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Morphologic Segmentation Linearity in Aesop's Fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf"

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" through Morphologic Segmentation Linearity Analysis (MSLA) to uncover its morphemic structure and textual organization. The analysis identifies 91 lexical morphemes, consisting of 55 simple forms (roots), 1 compound form, and 35 complex forms (roots with affixation). In addition, 125 grammatical morphemes are found: 40 determiners, 22 prepositions, 16 conjunctions, 28 pronouns, 6 infinitive markers, and 13 auxiliaries. The results show that the fable's narrative adheres to a clear pattern of morphologic segmentation linearity, in which the orderly arrangement of lexical and grammatical morphemes contributes to textual clarity, cohesion, and didactic force. The study recommends using the fable as a resource for teaching morphology and grammar, extending similar analyses to other texts, and exploring digital tools for automated morpheme segmentation in language and literary studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Morphology, the study of the internal structure of words and the rules of word formation, is central to understanding how words are created, how they vary, and how they relate to one another in actual language use. It plays a crucial role in both first and second language acquisition, because awareness of morphological patterns helps learners expand their vocabulary and comprehend complex word forms (Haspelmath & Sims, 2010; Carlisle et al., 2013; Amirjalili & Jabbari, 2018). For example, knowing that the suffix –er added to a verb such as teach yields the noun teacher enables learners to infer the meanings of other morphologically related words. Students can more effectively extend their vocabularies by recognizing patterns in word creation, which deepens their understanding of language structure.

Morphologic Segmentation Linearity Analysis (MSLA) examines how the smallest meaningful units in words—roots, prefixes, and suffixes—are segmented and ordered, and how this linear order supports word recognition and comprehension (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; de la Pena, 2019). MSLA focuses on the sequence and impact of morphemes, the smallest meaningful units within words. By evaluating morpheme order and interactions, researchers can gain insight into the intended message and its effectiveness (Quebec, 2022; Magdato, 2024). Building on recent applications of MSLA in poetry and other fables, this study applies the approach to Aesop's "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" to investigate how the linear arrangement of morphemes shapes narrative structure, linguistic clarity, and moral impact.

The chosen text for this study, "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf," a classic fable by Aesop, imparts valuable lessons on honesty and credibility. This story teaches that our actions have consequences and that we should consider the implications before doing something that could damage others' trust. Aesop's fables, including "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf," have been integral to cultural education for centuries, imparting simple yet profound moral teachings that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. The moral of every tale is the life lesson it teaches, frequently expressed openly at the end of the story. Fables can be effective in the ESL classroom because of their simplicity and ability to captivate readers regardless of cultural background.

Using Morphologic Segmentation Linearity Analysis to examine "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" allows for a deeper understanding of the linguistic elements that construct the narrative. This analysis delves into the language structure, style, and the fable's didactic function, revealing how word formation contributes to the storytelling process and the conveyance of the fable's

moral (Spencer, 1991; Järvikivi & Niemi, 1999). By conducting a detailed segmentation and linearity analysis of the morphological structure of words within the fable, we aim to uncover patterns and linguistic elements that enhance the fable's storytelling and moral delivery (Katamba, 1993; Magdato, 2024). This analysis is significant because it provides detailed understanding of how language is used to construct narratives and impart lessons, revealing how specific word choices and structures influence the reader's perception and the overall effectiveness of the fable's moral (Anderson, 1992; Quebec, 2022).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study conducts a linguistic analysis of the morphological segmentation linearity in the textuality of Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf." It specifically emphasizes the examination of the lexical and grammatical morphemes present in each word of the fable.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This study investigates the morphologic segmentation linearity exhibited in the narrative structure of Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf." The concept of linear grammar underpins this analysis. This assertion is grounded in Corder's theory of linear grammar, which conceptualizes sentences in a language as a "string" of grammatical categories, akin to beads on a necklace, or as a sequence of "slots" to be occupied by words belonging to the appropriate grammatical category (Corder, 1967). Consequently, this model of linguistic description is referred to as "slot-and-filler grammar" because it regards the structure of a sentence as a linear sequence. This approach aligns with Noam Chomsky's Linear Bounded Automata (LBA) theory (Chomsky, 1956, 1957), which offers a formal framework for analyzing linguistic structures.

