



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Allomorphy



Definition

- A morpheme that has a number of corresponding surface forms is said to exhibit **allomorphy**.
- Each corresponding form is known as an **allomorph**.
- Thus whether a morpheme exhibits allomorphy is dependent on one's specific theoretical assumptions.



Plural in English

<i>cats</i>	[...s]	Preceding [t] is voiceless
<i>pads</i>	[...z]	Preceding [d] is voiced
<i>dogs</i>	[...z]	Preceding [g] is voiced
<i>sticks</i>	[...s]	Preceding [k] is voiceless

Assumption:

Plural form of the nouns is N+ “-s”.

Phonetically, plural “-s” is [s] or [z],
depending on the voicedness of the preceding segment.

Allomorphy under
this assumption.

Slide 3



Plural in English

Consider now other forms of plural:

children, oxen, brethren, ...

feet, mice, geese, ...

foci, radii, alumni ...

formulae, morae, ...

We probably wouldn't think of them as N + “-s”,

The plural morphemes are not the same as the one we
understand as “-s”.

i.e. “-en”, “-i”, “-ae” are not allomorphs of “-s”.

Slide 4



Allomorphy in Stems

<i>hymn</i>	[him]	<i>hymnal</i>	[himnəl]
<i>face</i>	[feis]	<i>facial</i>	[feɪʃiəl]
<i>demon</i>	[di:mən]	<i>demonic</i>	[dɪmɒnɪk]

- Allomorphs of *hymn*
 - assumes suffix to be [-əl], not [nəl]
- Allomorphs of *face*
 - assumes suffix to be [-iəl], not [ʃiəl]
- Allomorphs of *demon*
 - assumes the two pronunciations of “demon” are of the same word.
- If you reject these assumptions, then the cases of allomorphy would be very different.

Slide 5



Further Reading

- Anderson, Stephen (1992) *A-morphous Morphology*. Cambridge University Press.
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- Matthews, Peter H. (1991) *Morphology*, 2nd edition, Chapter 6. Cambridge University Press.
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Slide 6



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The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)
An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.
Hong Kong Baptist University.