MORPHOLOGY AND SEMANTIC INTERFACE
CONTENT

- Semantic interpretation of morphological structure
- Semantics and syntactic valency.
- Polysemy
SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF MORPHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE.

AIM

- Investigate the regularities involved in assigning a particular meaning to a complex word.
- To show that meaning assignment is a dynamic and flexible process.
Morphology and Semantics interface (Morphosemantics) has to do with form-meaning relationship.

Arbitrariness: there’s no relation between the meaning of a string phones (sounds) and the meaning of a word.

Eg. /pɛn/ ‘pen’
This arbitrariness feature in the form-meaning relations is reduced by their having a layered structure.

E.g., Sentences are not holistic but can be divided into constituents and basically words (syntactic structure).

- Likewise, words in their turn may have internal structure themselves (complex words).
- Language is combinatorial system: made of different components (phonetics...)
- Meanings assigned to complex words are partially motivated (a reason is given).
Compositionality principle: The meaning of a complex expression is a compositional function of that of its constituents and the way they are combined.

Thus, the meaning of the complex word is as a result of the meaning of it’s components/constituents and how they are put together to form the complex expression.

Therefore, we can derive the meaning of a complex word on the basis of its internal structure in morphology.

Eg. School bus ‘a bus that conveys pupils to school’
A first specification of this compositional function is that semantic scope reflects structural hierarchy (the manner in which the constituents are combined).

Consider the two following nouns from the Amerindian language Yup'ik (Mithun 1999: 43):

[yug-pag]-cuar  [yug-cuar]-pag

person-big-little  person-little-big

“little giant”  “big midget”
A similar observation can be made about the English adjective unbelievable.

This adjective has the meaning “cannot be believed”, and not the meaning “can be not believed”.

\[ \text{[un-[[believ]V-able]A]A} \quad \text{“cannot be believed”} \]
In the case of compounds, it is the notion ‘head’ that we need for a proper semantic interpretation.

The meaning of the non-head of a compound functions as a modifier of that of the head.

This statement is a correspondence rule that specifies the interface between the formal structure of a compound and its semantic interpretation.
Consider the following nominal compounds of Dutch:

- **graan-molen**  
  “corn mill”

- **mosterd-molen**  
  “mustard mill”

- **verf-molen**  
  “paint mill”

- **water-molen**  
  “water mill”

- **wind-molen**  
  “wind mill”
This shows that the structural notion ‘head of a compound’ that we need for formal reasons is essential for the semantic interpretation of compounds.

Headship induces the ‘is a’ relation.

Eg. A graanmolen is a molen.

The relationship between head and non-head can be circumscribed as ‘has some relation to’ and can be referred to as R.
For languages with right-headed compounds, the compound structure AB correlates with the semantic structure $R(B,A)$, that is, ‘B has some relation to A’.

Eg. chalk board ‘is a board that has some relation to chalk’

A B $R(B,A)$

This relation is not a matter of the grammar but the world knowledge/encyclopedic knowledge or knowledge of the context in which a compound is used.

The compounds aforementioned are all established compounds which means that the specific interpretation of R has been fixed.
For new compounds, the content of R can be inferred at the time of its being uttered on the basis of knowledge of the world and context.

An important semantic component of words is their function.

Eg. ‘umbrella organization’ to be “organization that functions like an umbrella”.

Because we know that an umbrella has a protective function and can keep one or more persons protected against rain or sun under its screen.

This shows that language users are able to interpret metaphorical use of language where notions from one domain of knowledge are transferred to another domain.
The meaning contribution of right-headed compound structures of the type AB is \( R(B,A) \), that is the literal meanings of the constituents.

This relationship then receives a specific interpretation for each individual compound, by means of interpretational mechanisms.

These mechanisms are pragmatic in nature since they follow from the \textbf{pragmatic principle of cooperation} (a participant in a conversation normally attempts to be informative, truthful, relevant and clear).

Try to come up with the most sensible interpretation possible so that we understand each other.
Considering the following cases of conversion in Dutch, we will illustrate how meaning assignment is vague but flexible in compounding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Noun</th>
<th>Verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bier</td>
<td>“drink beer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kaas</td>
<td>“produce cheese”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melk</td>
<td>“take milk from an animal”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tafel</td>
<td>“dine”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>“urinate”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<td>“table”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water</td>
<td>“urine”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These verbs all have the meaning “action that has some relationship (R) with the base-noun”.

