOER, BELIEVER	MONOPOLIST, SOCIALIST
- ITY	STATE, QUALITY, CONDITION	ACIDITY, CIVILITY
- OR	DOER, OFFICE, ACTION	DIRECTOR, ELEVATOR
- TUDE	QUALITY, STATE, RESULT	MAGNITUDE, FORTITUDE
- TY	QUALITY, STATE	ENMITY, ACTIVITY
- SHIP	STATE OF BEING	FRIENDSHIP, MEMBERSHIP

# *Adjective suffixes*

- FUL	FULL OF, MARKED BY	THANKFUL, ZESTFUL
- ISH	SUGGESTING LIKE	CHILDISH, BOYISH
- LESS	LACKING, WITHOUT	HOPELESS, MOTHERLESS
- LIKE	LIKE, SIMILAR	CHILDLIKE, DREAMLIKE
- LY	LIKE, OF THE NATURE OF	FRIENDLY, QUEENLY
- SOME	APT TO, SHOWING	TIRESOME, LONESOME
- ABLE	ABLE, LIKELY	CAPABLE, TOLERABLE
- ESQUE	IN THE STYLE OF, LIKE	PICTURESQUE, GROTESQUE
- FIC	MAKING, CAUSING	TERRIFIC, BEATIFIC

# *Verb suffixes*

OLD ENGLISH SUFFIXES		
- EN	CAUSE TO BE	DEEPEN, STRENGTHEN
FOREIGN SUFFIXES		
- ATE	BECOME, FORM, TREAT	ANIMATE, SUBLIMATE
- ESCE	BECOME, GROW, CONTINUE	CONVALESCE, ACQUIESCE
- FY	MAKE, CAUSE, CAUSE TO	GLORIFY, FORTIFY
- ISH	DO, MAKE, PERFORM	PUNISH, FINISH
- IZE	MAKE, CAUSE TO BE, TREAT WITH	CRITICIZE

# *Suffixes indicating smallness or lessening*

SUFFIX	MEANING	EXAMPLE
<b>-IE</b>	SMALL, FAMILIAR	BIRDIE, GIRLIE, NIGHTIE, AUNTIE
<b>- LET</b>	SMALL, UNIMPORTANT	PIGLET, LEAFLET, SRARLET, BRACELET, STREAMLET
<b>- LING</b>	UNIMPORTANT, DEROGATORY	DUCKLING, DARLING, SQUIRRELING
<b>- ETTE, - ET</b>	FEMININE FORM, IMITATION	USHERETTE, ROOMETTE, KITCHENETTE, CORONET
<b>- Y</b>	FAMILIAR FORM (USED IN FAMILY, WITH CHILDREN)	Daddy, Billy, doggy
<b>- OCK</b>	SMALL	HILLOCK, BULLOCK
<b>- EN</b>	SMALL	KITCHEN, CHICKEN
<b>- CLE, CULE</b>	LESSENING	ARTICLE, PARTICLE, GLOBULE



# *Roots*

When speaking about the structure of words stems should also be mentioned. The stem is the part of the word which remains unchanged throughout the paradigm of the word. Stems have not only the lexical meaning but also grammatical meaning. They can be noun stems, adjective stems and verb stems. Sometimes it is rather difficult to distinguish between simple and derived words, especially in the cases of phonetic borrowings from other languages and of native languages with blocked morphemes, *e.g.* “**cranberry**”, “**absence**”, *etc.*

# *Compounds*

Compound nouns are nouns built from two or more roots.

They often have one stress. The meaning of a compound often differs from the meaning of its elements.

Compounding- is one of the productive types of word-formation in Modern English.

Compound words are inseparable vocabulary units.

They are formally and semantically dependent on the constituent bases and the semantic relations between them which mirror the relations between the motivating units.

The main types of compound nouns are as follows:

**noun-stem+noun -stem**

**apple-tree, snowball, newspaper**

**adjective stem+ noun stem**

**blackbird, whitehorn, blackleg**

## *Stonewall combinations*

In Modern English there are lots of word combinations of the type *price rise, wage freeze, steel helmet, sand castle*.

Grammarians can't come to the conclusion whether adjectives can be formed by means of conversion from nouns.

# *Abbreviations*

The causes of shortening can be linguistic and extra-linguistic.

Abbreviation doesn't change the part-of-speech meaning.

**Examples:** *prof=professor, to rev=to revolve, comfy=comfortable.*

# *The statives*

Such words as *asleep, abed, ablaze, afraid, akin, alive* have been named adjectives, though they can't be attributes in a sentence, and though their meaning doesn't seem to be that of property. The a- means on, in or at. Statives are invariable. They often show a temporary state rather than a permanent one. They most usually follow a link-verb (was asleep) or they can be used like a participle, but they can't go before the noun they modify. In the sentence a stative is most usually a predicative (he fell asleep).



# *Conversion*

Conversion, one of the principal ways of forming words in Modern English is highly productive in replenishing the English word-stock with new words. This term refers to the numerous cases of words belonging to different parts of speech. This may be illustrated by the following cases: *work – to work; love – to love; paper – to paper*. As a rule we deal with simple words. There is a certain difference on the morphological level between various parts of speech, mostly between nouns and verbs. What serves a word-building means? The answer is a paradigm. As it is a morphological category, conversion can be described as a morphological way of forming words.

# *Blends*

Blends are words formed from a word-group or two synonyms. In blends two ways of word-building are combined: abbreviation and composition. To form a blend we clip the end of the first component and the beginning of the second component. As a result we have a compound -shortened word. One of the first blends in English was the word “smog” from two synonyms: smoke and fog. Mostly blends are formed from a word-group:

**cinemadict**

**informecial**

**slimnastics**

**slanguist**

**acromania**

**chunnel**

**megalog**

**dramedy**

**faction**

**medicare**

**socialite**

\* Cinemadict – cinema addict,  
informecial – informational commercial  
slimnastics – slimming gymnastics  
slanguist – slang linguist  
acromania – acronym mania  
chunnel – channel, canal  
megalog – magazine catalogue  
dramedy – drama comedy  
faction – fact fiction – fiction based on real  
facts  
medicare – medical care  
socialite – social elite