

## Pinches of SALT



mini-lessons in Language Sample Analysis  
for the busy clinician.

**This Lesson:** Identifying Inflectional Morphemes (to calculate MLU-m)

**Creator:** Marleen Westerveld, PhD

**Updates:** subscribe to Instagram: [@dr.marleenwesterveld.slp](https://www.instagram.com/dr.marleenwesterveld.slp)



# IDENTIFYING BOUND MORPHEMES



**In this lesson we will cover:**

1. What are inflectional morphemes and why does it matter?
2. How to identify inflectional morphemes in a language sample
3. Test your knowledge!



**Time to complete:**  
10 minutes max.





## BOUND MORPHEMES:

- Most of our conventions for marking “bound” morphemes are based on Brown (1973).
- According to Brown, young children generally do not learn a base word and then apply a derivational morpheme to encode extra information. Instead, they usually learn these as fully-formed, independent words with their own specific meaning.
- Some psycholinguistic evidence: Guo, et al. (2018): base words and derived words (e.g., beauty, beautiful) are stored as separate lexical entries and should be given equal weight.

## Inflectional morphemes:

- show some aspect of the grammatical function of a word – always suffixes
- never change the grammatical category.
- Are developmental morphemes

## Derivational morphemes:

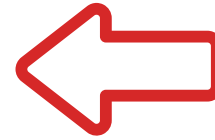
- used to create new words, or
- to make words of a different grammatical class



## **WHY DO WE 'WORRY' ABOUT IDENTIFYING BOUND MORPHEMES?**

Research indicates that difficulties in using, learning, and/or generalising bound morphemes may be a sign of Developmental Language Disorder.

## ACCORDING TO BROWN (1973)



Children move through stages: From I to IV, corresponding to their MLU (Mean Length of Utterance)

\* full form of the verb 'to be' when it is the only verb in the sentence

Stage	Age in months	Mean MLU-m (range)	Structure	Examples
I	12 - 26	1.75 (1.0 - 2.0)	One and two word phrases	That car Big bird
II	27 - 30	2.25 (2.0 - 2.5)	present progressive -ing in on plural -s	me <b>going</b> <b>in</b> bed <b>on</b> table mummy keys
III	31 - 34	2.75 (2.5 - 3.0)	Irregular past tense possessive 's Uncontractible copula*	teddy <b>went</b> home mummy' <b>s</b> chair it <b>was</b> fun. <b>Is</b> he gone?

## ACCORDING TO BROWN (1973) - CONTINUED

Children move through stages: From I to IV, corresponding to their MLU (Mean Length of Utterance)

Stage	Age in months	Mean MLU-m (range)	Structure	Examples
IV	35 - 40	3.5 (3.0 - 3.75)	Articles Regular past tense Third person singular, present tense	<b>a</b> big bear; on <b>the</b> table My horsie jump <b>ed</b> Mummy loves <b>s</b> me Bobbie walk <b>s</b> away
V	41 - 46+	4.0 (3.75 - 4.5)	Third person irregular Uncontractible auxiliary* Contractible copula Contractible auxiliary	She <b>has</b> ; He <b>does</b> . <b>are</b> they playing? She <b>was</b> laughing She' <b>s</b> pretty; They' <b>re</b> here. He' <b>s</b> going; I' <b>m</b> doing it.

\* full form of the verb 'to be'  
when it is an auxiliary verb in the sentence

Coding	explanation	Examples
/s	Regular plural	C I like egg/ <b>s</b> .
	DO NOT count irregular forms / or when sound changes	C Look at the leaves. C I love geese.
/z	Possessive	C Daddy/ <b>z</b> shoe/s.
	DO NOT count possessive pronouns	C <b>his</b> shoe/s.
/3s	Third person singular	C He like/ <b>3s</b> daddy/z shoe/s.
/s/z	Combining plural and possessives	C The baby/ <b>s/z</b> toy vs the baby/z toy.
/ed	Regular past tense -ed	C I like/ <b>d</b> him. C he bore/ <b>d</b> me.
	DO NOT count adjectives	C He was bored. C he was scared.
/ing	Present/past progressive -ing	C I am swim/ing. C Are you go/ing?
	DO NOT count finite verb forms	C He loves swimming. C Painting is fun.

## WHAT ABOUT (OTHER) CONTRACTIONS?

Coding	explanation	Examples
/n't /'t	Negative contractions	C I can/ <b>'t</b> do that. He does/ <b>n't</b> know me.
	DO NOT count it as a contraction if it is irregular or the sound of the root changes.	C Don't do that. C He won't do that.
/'ll /'m /'d /'re /'s /'ve	Contracted copulas or auxiliaries /'d is for would	C I/'ll see you on Sunday. C I've had a nice day. C She/'s so mean. C You/'re the best. C He'd do it if he could.
	WATCH OUT - plural vs contracted 's.	C He/ <b>'s</b> one of my best friend/ <b>s</b> .
/h's /h'd /d'd /'us	has, had, does, did, us.	C He/h's been sick. C We/h'd better go. C Let/'us go.

## IN SUMMARY (IN SALT)

**Note:** CLAN identifies slightly more morphemes



Inflectional Morphemes		Contractions	
/s	plural	/t, /n't	negation
/z	possessive	/s, /re, /m	is, are, am
/3s	3 <sup>rd</sup> person singular	/ll, /d	will, would
/ed	past tense	/ve, /h's, /h'd	have, has, had
/en	past participle	/d's, /d'd	does, did
/ing	progressive tense	/us	us

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

No	Child says	A	B	C
1	He likes me	He like/3s me	He like/z me	He like/s me
2	I walked the dog	I walk/ed the dog	I walked/ed the dog	I walk/3s the dog
3	I'd love to go swimming	I/'d love to go swim/ing	I'd love to go swim/ing.	I/'d love to go swimming
4	We tied the dogs to the tree	We tie/ed the dog/s to the tree	We tied the dog/s to the tree.	We tie/ed the dog/z to the tree.
5	He's my best friend's brother	He/'s my best friend/'s brother	He/'s my best friend/s brother	He/'s my best friend/z brother.

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## WHAT IF THE CHILD OMITTS THE BOUND MORPHEMES – OBLIGATORY CONTEXT?

You can use SALT conventions: indicate these omissions with an \*

- C He/\*'s my best friend. [*child omits contracted copula*]
- C He/'s one of my best friend/\*s. [*child omits plural -s*]
- C He/'s go/\*ing home [*child omits present progressive -ing*]



### Why is this important?

We use this information when calculating PGU (percent grammatical utterances) - a measure that shows good diagnostic accuracy (Guo et al., 2019)



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

(MW)

For a copy of the slides visit my website (navigate to E-learning):  
<https://marleenwesterveld.com/salt-webinars/>

All 'pinches of SALT' will be posted on YouTube:  
<http://www.youtube.com/@MarleenWesterveldSLP>

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