Clearly, the meaning of these words is compositionally determinable in context but we need to come up with a specific interpretation of R.

Once they have been coined, with a specific interpretation, that interpretation might become the conventionalized interpretation (often registered in dictionaries).
In other cases, we need other, non-linguistic resources to come up with a specific interpretation of R.

For English verbs like *to boycott, to hoover, and to xerox* derived from proper nouns

The proper noun Boycott as such does not give a clue as to what a verb to boycott might mean.

Hence, the meaning of these verbs is not computable on the basis of the meaning of their base nouns without further information on these proper nouns.
Abstractness of the meaning contribution of morphological structure is also the key to understanding the manifold interpretations of reduplicative structures such as plurality, iterativity, and intensity.

The following rule accounts for the different interpretations of reduplicative structures:

Interpret $X \ X$ as $[A \ \text{INCREASED}]$ (where $A$ represents the meaning of $X$ and INCREASED represents an abstract semantic unit). (Botha 1988: 94)

This is a correspondence rule that relates a particular morphological form to its semantic structure.
Consider the following sentences from Afrikaans (Botha 1988: 92–3):

a. Die kinders drink bottels-bottels limonade
   
   the children drink bottles-bottles lemonade

   “The children drink many bottles of lemonade”

b. Hij lek-lek oor sy droë lippe
   
   he lick-lick over his dry lips

   “He licks and relicks his dry lips”
The abstract meaning INCREASED will then receive a more specific interpretation by means of **conceptualization rules** which define conceptual well-formedness.

Such rules do not specify the interface between formal structure and semantic interpretation, but further develop the semantic interpretation.

For instance, the following conceptualization rule may be assumed:

- If A has the meaning component **COUNTABLE THING**, the property INCREASED must receive a numerical interpretation as in (a).
In example (b), it is a verb that is reduplicated. Verbs denote events with the measurable property of duration.

Hence, another example of a conceptualization rule is, with verbs the notion INCREASED should be interpreted as INCREASE OF TIME.

However, licking one’s lips is a bounded event, hence, the only sensible interpretation here is an iterative one: repeated licking must be involved.

An example from Akan: /keka/ ‘bite’ /kekakeka/ ‘bite bite’
Many kinds of **denominal adjectives** (adjectives derived from nouns) function as relational adjectives.

Eg: *biological* from *biology*

**Relational adjectives** denote the existence of a relation between the noun that they modify and some other entity evoked by that adjective.

Eg: *biological experiment*

They are distinguished from **qualifying adjectives** that denote a quality/characteristic of the noun they modify.

Eg: *kind lady*
Consider the following examples from English:

a. the Americ-an flag
b. a person-al computer
c. a spous-al hire
The meaning contributions of the different denominal suffixes involved are all the same: “related to base noun”.

Thus, they relate the base noun of the adjective to the head noun that these adjectives modify in a phrase.

An American flag does not denote a flag that is American in nature, but the flag of America.
Due to this relational nature of such adjectives, they cannot be used in predicative position except when contrast is involved, as in (b), nor can they be modified, unlike qualitative adjectives (c):

a. *The flag is American/*a very American flag

b. That flag is not American but Canadian.

c. That flag is blue/a very blue flag
By adding a modifier, relational adjectives can be forced to be interpreted as qualifying adjectives.

If I call someone *a very American lady*, I invoke all the prototypical qualities of American ladies (wearing shorts in summer, speaking loudly and with a lot of gestures, etc.).

This kind of interpretational shift is a case of type coercion where modifiers require qualifying adjectives as their adjectival heads.

Hence, in such cases denominal adjectives are interpreted as qualifying adjectives.
Relational adjectives play an important though not exclusive role in what have been called **bracketing paradoxes**.

For instance, a moral philosopher is not a philosopher who is moral, but someone who deals with moral philosophy.