Understanding Sentence Structure and Morphological Segmentation

Studying language complexity necessitates analyzing sentence structure, word forms, and their meanings. While grammar plays a crucial role in clear communication (Ervin-Tripp, 1972), morphology, the study of word formation, is equally important. Every language possesses a set of fundamental words, known as morphemes, which can be combined to create new words with distinct meanings (Bauer, 2020). Sentence clarity relies on meticulous arrangement, utilizing syntactic and morphological knowledge (Radford, 2011). Marslen-Wilson and Welsh (1978) suggest that listeners utilize lexical, syntactic, morphological, and phonological information during speech processing to anticipate word boundaries and their meanings. Recognizing a word before its completion allows listeners to predict the remaining sounds and the following word.

Morphological Segmentation Linearity in Language Research

The concept of morphological segmentation linearity has garnered significant attention in linguistics. De la Pena (2019) emphasizes the importance of examining the smallest units of meaning and sound in language, highlighting the need for morphological and phonological analysis. This foundational work underscores the significance of understanding morphemes and their linear arrangement for thorough linguistic analysis, paving the way for more specific studies on morphological segmentation.

Exploring Linearity in Literary Texts

Magdato's (2024) recent work explored how morphological segmentation linearity contributes to understanding the complexities of literary texts, focusing on Aesop's fable "The Farmer and the Snake." This analysis demonstrates how the sequential arrangement of morphemes shapes the overall meaning and interpretation of the text. Similarly, Quebec (2022) examined how linearity plays a role in preserving the integrity of poetic structures and enhancing reader comprehension in Jose Garcia Villa's "PROEM." These studies showcase the broader applicability of morphological linearity in analyzing diverse literary genres.

Building on Existing Knowledge

These studies collectively highlight the significance of morphological segmentation linearity in language processing and literary analysis. They provide a strong foundation for investigating the morphological structures present in Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf." The present study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on morphological segmentation and its impact on language comprehension by analyzing the linearity of morphemes within the fable.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive–structural approach to investigate morphologic segmentation linearity in Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf." Descriptive analysis is used to identify and classify the morphemes in the text, while structural analysis examines how their combinations contribute to the fable's overall meaning and narrative organization (Karpati, 2022; Saleh, 2023; Loeb et al., 2017; Haspelmath & Sims, 2010).

Descriptive analysis, as defined by Karpati (2022), involves the systematic representation of phonemes, allophones, and their transformations into morphemes. The focus is on identifying and describing the morphological components within the text, examining linguistic patterns and structures contributing to its meaning and effectiveness (Loeb et al., 2017; De la Pena, 2019).

Structural analysis, complementing the descriptive analysis, delves deeper into the internal structure of words and their contribution to the overall meaning of the fable. This method aligns with the principles of Structuralism, which posits that form defines content. By breaking down words into their constituent morphemes—root, prefix, and suffix—we uncover the underlying structures that shape the fable's message. This approach resonates with recent work by Haspelmath (2010) emphasizing the role of morphology in language processing and the significance of morpheme order for meaning.

Data Source

Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" serves as the primary data source. The text contains 15 sentences and a total of 276 words to be analyzed. The fable is presented below:

A Shepherd Boy tended his master's Sheep near a dark forest not far from the village. Soon he found life in the pasture very dull. All he could do to amuse himself was to talk to his dog or play on his shepherd's pipe. One day as he sat watching the Sheep and the quiet forest, and thinking what he would do should he see a Wolf, he thought of a plan to amuse himself. His Master had told him to call for help should a Wolf attack the flock, and the Villagers would drive it away. So now, though he had not seen anything that even looked like a Wolf, he ran toward the village shouting at the top of his voice, "Wolf! Wolf!" As he expected, the Villagers who heard the cry dropped their work and ran in great excitement to the pasture. But when they got there, they found the Boy doubled up with laughter at the trick he had played on them. A few days later the Shepherd Boy again shouted, "Wolf! Wolf!" Again, the Villagers ran to help him, only to be laughed at again. Then one evening as the sun was setting behind the forest and the shadows were creeping out over the pasture; a Wolf really did spring from the underbrush and fall upon the Sheep. In terror the Boy ran toward the village shouting "Wolf! Wolf!" But though the Villagers heard the cry, they did not run to help him as they had before. "He cannot fool us again," they said. The Wolf killed a great many of the Boy's sheep and then slipped away into the forest.

The moral of the story is that if you constantly lie or deceive others, they will refuse to believe you, even if you are saying the truth. This story highlights the value of honesty and the consequences of losing trust.

