

1 Preliminaries

This chapter and the next are concerned with morphology, that part of a grammar that deals with the form of words. As explained in Ch. 1, §4.3, morphology is divided into two subcomponents: we look first at inflectional morphology and then in Ch. 19 turn to lexical word-formation.

■ Inflectional morphology vs lexical word-formation

The distinction between these two subcomponents of morphology may be illustrated with reference to a set of words such as the following:

- [1] i **simple** *simpler* *simplest*
 ii *simpleton* *simpletons* *simpleton's* *simpletons'*
 iii *simplify* *simplifies* *simplified* *simplifying*

The three words in [i] are forms of the same lexeme, which we represent in bold face as **simple**. *Simpleton* and *simplify*, however, are not forms of this lexeme: they are forms, together with the other words in [ii–iii] respectively, of the lexemes **simpleton** and **simplify**.

As is implied by saying that they are forms of the same lexeme, *simple*, *simpler*, and *simplest* represent the same lexical item, the same vocabulary item. They are forms of this item that are required or permitted in different syntactic constructions. In the frame ‘*This is ___ than that*’, for example, only the comparative form *simpler* is permitted, and similarly the frame ‘*This is the ___ of them all*’ requires the superlative form *simplest*. And if we replace the lexeme **simple** by another adjective, we will still need a comparative and superlative form in these constructions: *This is cheaper than that* and *This is the cheapest of them all*, and so on.

Simpleton and *simplify*, by contrast, represent different vocabulary items, different lexemes. From a syntactic point of view, the fact that *simpleton* is formed by adding an affix to *simple* is irrelevant: its syntactic distribution is no different from that of nouns that are not derived from an adjective. *Simpleton* and *fool*, for example, are syntactically alike: the grammatical difference between them is purely morphological. Similarly, the morphological structure of *simplify* is of no syntactic significance: the grammatical difference between *I’ll simplify the problem* and, say, *I’ll solve the problem* is again purely morphological.

The various forms of a lexeme are, more specifically, its **inflectional forms**, and it is with the morphological description of these that the bulk of this chapter is concerned. However, we also include in the final section of the chapter a description of various