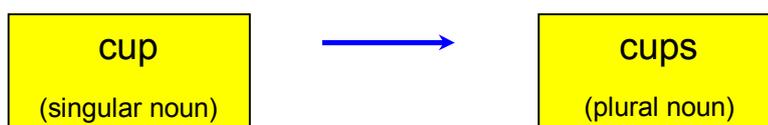


## Morphology

This is the study of how words are formed and their structure. It looks at how words are built up from smaller elements and the rules that govern this process. The elements that combine to create words are called **morphemes**, which are the smallest unit of meaning that exists in a language.



Look at the example below:



Here, the word *cups* contains the morpheme *cup* and the plural affix *-s*.

Morphology is usually divided into two fields: the study of **inflections** and the study of **word-formation**, which can be referred to as either **lexical** or **derivational**.

**Inflectional morphology** deals with those parts of words that signal grammatical changes to a word – such as the plural affix *-s* in our first example above.

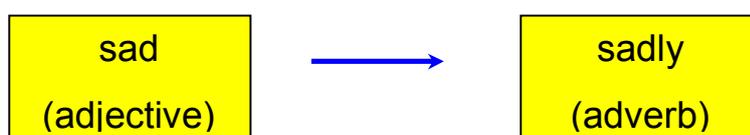
Other examples might include:

- the ***-ed*** that is affixed to the stem of a verb to show the past tense
- the ***-(e)s*** that indicates a 3<sup>rd</sup>-person singular verb
- the ***'s*** that indicates somebody's possession of something

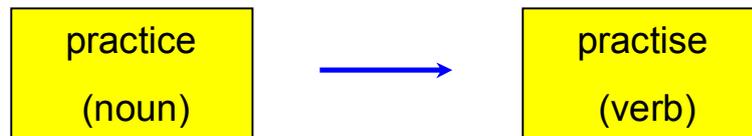
These affixes do not change the grammatical class of the word they are attached to, so (I) *walk*, (she) *walks* and (they) *walked* are all part of the same verb paradigm, but the latter two have had person or time inflectional affixes added.

On the other hand, **lexical or derivational morphology** both deal with words that are 'derived' from other words and generally change grammatical class in the process.

For instance, when we add the suffix '*-ly*' to a word it changes from the original class to that of an adverb. Look at the following example, where the addition of the suffix changes a word from an adjective to an adverb.



In some cases, it simply involves the change of a single letter – if the second 'c' in the noun 'practice' is changed to an 's', the word becomes the verb 'practise'.



So essentially, morphology starts small and has to do with the rules of how we build individual words within our vocabulary.

#### **Further research on Morphology**

For a little more on Morphology and its impact on English (and other languages) take a look at the following, which links to a paper from Dr C. George Boeree:

<http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/morphology.html>

Now let's move on to look at the next area of the structure of our language, syntax.