Analytical Framework

Corder's Theory of Linear Grammar. Corder (1967) conceptualizes sentences as strings of grammatical categories, which helps us understand how morphemes are organized linearly to create meaning.

Affixation Structuration. As a core concept in morphology, affixation involves adding prefixes, suffixes, infixes, or circumfixes to a base word, influencing its meaning or grammatical function (Bauer, 2020). Spencer (1991) highlights affixation as a crucial process in creating new words and modifying existing ones within morphological theory.

Lexical Morphemes Analysis. Spencer (2019) outlines a framework for analyzing lexical morphemes, considering their grammatical function (e.g., noun, verb), internal structure (simple, complex, compound), root form, and any affixation that alters their meaning. The lexical morphemes are identified and analyzed according to their word class, form, root, and affixation:

1. Function: Identified based on how the morpheme is used in the text, such as noun, adjective, verb, or adverb.
2. Form: Categorized as simple, compound, or complex.
3. Root: The base word that can stand alone without affixes.
4. Affixation: Affixes added at the beginning, middle, or end of the root to change its meaning.

Grammatical Morphemes Analysis. The grammatical morphemes are also identified and analyzed according to their constituents and functions in the sentence. Berkovits (2018) highlights how grammatical morphemes express relationships between lexical morphemes, which can include function words such as pronouns, prepositions, determiners, conjunctions, and articles. These are identified based on their constituents and functions within the sentence structure.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lexical Morphemes: Content Words

A lexical morpheme is a morpheme that conveys the primary meaning of a word, encompassing categories such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (Ashcraft, 2022). These morphemes are crucial for understanding the fundamental meaning and central message of a word inside a sentence. The morphologic segmentation analysis of Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" reveals a total of 91 lexical morphemes distributed across the narrative.

The fable includes simple forms (e.g., boy, sheep, forest, village, plan), complex forms with inflectional or derivational affixes (e.g., tended, shepherd's, villagers, excitement, shadows), and one compound form (underbrush). These lexical items help construct the narrative world, encode actions and qualities, and support the fable's didactic message about honesty and trust.

Simple Forms

Simple forms are composed of a single root morpheme. The nouns shepherd, boy, master, help, sheep, forest, village, life, pasture, dog, pipe, day, wolf, plan, flock, top, voice, cry, work, trick, sun, and terror all appear in their simple forms, directly representing their root meanings without any additional affixes.

Simple verbs found in the text include help, do, amuse, talk, play, see, call, attack, drive, spring, fall, run, and fool. These verbs appear in their base form, indicating actions without additional morphological complexity.

Simple adjectives like dark, far, dull, quiet, great, few, and many are used to describe the state or quality of nouns, while simple adverbs such as soon, very, so, now, even, away, there, up, again, only, then, out, and before modify the actions of verbs or the attributes of adjectives and other adverbs.

Complex Forms

Complex forms are created by adding affixes to root morphemes, including derivational and inflectional morphemes. Complex nouns include shepherd's, master's, and boy's, which include the possessive suffix 's; villagers, which combines the root village with the suffixes -er and -s; excitement, derived from excite with the suffix -ment; laughter, from laugh with the suffix -ter; and days, which is the plural form of day.

The complex verbs in the text can be classified into regular and irregular verbs. Regular verbs follow a predictable pattern when forming the past tense or present participle by adding standard suffixes such as -ed, -d, and -ing. The verbs doubled, played, laughed, tended, looked, expected, dropped, shouted, killed, and slipped are complex because they are inflected with the past tense affix -d or -ed (e.g., doubled = double + -ed). These verb forms express actions that took place in the past.

Similarly, verbs such as watching, thinking, shouting, setting, and creeping are formed by adding an -ing affix to their base form (watch, think, shout, set, creep), denoting a continuous action and creating a distinct verb form from the simple present tense.

Irregular verbs, on the other hand, are complex in form but do not follow a rule of affixation and must be memorized. These verbs include found (from find), sat (from sit), thought (from think), told (from tell), seen (from see), ran (from run), heard (from hear), got (from get), and said (from say). The irregular forms often involve internal vowel changes or entirely different root forms, as seen in found from find and thought from think. Regular and irregular verbs both demonstrate the complexity of English morphology and the importance of understanding verb formation patterns.

Compound Forms

Compound forms are composed of two or more free morphemes that together form a single lexical unit. The fable contains one compound form: underbrush, which combines the free morphemes under and brush to denote the dense vegetation beneath trees in a forest.