Hence, there seems to be a mismatch between the formal structure of this phrase, and its semantic interpretation:

**syntax:** \([[\text{moral}]A \ [\text{philosoph-er}]N]NP\)

**semantics:** \([[\text{moral philosophy}]er]\)
The same observation applies to phrases such as nuclear physicist, criminal lawyer, small farmer, and first violinist.

On second thought, however, the same kind of interpretation occurs when there is no possibility of bracketing the phrase differently at the semantic level, as shown by the following examples with underived nouns:

‘a good athlete’ or ‘an old friend’
A good athlete is not necessarily a good person, but someone who is good as an athlete.

Similarly, an old friend is not necessarily old aged, but someone with whom you have a lasting friendship.

In these cases, this interpretation cannot be attributed to a difference in bracketing between the formal and the semantic structure.

What we need therefore is a semantic principle that tells us how to interpret such phrases with denominal relational adjectives and those with simplex adjectives.
The general idea is that an attributive adjective, whether a qualifying adjective or a relational adjective, may modify only part of the semantic structure of the head noun.

The phrase old friend can mean “a friend who is old aged” and in this case, old only says something of what we may call the PERSON component of the meaning of friend.

If we interpret this phrase as “someone who has been a friend for a long time”, the adjective mentions a property of another meaning component, the FUNCTION component “friendship”.
Denominal relational adjectives have the specific property as the entity invoked by their base noun.

For instance *crime* in the case of *criminal lawyer*, functions as an argument of the FUNCTION component of the meaning of lawyer.

In the phrase *criminal lawyer*, x will then be taken to stand for “crime”.

This FUNCTION may be circumscribed as “*giving advice on legal matters concerning x*”.
How does the interpretation of morphological structure proceed in those cases such as vowel change.

Eg. saw of to see, (in which there is no separate past tense morpheme)

A possible answer is that such operations are triggered by the presence of morphosyntactic features such as [+past] or an abstract grammatical morpheme PAST.
Such features or morphemes will then be linked to a semantic property PAST at the semantic level where the linking rules will also specify the scope of PAST.

The semantic scope of this property is not just the verb itself, but the whole event described, as represented in a semi-formal way in below:

Eg: Indriaas saw the accident = PAST [SEE, Indriaas, the accident]

Thus, it is specified that the event of Indriaas seeing the accident took place before the moment of speaking.
**Syntactic Valence** is the number of arguments (NP) present in a given clause.

**Semantic Valence** is the number of participants (NP) required by a verb.

The syntactic valence of a complex word is (at least partially) determined by its semantic properties.

One of the functions of morphology is to change the syntactic category of words with the effect that other syntactic uses are made possible.

A cross-linguistically very common form is that of **action nominalization** or **deverbalization**, in which verbal constructions are deverbalized to...
There are degrees of deverbalization as the following examples of deverbal
nominalization in English show (Malouf 2000: 93):

Chris was shocked that Pat illegally destroyed the evidence

a) Chris was shocked by Pat having illegally destroyed the evidence
b) Chris was shocked by Pat’s having illegally destroyed the evidence
c) Chris was shocked by Pat’s illegal destroying of the evidence
d) Chris was shocked by Pat’s illegal destruction of the evidence
In (a–c) we see the **gerundive nominals** *having destroyed* and *destroying*, and in (14d) the deverbal **action noun** *destruction*.

In the sentences (a–d), these deverbal nouns are used as the heads of a noun phrase.

This can be concluded from the fact that they occur in a PP with the preposition *by*, yet, they show some verb-like behavior as well.

This is most clearly the case with the gerundive nominals that co-occur with the adverb *illegally*, which is impossible to use with the derived noun *destruction*. 
Selecting adverbial forms as modifiers is a distinguishing property of verbs and adjectives, whereas nouns select adjectives as modifiers.

Furthermore, in (b, c), the object of the verb *destroy*, the phrase *the evidence*, appears as a bare NP, without a preposition.

This is of course a prototypical property of verbs rather than of nouns.
In (d), the complement-NP of *destruction* has to be preceded by a preposition, the default preposition *of*.

Such nominalization patterns raise the issue whether categories such as V and N can always be sharply distinguished.

This is why deverbal nominalizations have been qualified as belonging to the set of **mixed categories** *(transcategorial constructions)*.

