

The term **morphology** was invented & became current in the 2nd half of the 19th c.

Why? Earlier there was no need for a special term, because the term **grammar** mostly meant word structure, ie morphology.

The terms **phonology** (for sound str) and **syntax** (for sent str) had existed for centuries when morphology was introduced.

Our simple def'n of morphology: the study of the **internal structure** of words.  
But in what sense? Words have internal structure in 2 very different senses.

Consider nuts /nʌts/:

Four letters (graphemes): <n>, <u>, <t>, <s> – those will be largely ignored here.

Four sounds: /n/, /ʌ/, /t/, /s/

*nuts*

nʌts

What are these two senses?

① On the one hand, words are made up of sequences of **sounds**, ie they have internal phonological structure. Thus, *nuts* consists of 4 sounds (or **segments**): /nʌts/.

Segments such as /n/ or /ʌ/ or /t/ can't be assigned meaning; they “only” have a contrastive value (in order that eg *nuts* can be distinguished from

*cuts* /kʌts/, *guts* /gʌts/, *shuts* /ʃʌts/

and from

*nets* /nets/, *notes* /nouʌts/, *nights* /naɪʌts/

and so on).

The words /nʌts/ and /kʌts/, /gʌts/ and /ʃʌts/ etc. are minimal pairs. It plays no role whether /kʌts/ is a noun or a verb: what matters is the minimum sound/segmental difference.

② But: it often happens that variations in the shapes/forms of words **correlate systematically** with semantic changes.

Eg *nuts, nights, necks, backs, taps* share not only a phonological segment (the final /s/), but also a meaning component: they all refer to a multiplicity of things from the same class. Where the final /s/ is lacking (*nut, night, neck, back, tap*), reference is made consistently to only one such thing.

The words *nuts, nights, necks, backs, taps* are **analyzable** into *nut-s, night-s, neck-s, back-s, tap-s*. This can be seen in the transcriptions of the segments as well, but here it is not customary to use any sign other than the sound symbols.

*nut-s    night-s    neck-s    back-s    tap-s*

/nʌt-s/    /naɪts/    /neks/    /bæks/    /tæps/

By contrast, *blitz* /blɪts/, *box* /bɒks/, *corpse* /kɔ:ps/ do not refer to a multiplicity of things, and there exist no semantically related words such as \**blit*, \**bok* (!), \**corp*.

*blitz                    box                    corpse*

/blɪts/                    /bɒks/ (!)                    /kɔ:ps/

Are these words complex? = Analyzable? = Do they have structure?

Yes, and no. Yes, phonologically; no morphologically,

Words like *nuts* are (morphologically, ie not just phonologically) complex words.

In a morphological analysis, we say that the final /s/ of *nuts* expresses plural meaning when it occurs at the end of a noun. But the final /s/ in *corpse* does not have any meaning, and *corpse* does not have morphological structure.

Thus, morphological structure exists if there are groups of words that show identical partial resemblances in **both form and meaning**.

It is important that this form–meaning covariation should occur systematically (in groups of words). When there are just two words with partial form–meaning resemblances, these may be just accidental. Thus, one could eg say that the word *hear* is morphologically structured, and related to *ear*. The *h* could actually mean ‘use’, so *h-ear* would be morphologically complex, and mean ‘use one’s ear’, ie ‘hear’.

But: this is the only pair of words of this kind (there is no \**heye* ‘use one’s eye’, no \**helbow* ‘use one’s elbow’ etc.); these resemblances are accidental.

The story of the Hungarian *ő*

Does the sound/segment *ő* have meaning? That is, does *ő* mean anything?

Yes, and no.

But *ő* surely means ‘he/she’, ie 3sg (= 3rd person singular personal pronoun [gender-insensitive]), doesn’t it?

No, it does not: it is the **word** *ő* which means that. It can even occur as a sentence. (Recall: can be an **utterance**.)

*Ő mondta. Ki mondta? – Ő.*

If the segment *ő* did have meaning, then

– on one hand, the H. nouns *kő* ‘stone’ and *nő* ‘woman’  
would have to do with the meaning ‘he/she’; and  
the H. verbs *lő* ‘shoot’ and *fő* ‘boil’  
would have to do with the meaning ‘he/she’  
but they do not.

– on the other hand, the other item, the <k> in *kő* and the <n> in *nő* would also have to be meaningful; the <l> in *lő* and the <f> in *fő* would have to have some kind of meaning,

but they do not.

(this time written symbols have been used,  
standardly between **angle brackets**)

The H. words *kő* and *nő* and *lő* and *fő* are not morphologically complex.

By contrast, the H. word for ‘they’ (perhaps obviously gender-insensitive) is *ők*. It is morphologically complex; has structure; is analyzable into this *ő* plus the *k*, which is the plural morpheme in the language.

Putting two and two together, you get:

*Ő-k* ‘(s)he-pl’, ie ‘they’