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## Formation Processes in O. Henry's "The Gift of the Magi": A Morphological Analysis

Rizfa Fadilla Kurniasih<sup>1</sup>✉, Fani Indrawan<sup>2</sup>

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Indonesia

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### Abstract

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This study aims to identify and analyze the types of word formation processes found in O. Henry's short story "The Gift of the Magi."

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method based on Yule's (2010) word formation theory. The data consists of words collected from all paragraphs of the short story. Each identified word is analyzed based on its morphological process using Yule's framework, supported by the Online Etymology Dictionary and the Cambridge Dictionary to trace the origin and determine the word class. The results show that there are four types of word formation processes found in the short story, namely borrowing (16 words), compounding (20 words), derivation (22 words), and double processes (2 words). Based on these findings, derivation was identified as the most dominant type of word formation process used in "The Gift of the Magi." The results of this study show that morphological processes play an important role in enriching meaning and lexical variation, especially in English literature.

## INTRODUCTION

Words are one of the most essential components of a language. Through words, individuals can convey ideas, emotions, and specific intentions to others. In linguistics, words are closely related to the field of morphology, which is a branch of linguistics that studies the structure of words and how they are formed from the smallest units called morphemes (Katamba, 1993). The study of morphology is also inseparable from the aspect of word formation, which explores how the smallest linguistic elements combine to create new words and produce new meanings (Plag, 2003). Therefore, the study of morphology is very important in understanding vocabulary development and how language adapts and enriches over time.

Morphology often has significant relevance in the study of classical literature, as literary works often serve as a medium for creativity in the author's choice of words. Through unique lexical choices, authors not only tell a story but also create certain nuances that can influence the reader's emotions. One literary work rich in linguistic phenomena is the classic short story "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry. In this short story, the use of vocabulary shows a strong connection to the study of morphology, especially in terms of word formation.

The process of word formation cannot be separated from Yule's theory in his book *The Study of Language* (2010), in which he explains the various mechanisms of word formation used by speakers to create new vocabulary. According to Yule (2010), there are ten types of word formation processes, including coinage, borrowing, compounding, blending, clipping, back-formation, conversion, acronyms, derivation, and multiple processes. These processes show that language evolves over time and adapts to communication needs and social and cultural contexts. Therefore, word usage does not only depend on the linguistic system itself, but is also closely related to social conditions, cultural contexts, and linguistic innovations created by speakers.

In line with Yule's perspective, a number of researchers have conducted studies analyzing word formation processes in various contexts. Previous researchers have applied studies on word formation processes to various objects, such as social media, digital applications, websites, and film scripts (Arissty, 2018; Kalukar et al., 2023; Kamal et al., 2023; Ratna & Kepirianto, 2021; Indrian, 2022; Devany & Sopha, 2024; Hikmah et al., 2024). This shows that the process of word formation has a broad scope and is relevant to explore in various linguistic and media contexts.

However, research on word formation processes in classical literature remains relatively limited. Most previous studies tend to focus on digital media or film scripts. In fact, classical literary works have great potential to be analyzed through the framework of word formation processes, as they exhibit a rich vocabulary and complex linguistic structures. Therefore, this study is important to fill the gap in morphological research within literature the field of literature and to reaffirm that classical works can serve as valuable research objects, particularly in the area of morphology.

Based on this background, the present study focuses on the morphological analysis of word formation processes in the short story “The Gift of the Magi”. The objectives of this research are (1) to identify the types of word formation processes that appear in the text, and (2) to determine which type of word formation process appears most frequently and dominates in “The Gift of the Magi”. It is expected that this study will contribute to linguistic research, particularly in the field of morphology, as well as enrich the study of language in classical literature.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Morphology

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that studies the structure of word formation. This field is closely related to how the internal structure of words determines their meaning and grammatical function in a language (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2005). In addition, morphology studies the smallest meaningful components in language, called morphemes (Seo, 2022). Morphemes are the basis for the formation of words, phrases, and more complex language structures, because each word basically consists of a combination of morphemes that produce a specific meaning (Bauer, 2003).

In the field of morphology, word production focuses on the methods of forming new words in a language. This process includes the insertion of affixes, such as prefixes, infixes, and suffixes, as well as other mechanisms such as reduplication. Understanding these processes is important because it shows that a language can develop and adapt to the communicative needs of its speakers. Morphology itself is a broad linguistic branch that covers various aspects of word structure, meaning, and grammatical function. Among its many subfields in morphology, the study of word formation processes holds an important role in understanding how new words are created, how meanings evolve, and how linguistic creativity manifests within a language, as explained in Yule's (2010) theory.