Other examples of such mixed categories are verbal participles.
The (partial) preservation of the syntactic valency of the base of such complex words is referred to as **inheritance**.

Deverbal nouns in -ion differ from gerundive nominals in exhibiting a lesser degree of inheritance of verbal properties, as we saw above.

In deverbal nominalization of the type -ion, the deverbal noun inherits the Predicate Argument Structure of its base verb, but the syntactic expression of the arguments is different from that of the base verb.
Moreover, the syntactic expression of the inherited arguments of such deverbal nouns seems to be optional; compare:

a. Pat’s destruction of the evidence
b. The destruction of the evidence
c. Pat’s destruction
d. The destruction

In (c), *Pat* is interpreted as the Patient of *destruction*, not as Agent, unless there is some specific context in which objects can be omitted.
Action nouns can further develop from simple event nouns into result nouns denoting the result/product of the action.

Eg: Action noun: I listened to a preaching.

Result noun: The preaching is on the CD.

In the latter interpretation they no longer denote an event with participants, and hence do not allow for Agent phrases.

When such nouns are interpreted as result nouns, they can be pluralized.
Therefore, such plural deverbal nouns exclude the use of Agent phrases:

Eg: Extensive collections of shells (*by Indriaas).

These expressions (*by my father) are old-fashioned.

Their instructions (*by the disciples) were recorded.
In sum, when there are differences in syntactic valence between verbs and their corresponding deverbal nouns, these differences can be seen as reflecting differences in their semantic structure.

The issue of inheritance of syntactic valence also crops up in the analysis of compounds of the following type:

coffee-maker, pasta-eater, story-teller, truck-driver

In these compounds headed by a deverbal agent noun, the left constituent is interpreted preferably as the Patient of the action denoted by the verbal base of the head noun.
How are we going to account for that interpretation?

We cannot consider these words to be derived by means of the suffix -er from verbal compounds of the N + V type, since this is not a productive type of compounding in English.

Compounds such as *to coffeemake or *to pasta-eat cannot be formed.

Hence, a word such as coffee-maker must be considered a case of N + N compounding, with the head noun being a deverbal noun.

There are two ways of accounting for the Patient interpretation of the left constituent.
The default one is to simply assume that the Patient interpretation is a filling-in of the general relation $R$ that exists between the two parts of a compound.

For *maker*, the most sensible interpretation of the relation with *coffee* is that *coffee* is a specification of what is made.

The other analytical option is to assume that deverbal nouns keep the Predicate Argument Structure of their verbal base.

The semantic structure of *maker* will then be as follows, with the PAS of its verbal base incorporated: $x \ [\text{MAKE}, x_{\text{AGENT}}, y_{\text{PATIENT}}]$
This semantic structure is a slightly more formal representation of the informal description of the meaning of maker as “one who makes something”.

The semantic effect of the –er suffix is that it binds the x-argument of the verbal base. This means that this argument cannot be expressed anymore.

Hence, only the y-argument is left to be expressed by a nominal, either as the left constituent of a compound, or as an NP that is preceded by the default preposition ‘of’.

Both the compound coffee-maker and the phrase maker of coffee are well-formed expressions.
The inheritance of syntactic valence as analyzed here is the effect of preservation of argument structure of the base words.

There is, however, also a kind of inheritance of a more syntactic nature, with little or no semantics involved.

Verbs may select a specific preposition for the complement they occur with, a prepositional object.

This also applies to a variety of adjectives.
This choice of preposition is an idiosyncrasy that has to be encoded in the lexicon, and this choice is taken over by the derived word.

As illustrated below:

- to long for
- to compare to
- to hope for
- to trust in
- divide by

longing for
comparable to
hope for
trust in
divisible by
This implies that in these cases there is a transfer of specific syntactic subcategorization information from the base word to its derivative.

The relation between the semantics of a word-formation process and its effect on syntactic valency is also at stake in two other English word formation processes, the coining of deverbal adjectives ending in -able and middle verbs.
do-able  "can be done"
drink-able  "can be drunk, fit for drinking"
read-able  "can be read, pleasant to read"
wash-able  "can be washed"

This book reads easily
These products sell well
This chicken broils excellently
Both processes serve to create words that do not denote events but stative properties.