Grammatical Morphemes: Function Words

In addition to the 91 lexical morphemes, the text contains 125 grammatical morphemes. Grammatical morphemes are morphemes that express grammatical relationships, including determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, infinitive markers, and auxiliaries (Berkovits, 2018).

Determiners (40). Determiners are words that precede and modify nouns, specifying or determining them. Examples include the definite article the, the indefinite articles a and an, demonstratives like this and that, and possessive determiners such as his, her, and their.

Prepositions (22). Prepositions show relationships between nouns and other elements in the sentence. Prepositions identified in the text include near, in, to, on, at, from, of, out, and into, among others. These words establish spatial, temporal, and other relationships crucial to understanding the narrative.

Conjunctions (16). Conjunctions link words, phrases, and clauses. Examples found in the fable include and, but, or, if, though, as, and when. These connective words provide coherence to the narrative structure and help readers follow the sequence of events.

Pronouns (28). Pronouns replace nouns and include personal pronouns (he, she, it, they), relative pronouns (who, which, that), and interrogative pronouns (what, who). They maintain cohesion by referring back to nouns previously mentioned.

Infinitive Markers (6). The infinitive marker to appears in verb phrases such as to call, to help, and to amuse, indicating the base form of verbs.

Auxiliaries (13). Auxiliary verbs (be, have, do) combine with main verbs to express tense, aspect, or modality. These include forms such as is, was, have, had, do, and did.

Morphologic Segmentation Linearity

The morphologic segmentation linearity exhibited in "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" demonstrates a clear, organized pattern in which lexical and grammatical morphemes work together to create narrative coherence. The linear arrangement of morphemes—from simple roots to complex inflected and derivational forms—contributes to the fable's clarity and effectiveness in conveying its moral lesson.

The consistent use of simple lexical items mixed with complex verbal forms creates a rhythm that supports both readability and comprehension. For example, the repetition of the structure "Wolf! Wolf!" (a simple lexical morpheme repeated) in combination with past-tense verbs (ran, shouted, heard) reinforces the urgency and deception central to the narrative. The grammatical morphemes, particularly pronouns and conjunctions, maintain textual cohesion throughout the story, allowing readers to follow the sequence of events logically.

The fable's adherence to morphologic segmentation linearity is evident in how the narrator progressively introduces complexity through affixation. Early in the text, predominantly simple forms establish the setting (dark forest, quiet village, pasture). As the narrative develops, more complex verb forms emerge to convey increasing action and emotional intensity (doubled up with laughter, creeping out over the pasture, slipped away). This progression supports the fable's didactic function—moving from a calm introduction to escalating deception and its ultimate consequences.

CONCLUSION

The morphologic segmentation linearity analysis of Aesop's fable "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" reveals a total of 91 lexical morphemes: 55 simple forms (roots), 1 compound form, and 35 complex forms involving roots with affixation. The text also contains 125 grammatical morphemes, including 40 determiners, 22 prepositions, 16 conjunctions, 28 pronouns, 6 infinitive markers, and 13 auxiliaries. Taken together, these morphemic elements form a clear linear pattern that supports the narrative's coherence and reinforces its moral lesson on the consequences of dishonesty and the erosion of trust.

The findings indicate that "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" is an effective model text for illustrating how morphemes interact to create meaning in both linguistic analysis and classroom practice. The fable's deliberate arrangement of simple and complex morphological forms enhances its didactic power, making the moral lesson more memorable and impactful. The study demonstrates that morphologic segmentation linearity analysis is a valuable tool for understanding not only the structure of language but also its role in shaping narrative meaning and rhetorical effectiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Pedagogical Integration. Integrate "The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf" into linguistics and grammar courses to demonstrate how lexical and grammatical morphemes work together to convey meaning and construct narrative.
2. Analytical Model. Use the study's structured procedure as a model for teaching morphological analysis and narrative techniques in literature and ESL classrooms, helping students understand the relationship between language form and meaning.
3. Extended Research. Extend similar morphologic segmentation linearity analyses to other fables, poems, and literary texts, exploring how different genres employ morphological patterns to achieve rhetorical goals.
4. Digital Tools Development. Support the development of digital tools and software for automated morpheme segmentation and analysis, which could enhance both research capabilities and educational applications in linguistics.
5. Multilingual Comparison. Apply this analytical framework to translations of Aesop's fables in other languages, investigating how morphological segmentation linearity varies across linguistic systems and how this affects translation quality and moral clarity.

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