## **Yule's Word Formation Theory**

Word development is an interesting aspect of language because it involves the use of new words, which in turn produce new meanings. Word formation does not occur randomly, but follows certain patterns found in various languages (Yule, 2010). These patterns are known as word formation processes. Through these processes, a language can adapt to the communication needs of its speakers while enriching the vocabulary of that language. Several main categories of word formation processes, as proposed by Yule (2010) in his book, include the following: (1) Coinage, or the invention of entirely new words, for example, brand names that later become common words; (2) borrowing, or the adoption of words from other languages; (3) compounding, or the combination of two root words into a single new form; (4) blending, or the merging of parts of two words; (5) clipping, or the shortening of a word; (6) backformation, or the creation of a new word by removing an affix; (7) conversion, or changing the grammatical category of a word without altering its form; (8) acronyms, or abbreviations that are pronounced as words; (9) derivation, which involves the addition of affixes such as prefixes and suffixes; and (10) multiple processes, when a word is formed through a combination of more than one mechanism.”

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used qualitative descriptive methods to explore the word formation process found in O. Henry's short story “The Gift of the Magi”. According to Bogdan & Bilken (1992), the descriptive qualitative method is a data collection technique that involves words or sentences, which can also be in the form of images, rather than numbers. Wibowo (2025) also suggests that the descriptive qualitative method is used to describe or explain phenomena that occur naturally without interference or manipulation of the variables being studied.

The data source was collected from short story downloaded from an American English website, accessed on October 6, 2025. The data analyzed consisted of words that showed the occurrence of word formation processes found in the text. After the data was collected, the researcher identified and analyzed the words to determine the type of word formation process based on Yule's (2010) theory. In addition, the researcher also used the Online Etymology Dictionary to trace the origins or historical background of the words and the Cambridge Dictionary to identify the word class of each item analyzed. The next step was to present the analysis results in a table. This table aims to provide a clearer

overview of the types and dominance of word formation processes found in the short story “The Gift of the Magi.”

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides the findings and discussion of the analysis of data collected from the short story “The Gift of the Magi”. The research findings are presented based on the types of word formation processes found in the text, followed by a discussion explaining how these word formation processes occur in the words in the text.

**Table 1. The Types of Word Formation Processes in “The Gift of the Magi”**

No	Types of Word Formation	Total
1.	Coinage	0
2.	Borrowing	16
3.	Compounding	20
4.	Blending	0
5.	Clipping	0
6.	Backformation	0
7.	Conversion	0
8.	Acronyms	0
9.	Derivation	22
10.	Multiple processes	2

### Borrowing

English has frequently borrowed and adopted words from other languages throughout its history. This phenomenon is not only evident in everyday usage but is also reflected in literary works such as “The Gift of the Magi”. Some examples of words that demonstrate the borrowing process in the text include:

- Magi (Latin *magos*)
- Electric (Modern Latin *electricus*)
- Jewel (Old France *jouel*)
- Cent (Latin *centum*)
- Watch (Old English *wæccan*)

The word "Magi" comes from the Latin word *magos*, which means wise man or wizard. Meanwhile, "Electric" comes from the Latin word *electricus*, which describes phenomena related to electricity or electric charges generated when an object is rubbed and attracts light materials. The word "Jewel" comes from the Old French word *jouel*, which means a valuable object that has emotional and material value. In addition, "Cent" comes from the Latin word *centum*, which means one hundred, while "Watch" comes from the Old English word *wæccan*, which means the act of keeping awake or being alert.

Based on the results of the identification, these five words fall into the category of borrowing, which refer to words adopted from other languages and then adapted into English. Borrowing generally retain similarities to their original language before undergoing modification in English. These five words clearly demonstrate the strong historical and cultural influences embedded in the language.

However, it is important to understand that borrowing is a word formation process that involves linguistic processes related to the adoption of words from other languages. Unlike etymology, which focuses on the origin and historical development of words, the analysis of borrowing in the context of word formation emphasizes the process of adoption and adaptation from the source language to the target language.

### **Compounding**

The formation of new words in English is also inseparable from the combination of words, which in morphological studies is known as compounding. This process involves combining two or more base words (free morphemes) to form a new word with a new meaning. Examples of such words found in the short story "The Gift of the Magi" are as follows:

- Letter-box (*noun*)
- Cold-eyed (adjective)
- Waterfall (noun)
- Large-hearted (adjective)
- Schoolboy (noun)

The word "letter-box" comes from two root words: *letter* (noun), which means a written message, and *box* (noun), which means a container or box. When these two words are combined, they form a new word that means a container used to receive or send letters. Meanwhile, "cold-eyed" is formed from *cold* (adjective), which refers to low temperature or lack of emotion, and *eyed* (noun), which refers to the way someone looks or the expression in their eyes. When combined, these two words produce a new meaning that describes someone with a sharp or cold gaze. The word "waterfall" comes from *water* (noun), which means a flowing liquid, and *fall* (verb), which describes a downward movement or a drop from a height. When combined, the two words form a new meaning: a stream of water falling from a high place, such as a slope or cliff. In addition, "Large-hearted" is formed from the combination of *large* (adjective), which means size, and *hearted* (noun), which is derived from heart, referring to a person who has a certain trait or disposition. This combination produces a new meaning a generous or kind-hearted person.

