

## How English Words are Formed: The Morphology of English

### **Morpheme**

A *morpheme* is the smallest unit or part of a word. Morphemes can be *free*, meaning they can stand alone (like bird and arch), or they can be *bound*, meaning that they need to be attached to another morpheme to make sense (like un- and -ly).

### **Root**

English words have one or more roots, which are the most basic forms of the word. They can be *free* or *bound*. Roots may be from Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Greek, or other languages from which English has borrowed words.

- Examples of *Greek roots* would be dem, phil, heli, graph, phon, tele, phob
- Examples of *Latin roots* would be aqua, optim, fort, temp, vid
- Examples of *Anglo-Saxon roots* would be speak, hand, eat, you, good, bad

### **Affixes:** Prefix, Infix, Suffix

- A **prefix** is added to the beginning of a root or stem, e.g. *pre*-fix, *ab*-normal, *uni*-brow
- A **suffix** is added to the end of a root or stem, e.g. geo-log-*y*, kind-*ness*, bronch-*itis*
- An **infix** is adding to the middle of a word, connecting two other morphemes., e.g. public-*a*-tion

### **Stem**

Roots are modified (changed) by adding affixes to them. When a root and an affix form a word which can be further modified (e.g. *pre*-fix can become *pre*-fix-*es*) the root and affix to which the new affix is added is called the stem of the word.

*Root + affix = Stem* (if the word can be modified by adding more affixes)  
Kind + ness (stem) + es (suffix)

### **Allomorphs**

Allomorphs are alternate forms of a morpheme whose forms are predictable based on where they occur in a word.

Examples:

- English regular plural '-s' vs '-es' (s ~z~iz)
- Greek root 'tongue' or 'language' = gloss or glott, e.g. glossary, glottis, panglossia, glottal, polyglot