In this respect they are quite unlike the passive construction, which does denote events.

Since these types of word do not denote events, they cannot occur with an Agent phrase.

The only argument that is expressed is the Patient-argument of the base verb.

This argument is stated to have the property that it can participate in the
*This tea is drinkable by Mary

*This book reads easily by John

The semantic structure of these adjectives and verbs implies that there is no Agent to express, not even in a by-phrase, because there is no Agent participant in the Lexical Conceptual Structure of these words, and hence they are intransitive predicates.
It seems superfluous to say of wine that it is drinkable, to mean it can be drunk.

What we observe here, is a more general pragmatic Non-Redundancy Constraint (avoid providing information that is already known) involved in the interpretation of words.

Therefore, if someone nevertheless states that it is drinkable, we infer that this must mean it is good wine to drink, otherwise the information would be superfluous/redundant.

We assume that speakers try to be informative, after all, and to provide relevant information.
For the same reason, it seems odd to say that a book can be read.

Thus, adjectives such as *drinkable* and *readable* receive an interpretation of positive evaluation.

The same holds for middle verbs that can be explained using *diathesis*.

Diathesis is expressed in an active construction in which the agent is designated by the subject, however, the subject is affected by the action expressed by the verb.

Semantic features of middle verbs are expressed using reflexivity, reciprocity, detransitivisation, subject affectedness and spontaneous events.
Consider the following examples from Akan:

a. Aburo no a-fifi
   corn DET ASP-germinate
   ‘The corn has germinated.’

b. Dua no a-bu
   tree DET ASP-break
   ‘The tree has fallen.’

c. Sika no a-yera
   money DEF ASP-lose
   ‘The money is lost.’
This pragmatic principle may also explain why denominal adjectives in -ed such as *eyed* do not occur on their own, but in compounds only:

- blue-eyed
- red-faced
- right-handed
The adjectives in the left column are morphologically well-formed.

However, they violate the pragmatic Non-Redundancy Constraint.

It is expected that human beings have a face, and hence it does not seem to make much sense from a pragmatic point of view to say *My husband is faced*.

Hence the use of such adjectives is infelicitous (indicated here by the question mark) unless they are embedded in a compound.

If a man has a lot of hair we prefer to call him *a hairy man*, and *a haired man* sounds odd although it makes sense from the pragmatic point of view.
The crucial role of semantics in determining the syntactic valency of derived verbs can be illustrated by the formation of Dutch verbs by means of the prefix *be*-.

Morphology may be used to form obligatorily transitive verbs from verbs that are intransitive or optionally transitive.

In Dutch, the prefix *be*- is used for this purpose as shown below. These examples show that, whatever the syntactic valency of the input verb, the syntactic valency of the output verb should obligatorily be a transitive verb.
Lexical Conceptual Structure of deverbal *be*-verbs can be circumscribed as follows: ‘x completely affects y by executing the action expressed by the base verb’.

This means that the Predicate Argument Structure of such verbs always comprises two arguments.

Moreover, the resulting verbs are always telic verbs because the endpoint of the action is implied: the $y$-argument is completely affected, and thus the end of the action is implied.
We can now predict the syntactic valency of be-verbs on the basis of the following rule: ‘if a telic verb has a Patient-argument, this argument must always be expressed syntactically’.

This regularity is an example of a correspondence rule that specifies the interface between syntax and semantics.

Thus, the fact that these be-verbs are obligatorily transitive is fully predictable.
In sum, the effects of morphological operations on the syntactic valency of input words are primarily the effects of the semantic changes brought about by these operations.

If the semantic changes are minimal, the differences in syntactic valency between base word and derived word will also be minimal.
Consider the following list of English deverbal nouns in -er, subdivided into a number of semantic categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>baker, writer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal Agent</td>
<td>mower, pointer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>atomizer, blotter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencer</td>
<td>feeler, hearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>breather, disclaimer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locative</td>
<td>diner, sleeper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clearly, it is not the case that the suffix -er is used only to derive agent nouns.

So should we assume a number of different suffixes -er, each with a meaning of their own?