The word "schoolboy" comes from *school* (noun), which means a place of learning or educational institution, and *boy* (noun), which means a male child. When combined, they form a new meaning: a male child who attends school or is part of a school environment, such as a student.

Based on analysis, the five words above can be classified as examples of compounding, namely the formation of words through the combination of two root words. This process not only produces new forms and meanings but can also cause changes in the word class of the original components. Such changes indicate that compound word formation is not only structural but also semantic and syntactic. In other words, some compound words do not always retain their original word class but can adapt according to their function and usage.

### Derivation

In English, particularly in word formation, derivation is a process that occurs when a base form undergoes the addition of an affix, either at the beginning of the word, known as a prefix, or at the end, known as a suffix. Some examples of derivational words found in the text "The Gift of the Magi" involve the use of suffixes, such as the following words:

- Careful *adjective* (Care *noun* + suffix *ful*)
- Slowly *adverb* (Slow *adjective* + suffix *ly*)
- Important *adjective* (Import *verb* + suffix *ant*)
- Direction *noun* (Direct *verb* + suffix *ion*)
- Beautiful *adjective* (Beauty *noun* + *ful*)

The word "Careful" comes from the root word *care* (noun) with the addition of the suffix *-ful*. The combination of the root word and the suffix produce an adjective with a new meaning, referring to a person's attitude of avoiding mistakes or danger by thinking or acting carefully. Meanwhile, the word "Slowly" comes from the root word *slow* (adjective) with the addition of the suffix *-ly*. This combination produces an adverb that describes the manner or speed at which an action is performed. The word "Important," on the other hand, comes from the base word *import* (verb) with the suffix *-ant*, forming an adjective that conveys the meaning of something that has a significant influence or high priority in a particular situation. In addition, the word "Direction" comes from the root word *direct* (verb) with the suffix *-ion*. The combination of the root word and suffix produces a noun that refers to instructions in situations involving direction, action, or procedure. Meanwhile, the word "Beautiful" comes from the base word *beauty* (noun) with the suffix

*-ful*. The combination of the root word and suffix forms an adjective that expresses the perception of a person's physical beauty.

Based on analysis, these five words show changes in both meaning and word class due to the addition or combination of suffixes, which function as a means of derivation in English morphology. This process not only changes the form and class of words, but also expands their meaning and function in sentences. This phenomenon shows that derivation is an essential process in the word formation system, which allows for more complex and flexible expression in language use.

### **Multiple Processes**

In English morphology, the phenomenon in which a word undergoes more than one process either sequentially or simultaneously is called multiple processes. This process involves a combination of derivation, inflection, compounding, and other word formation processes. The findings of multiple processes in the short story “The Gift of the Magi” are as follows;

- Furnished rooms (Furnish + derivation suffix *-ed*, conversion verb to adjective, and room + inflection suffix *-s*)
- Looking-glass (Look + derivation suffix *-ing*, conversion verb to modifier, and compounding glass)

The phrase “Furnished rooms” is derived from the base word *furnish* (verb), which means to equip or provide furniture. The first process it undergoes is derivation, through the addition of the suffix *-ed*, forming the participle furnished, which functions as an adjective in this phrase. The second process is conversion, as the verb furnish changes its function to an adjective (furnished) to modify rooms, giving it a new meaning “equipped with furniture.” Meanwhile, the word rooms comes from the base word *room* (noun) and undergoes an inflectional process with the addition of the suffix *-s* to indicate the plural form. These two words combine to form a noun phrase with the structure adjective + noun. On the other hand, the word “Looking-glass” comes from the base word *look* (verb), which first undergoes a derivational process through the addition of the suffix *-ing*, forming the present participle looking. Then, looking undergoes a second process, conversion, functioning as a modifier within a compound noun rather than as an active verb. Therefore, “Looking-glass” as a whole is the result of compounding, resulting a new noun.

Based on the results of the identification, these two phrases show that word formation in English often involves multiple processes, a combination of more than one

type of morphological process that occurs simultaneously or sequentially. These processes include derivation, inflection, conversion, and compounding, which collectively create new meanings and functions in usage. This phenomenon reflects the complexity and flexibility of the English morphological system in expressing a rich range of meanings, both structurally and semantically. In the short story “The Gift of the Magi”, these processes are among the least frequently found word formation processes in the text.

## **CONCLUSION(S)**

Based on an analysis of word formation processes in O. Henry's short story “The Gift of the Magi”, it can be concluded that the story consists of four types of word formation processes according to Yule's theory (2010). The analysis shows that there are processes of borrowing, compounding, derivation, and multiple processes in the text. Among these processes, derivation is the most dominant type, with a total of 22 words identified. This shows that O. Henry tends to use suffix addition to form new words and convey deeper meanings in his narrative. Meanwhile, the least common process in “The Gift of the Magi” is multiple processes, with only two occurrences.

The researcher realized that not all types of word formation processes appear in “The Gift of the Magi”. Therefore, further research is recommended to analyze other subjects or modern literature in order to obtain a wider variety of word formation types using the same approach.

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