

CLIPPT

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Among the twenty or so ways that new words enter our language is clipping. Clipping, the opposite of affixing, forms a new word by eliminating part of a complex or compound word. Usually the meaning is not changed.

Words can be front-clipped: WIG from PERIWIG. They can be back-clipped: RUM from RUMBULLION. They can be mid-clipped: SEXTON from SACRISTAN. Some words result from fore-and-aft clipping: STILL from DISTILLERY. There are even compound clippings: TAXI-CAB from TAXIMETER CABRIOLET. These are mostly examples of regular clipping. GIN from GENEVA has also been changed in spelling and is an example of irregular clipping.

Consider VAN. It is the result of back-clipping VANGUARD. It is also the result of front-clipping CARAVAN. Words like this should have a special name: dual-clipping?

Morphemes are sounds or combinations of sounds that convey a meaning. A free morpheme can stand alone; it is a word. A bound morpheme cannot stand alone. It must be combined with a free morpheme to convey a meaning: e.g., -ly in adverbs like WARMLY.

A simple word or simplex consists of a single free morpheme: words like BOOK, MAN, FIRE. A compound word is the combination of two or more free morphemes. Compounds can be phrasal like NEVER-THELESS or fused like SMOG (smoke + fog).

Some words seem simple but are not. NEST derives from the Indo-European NI-SD-OS, "place where a bird sits down". Such words are called latent or obscure compounds, contrasted to bare or naked forms like HORSE or DEER.

Words can also be lengthened by complexing. A complex word is the union of one or more free morphemes with one or more bound morphemes. The bound morphemes can be prefixes (UNCLASP), suffixes (CLASPS) or both (UNCLASPED).

Now, take the free morpheme GRAM; complex it with a prefix and a suffix to get KILOGRAMS. Then midclip it to get KILOS, as in "The police confiscated two kilos of marijuana". This combination of affixing and clipping results in a heretofore unclassified type of word made up of two bound morphemes. What shall we call it? A phantom word, perhaps?