Well, there is certainly more than one suffix -er in English: there is also the comparative suffix -er, with a completely different meaning.

That is, there are at least two homophonous suffixes -er.

In order to interpret the variation in meaning for the deverbal suffix -er, another notion is more appropriate, that of polysemy.
We speak of polysemy when a morpheme or a word has more than one meaning, but with some systematic relation between these different meanings.

Consider the following meanings for the word *head*:

1. The top part of the body in humans and some other higher animals
2. Person (as in *dinner at 20 dollars a head*)
3. Leader

Actually, there are many more meanings for *head*, but these three suffice.
Meaning 1 is the primary meaning of this word.

Meaning 2 can be considered to be derived from this primary meaning through the semantic mechanism of **metonymy** in which someone or something is referred to by an associated item. In this example, the word *head* is used to denote the person who is the owner of the head.

In the third meaning, we speak of **metaphorical use**: just as a head in its literal sense governs the body to which it belongs, a human being may govern an institution of some sort (which can also be called a ‘body’).
Thus, these three different meanings of *head* can be related systematically in terms of general mechanisms of semantic interpretation, and we consider this a case of polysemy.

There are also systematic explanations for what one might call the polysemy of the suffix *-er*.

To begin with, the subject argument of the underlying verb may be:

- a human agent *(baker)*,
- a non-human/impersonal one *(pointer)*,
- an experiencer *(hearer)*.
Hence, the different interpretations correlate with the different semantic roles of the subject arguments of the base verbs.

In the case of *sleeper* something else is at stake. Here, the location (or space) of the action of sleeping is denoted.

This interpretation can be understood by means of the notion *domain shift*: one may go from one semantic domain to another related one, and thus derive new interpretations.
(Heine et al. 1991: 48), An example of such a cross-linguistically valid domain shift chain is:

PERSON > OBJECT > ACTIVITY > SPACE > TIME > QUALITY

In this chain, one might go from left to right or from one domain to the next.

For instance, the English word *reader*, which is a word for a person, can also be shifted to the domain of OBJECT, and be interpreted as a kind of patient: “collection of reading material”.

Similarly, the word *diner* that can denote a person who dines can also
The possibility of such domain shifts also explains the activity name *disclaimer* and the space or location name *sleeper*.

These kinds of domain shifts are examples of metaphorical and metonymical extensions.

Metaphorical operations conceptualize domains of cognition in terms of other usually less abstract domains.

The shift from PERSON to INSTRUMENT is an example of domain shift that one often finds in natural languages.
- This chain can be seen as a metaphorical one: the notion AGENT is transferred to the domain of inanimate material things that are conceived of as agents that perform a particular task.

- A locative interpretation (as in diner) looks more like metonymy: the name for the agent is transferred to the location of the action denoted by the base verb.

- Domain shifts occur cross linguistically.

- This is what should be the case since such interpretational chains are cognitive in nature, and hence applicable to different languages.
Note, moreover, that quite a number of such nouns have more than one interpretation.

The Dutch agent noun ‘sender’ can be interpreted as an agent noun denoting a human being, but also as a radio or TV channel (an instrument for transmitting signals).

If the instrument interpretation is the established one, as is the case for Dutch ‘opener’ (an instrument to open cans or bottles), the (human) agent interpretation can always be activated and used, as in
‘De opener van deze expositie’

“The opener of this exhibition”.

- The American English word *diner* for a certain type of restaurant can still be used for someone who dines.
- This means that we do not have to assume a list of different meanings for these deverbal suffixes.
- It is the individual complex words with these suffixes that show this semantic variation, and this variation follows from independently established principles of semantic interpretation.
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<th>Translation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>ir-ó</td>
<td>“writer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>hegyez-ő</td>
<td>“pencil sharpener”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>társalg-ó</td>
<td>“parlor”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Dutch (deverbal suffix -er)**

<table>
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<th>Translation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>schrijv-er</td>
<td>“writer” &lt; schrijf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>maai-er</td>
<td>“mower” &lt; maai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>miss-er</td>
<td>“failure” &lt; miss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variation in interpretation for different words of the same morphological type is also quite spectacular in the case of **DIMINUTIVES**.

