

9. Productivity

The Structure of Words (Ling 350)

Prof. Pentangelo

Fall 2025

Reading

- I can't emphasize enough how crucial it is that you actually read the entire chapter **before** coming to this class.
- You need to engage with the course content outside of class. We only meet once a week, and, apart from reading, there's no homework. You will forget *a lot* from week to week without some engagement.
- To succeed in this class, you need to **comprehend** what you read – not just in the textbook, but in the slides as well. I saw a lot of attempts to copy down stuff from the slides but in a way that made no sense and showed a total lack of understanding.
- When you don't understand something, you have to ask about it.

Finishing up from last week

- Refresher on trees
- How would we draw trees for:

basket

basketful

basket case

basketball

basketball court

basketball player



- Now let's do the final activity on the worksheet from last week.

Productivity

- What is productivity?

Formal Regularity

- In this context, what does “formal” mean?
- “Of a derivational process, the characteristic that the kind of base to which the process can apply can be relatively precisely specified. For example, the formation of verbs with the suffix *-en* is formally regular in that nearly all its bases are monosyllabic adjectives ending in obstruents (plosives and fricatives), e.g. *tough*, *fat*, *damp*.” (106)
- Is *-ness* formally regular?
- What kinds of bases does it take?

“The suffix *-ness* is [...] formally regular, in the sense that one can specify what sort of structure an adjective must have in order to be a possible base for it – namely, any structure whatever. That is, whatever adjective *-ness* is attached to, the result sounds like a possible noun, even though it may not be one that is conventionally used (e.g. *sensitiveness*, *pureness*, *longness*).” (93)

Semantic Regularity

- What does “semantic” mean?
- “A derivational process is semantically regular if the contribution that it makes to the meaning of the lexemes produced by it is uniform and consistent.” (95)
- Is the adverb-forming *-ly* semantically regular?
- What meaning does it add? quickly, slowly, intelligently, hastily, shoddily, casually
- How about *-able*? Is that semantically regular?
- What meaning does it add in these words?
 - That is a readable book.
 - That is a punishable offense.
 - He is an adorable dog.
 - This water is not drinkable.
 - This surface is paintable.

Formal and Semantic Regularity

- There can be a mismatch between these 2 types of regularity – some affixes are formally regular and semantically irregular.
- We've established that *-able* is semantically irregular. Is it formally irregular as well?
- *-able* is formally regular. It can attach to basically any transitive verb.
- To evaluate this, it can be helpful to make a chart.

What is a transitive verb?

	<i>-ion</i>	<i>-ment</i>
admit	☒	☐
commit	☒	☒
permit	☒	☐
transmit	☒	☐
submit	☒	☐
emit	☒	☐

Now do activity 1 on this week's sheet.

First, let's evaluate the formal regularity of *-ion*.

Now, let's evaluate the formal regularity of *-ment*.

What's more formally regular: *-ion* or *-ment*?

For next time

- Reread section 8.6 “Measuring productivity: the significance of neologisms” (pp.102–105) as well as all of chapter 9. There will be a quiz on these readings at the start of next week’s class.
- Come prepared to discuss.