

HO CHI MINH CITY UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

# AN OUTLINE OF MORPHOLOGY

by

Nguyen Hoa Lac

Lecturer in English



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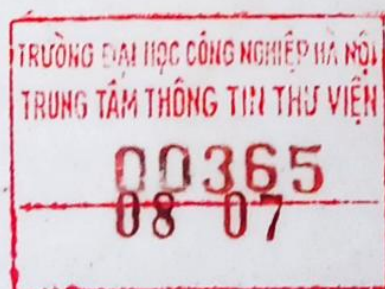


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**NHÀ XUẤT BẢN TP. HỒ CHÍ MINH**



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# Chapter I

## An Introduction to Morphology

### I. WHAT IS LANGUAGE ?

Edward Sapir, the great philologist, defined language as "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols" (*Sapir, Language, P.7*).

The phrase "method of communicating ideas" suggests that communication is the primary function of language.

Besides, the qualification "purely human and non-instinctive" illustrates the social nature of language.

The definition also indicates the important characteristic of language, the system of symbols. This system consists of different levels from sound systems to meaning. The various levels are shown in the following chart.

Semantic level	deals with meaning
Syntactic level	deals with sentence structure
Morphological level	deals with word-structure
Phonology (or phonemics)	deals with sound systems

These levels were assumed to be ordered in a hierarchy with phonology at the bottom and semantics at the top.



Linguistics, the science of language, studies not only sounds and word-structures, but also the arrangement of words in the formation of utterances as well. Language, thus, consists of four constituent parts : the phonological system, the morphological system, the syntactic system and the semantic system.

Only the unity of these parts forms a language.

## II. STRUCTURALISM AND MORPHOLOGY

1. When **structuralism** was in its prime, especially between 1940 and 1960, the study of morphology occupied centre stage. Many major structuralists investigated issues in the theory of word-structure (Bloomfield ; Harris ; Hockett...). Nida's course-book entitled *Morphology*, which was published in 1946, codified structuralist theory and practice. It introduced generations of linguists to the descriptive analysis of words.

The structuralists recognized that words may have intricate internal structures. Traditional linguistics had treated the word as the basic unit of grammatical theory and lexicography, whereas American structuralists showed that words are analysable in terms of morphemes. These are the smallest units of meaning and grammatical function. Previously, word-structure had been treated together with sentence-structure under grammar. (F. Katamba, p.4-5).

2. In **structuralism** grammar covers both morphology and syntax, whereas in **generative linguistics** the term grammar is employed in a much wider sense. It covers not only morphology and syntax, but also semantics, lexicon and phonology. Hence, there are rules of grammar in every linguistic module. Phonological rules, morphological rules, syntactic rules and semantic rules are all regarded as rules of grammar.



3. **Morphology** is the study and description of word-structure. It also studies word-formation.

Morphology is a Greek term : Morpho (Morphe means form) and logy (logos means study). Hence, morphology is the study of form. This term is taken from biology.

In linguistics, morphology, according to Eugene A Nida, is the study of morphemes and their arrangements in forming words.

**Syntax** is the study of the arrangement of words into larger units such as phrases, sentences, sentence groups.

Such arrangements are also vital parts of the system of communicating meanings.

### **III. GENERATIVE GRAMMAR AND MORPHOLOGY :**

Generative grammar (1957) was initiated by Noam Chomsky (1928...). It has been the dominant school of linguistics, after structural linguistics, in the second half of this century.

Though the review of the theory is necessary, here we focus our attention on the place of morphology in generative grammar.

After the time when structuralism peaked in the 1950s, morphology was at first eclipsed when generative grammar came on the scene. Generative grammarians rejected the validity of the separate morphological module.

From the point of view of advancing our understanding of word structure, this stance was unfortunate. The study of word-structure was in the shadows for more than a decade.

Morphology did not re-emerge from oblivion until the mid - 1970s.

# AN OUTLINE OF MORPHOLOGY

*Nguyễn Hòa Lạc*

Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản :  
TRẦN ĐÌNH VIỆT

Biên tập : NGUYỄN VIỆT CÔNG  
Sửa bản in : PHÚC ĐỒNG  
Bìa : TÙNG HẢI

**NIÀ XUẤT BẢN THÀNH PHỐ HỒ CHÍ MINH**  
**62 NGUYỄN THỊ MINH KHAI - Q.1**

**ĐT : 8225340 – 8296764 – 8220405 – 8222726 – 8296713 – 8223637**  
**FAX : 84.8.298540**

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