Starting from the basic meaning SMALL, one may get to quite a number of interpretational types.

Cross-linguistically, the basic meanings of diminutives are those of “child” or “small”, two closely related meanings that relate to size.

The meaning component “child” extends into notions such as affection, sympathy, and pet, that is, there is often a meaning component of endearment involved.
Consider these examples from Dutch

- **Endearment:** kind "child" kind-je "small child, darling"

- **Small (size):** broek "trousers" broek-je "pants"

- **Feminity:** Geert "boy’s name" Geert-je "girl’s name"

- **Small (amount):** bier "beer" bier-tje "glass of beer"

- **Cheap:** auto "car" autoo-tje "inexpensive car, toy car"
Consider the following examples from Akan:

- **Member**    “asore-ba”    ‘church member’
- **Non-serious**    “ade-wa”    ‘a little thing’
- **Affection**    “dɔfo-wa”    ‘lover’
- **Admiration**    “aniedem-ba”    ‘a brave person’
- **Disdain**    “abomfia-wa”    ‘a despicable person’
- **Feminity**    “ɔhene-wa”    ‘female name’
• This second cluster of meanings might be subsumed under the notion ‘attitude’ or ‘evaluation’. Thus, diminutive morphology belongs to the semantic category of evaluative morphology.

• The use of diminutive morphology for the creation of female names probably reflects the idea that women are physically smaller than men.

• The different meanings of the diminutive can be related by conceiving of its semantics as a **radial category**.

• A radial category has one or more core meanings from which the other meanings derive through semantic extension mechanisms such as
Figure 9.1 is a reduced version of what Jurafsky (1996: 542) considers as the universal structure of the semantic category ‘diminutive’.
In many cases the use of a diminutive suffix has a strong pragmatic rationale, instead of just qualifying something as small.

Therefore, Dressler and Barberesi (1994) interpret the evaluative nature of the diminutive by considering the pragmatic feature [non-serious] as its basic meaning.

It is often used in ‘motherese’, the language addressed to small children.
This is the kind of euphemistic use of the diminutive that also occurs when a Dutch speaker asks:

“Hebt U nog een minuutje voor me”.

“Do you have a minute-DIM for me?”.

You can be pretty sure that the conversation will take more than a minute.
Another pragmatic role for morphology is the use of honorifics that express different degrees of politeness.

It may also reflect the position in the social hierarchy of speaker and addressee.

In Japanese, for instance, the predicate of a subject receives a special honorific form if the speaker addresses a socially superior person.

A relatively simple example of the politeness use of the honorific suffix "-
(Harada 1976: 502):

Ame ga hut-ta  Ame ga huri-masi-ta

rain SUBJ fall-PAST  rain SUBJ fall-HONOR-PAST

“It rained”  “It rained” (polite speech)"

These examples show that the interpretation and use of complex words is not only a matter of cognitive principles and mechanisms, but also has a pragmatic dimension.
A particular interpretation of a complex word may be the established one, as is often the case.

This is referred to as lexicalization.

It does not necessarily mean that such a word has become irregular, or that other interpretations are now impossible (recall the example of diner), but simply that a particular interpretation of a word has become part of the lexical norm of the language community involved.
CONCLUSION

➢ The semantic interpretation of complex words is governed by the general principle of compositionality.

➢ Correspondence rules specify relationships between formal structure and semantic interpretation of complex words.

➢ The semantic scope of morpho-syntactic properties may be larger than the word on which they are marked, as is the case for tense and mood properties.

➢ The semantic interpretation of a word may be further enriched by conceptualization rules.
Pragmatic principles, knowledge of the world and of the context in which a word is used must also be invoked to arrive at a proper interpretation and use of complex words.

The semantic interpretation of complex words and the semantic effects of morphological operations may have implications for the syntactic valency of complex words, since the syntactic valency of a word reflects its semantic properties.

Polysemy of affixes and of individual complex words is a pervasive phenomenon in the realm of complex words. It is the effect of semantic extension mechanisms such as metaphor and metonymy, and can be understood more generally in terms of domain shift chains.

The meaning contribution of a particular affix may be strongly pragmatic in nature, as is the case for diminutives and honorifics.