

This is the second of two chapters dealing with the form of words. The main topic of Ch. 18 was the formation of inflected words from their lexical base, while the present chapter is concerned with the form of lexical bases, i.e. with the lexical side of word-formation.

## 1 Preliminaries

### 1.1 Established words and potential words

To a very large extent speakers know words as individual items of vocabulary. We know, for example, that the word for the area over which a bishop has charge is *bishopric*, not *\*bishopdom* – and conversely that the word denoting the area over which a king rules is *kingdom*, not *\*kingric*; that there are words *unfaithfulness* and *infidelity*, but not *\*infaithfulness* or *\*unfidelness*; and so on. Words like *bishopric*, *kingdom*, *unfaithfulness*, *infidelity* we will refer to as **established** words: they are recognised as part of the vocabulary of the language.

Established words are individually familiar to speakers of the language and can be found in standard dictionaries. The inventory of items included in such dictionaries is not, however, identical to the set of words. A dictionary includes many multi-word expressions that have idiomatic meanings or are otherwise known as individual items (*give in*, *take advantage of*, *the more the merrier*, and so on). Conversely, and more importantly for the purposes of this chapter, not all words are established words. In speaking or writing we do not always restrict ourselves to established words: we can create new words or use words we have heard before but which have not yet become established.

Creating new words is in general subject to rules or constraints. For example, the rules of Present-day English word-formation allow *policeability* as a word, but not *\*priestric* or *\*pick-basket*. People vary in their subjective reaction to new words, and some will find *policeability* inelegant or otherwise open to criticism, but it nevertheless differs very clearly in its linguistic status from *\*priestric* and *\*pick-basket*. *Policeability* is formed from the established verb *police* by adding the adjective-forming suffix *-able*, and then adding a further suffix, with modification of *-able*, to yield a noun that might be used in such a sentence as *The Commissioner questioned the policeability of the new regulations*. But *\*priestric* and *\*pick-basket* do not conform to the present-day rules; *\*priestric* is analogous to *bishopric* but *-ric* is no longer available as an element for forming new words, and the pattern seen in *pickpocket* (plain form of the verb + noun in a direct