



FEMININE SUFFIXES OF ENGLISH AND THEIR MORPHOPHONEMIC AND MORPHOSEMANTIC REALIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT:

Word is traditionally considered the smallest meaningful grammatical unit of language. It is composed of morphemes: free or/and bound. Free morphemes are simplex words. Bound morphemes, also called affixes, are used to derive new words. Affixes, especially derivational ones, have phonological, grammatical and semantic significance. Like free morphemes they have orthographic and phonological shape and they express various concepts. The only thing that distinguishes them from the free morphemes is that they cannot be used independently. Affixes express the concepts like person, place, gender, state, quality, etc. These affixes may bring about some phonemic changes in the bases to which they are appended and cause change in the meaning of the base. Therefore, the affixes are substantial from the phonemic and semantic points of view. Hence, they are considered linguistic signs. The present paper attempts to bring together feminine suffixes of English. It is also a humble attempt to discuss the morphophonemic and morphosemantic features of these suffixes.

Key words: word, morphophonemic, morphosemantic, affixes, feminine suffixes

Traditionally it is supposed that meaning and grammar begin with word. However, there are units which are smaller than words. Language is a compositional system in which a unit is composed of smaller units. Accordingly, words are made of morphemes which are free and bound. Affixes are the bound morphemes. They have a specific linguistic significance. The derivational affixes in any language bring about the majority of the word formations. They cannot be put under the closed classes, as it can be done with the inflectional suffixes.

Semantically too they bear a vital importance. They signify a concept. The scholars like Quirk, Greenbaum(1975), Carstairs-McCarthy(2009), Laurie Bauer(1988) classify the derivational suffixes of English on the basis of the grammatical classes they form. However, on the basis of the concepts that they signify, they can be put into semantic classes. Feminine suffixes across languages denote the concept of female. Hence, they can be treated as one of the classes of suffixes. They are affixed to the nouns signifying masculine gender to form words denoting their feminine counterparts. English has feminine suffixes. Some of them display some phonetic similarity. The present paper is an attempt to enlist the feminine suffixes of English. It focuses the etymology of these suffixes and tries to point out their morphophonemic and morphosemantic aspects.

English belongs to a class of Indo-European languages, namely Anglo-Frisian class. On the basis of this rationale the researcher aims to focus the feminine suffixes in English. Feminine suffixes, as pointed out earlier, are attached to the masculine nouns to derive their feminine counterparts. Now let us enlist them and see their morphophonemic and morphosemantic aspects.

The following are the feminine suffixes of English:

1. -ette:

-ette is developed out of French loan words. -ette is a polysemous suffix implying 'feminine of ...' as in *bachelorette*, *majorette*, 'small or diminutive of ...' as in *kitchenette*, *statuette*, 'imitation of/ not real ...' as in *leatherette*, *satinette*, and 'feminine proper names ...' as in *Jeannette*, *Bernardette*.

As far as its feminine meaning is concerned, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current Dictionary has the words like – *bachelorette*, *brunette*, *coquette*, *censurette*, *conductorette*, *chaufferette*, *farmerette*, *ladette*, *majorette*, *officerette*, *sailorette*, *suffragette*, *undergradette*, and *usherette*.

The pronunciation of -ette is /et/. It makes a strong syllable. -ette normally takes the primary stress and hence affects the accent of the base. For example, *ˈkitchen* ~ *ˈkitchɪnɪt*, *ˈleather* ~ *ˈliːθərɪt*, *ˈusher* ~ *ˈʊʃərɪt*, and others.

2.-ess:

The suffix *-ess* is taken from Greek *-issa* via Latin through French *-esse*. This is a productive suffix. It forms feminine nouns parallel to masculine personal nouns, e.g. *actor* ~ *actress*, *duke* ~ *duchess*.

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English records around 50 words formed with *-ess*. Some of them are *actress*, *Jewess*, *Negress*, and *temptress*. The pronunciations of *-ess* is /ɪs, əs/ and /es, əs/. When it is pronounced /ɪs/ or /əs/, it forms a weak syllable. On the other hand, when it is pronounced /es/, it makes a strong syllable. According to Marchand (1960), *-ess* is pronounced /ɪs/ or /əs/, and has weak vowels. To Sethi and Dhamija (2001) *-ess* does not affect word accent (139). However, OALD, RED and CEPD have some derivatives in which *-ess* carries primary stress with /es/ pronunciation, which affects the accent of the base, e.g. *ˌmanageɪress*, *ˌmayoɪress*, *ˌpoeɪtess*, *ˌshepherɪdess*, and others.

There are also derivatives in which *-ess* is pronounced /es/ but not accented and does not affect the stress pattern of the base form, e.g. *ɪnegress*, *ɪgoverness*, and a few others. In the case of *duchess*, the alternation takes place at both the orthographic as well as phonological level. The sounds /ju:/ in *duke* are substituted by a short and strong vowel /ʊ/ and letter 'k' is replaced by 'ch', and according the consonant /k/ is replaced by /tʃ/. Such an alternation is irregular and non-automatic. '*duchess*' is an example of dissimilation in English.

3. -enne:

It is borrowed from French. It forms feminine nouns parallel to masculine nouns, e.g. *comedian* ~ *comedienne*, *doyen* ~ *doyenne*, *equestrian* ~ *equestrienne*, *tragedian* ~ *tragedienne* and others.

The pronunciation of *-enne* is /en/ which forms a strong syllable. It carries primary stress and affects the accent of the base, e.g. *coɪmedian* ~ *coɪmediɛnne*, *ɪdoyen* ~ *doyɛnne*, *eɪquestrian* ~ *eɪquestriɛnne*, *traɪgedian* ~ *traɪgediɛnne*.

4. -ine:

It is also derived from French. The suffix derives feminine nouns parallel to masculine nouns, e.g., *concupinus~concupine*, *châtelain~châtelain*, *hero~heroine*, *margrave~margravine* and others.

-ine is pronounced /ɪn/. It is a weak syllable. As far as morphophonemics is concerned, vowel mutation and shift in accent is exemplified in *Heroine*, a commonly used word-*hero* : /hɪrə/ ~ *heroine*: /heɪrəɪn/ wherein /ɪə/ →/e/ and the primary stress on the first syllable in *hero* is shifted on to the second syllable in *heroine*.

5. -trix:

It is derived from Latin. Few common words created in this suffix are *executrix*, *administratrix*, *testatrix*, *dominatrix* and others.

-trix is pronounced /trɪks/ which is a weak syllable. The suffix has an alternative form, *-trice* which is borrowed via French. It is archaic now. The only example found in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is *lectrice*.

6. -woman:

It's a free morpheme. It is from Old English. However, it functions as a semi-suffix (Hans Marchand 1960: 281). It is used in variety of terms but supposed to be sexist. The suffix is pronounced /wʊmən/. Normally, it does not bring about any morphophonemic change. Out of six English suffixes signifying feminine gender only *-woman* is native. But the words formed with it are probably considered under compounding and not suffixation.

To conclude, as far as feminine suffixes are concerned, English is very opulent. It is rich only because of its borrowings. Exhaustive research has been carried on affixes of English by scholars like Hans Marchand, Alexander Humez, Andriene Leherer and many others.

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