What is Morphology?
Second Edition

Mark Aronoff
and Kirsten Fudeman
Praise for *What is Morphology?*

“Aronoff and Fudeman have produced a clear and jargon-free introduction to contemporary morphological theory and practice. The book succeeds particularly in clarifying the empirical content, organizational principles and analytic techniques that distinguish morphology from other areas of linguistics.”

*James P. Blevins, University of Cambridge*

“This book offers abundant examples of morphological data and illuminating guidance through the classic and fundamental problems of morphological analysis. Any student who has worked through this book will really know what morphologists do, and how they go about doing it … I consider *What Is Morphology?* an indispensable introduction to the subject.”

*Martin Maiden, FBA, Professor of the Romance Languages Faculty of Linguistics*

Praise for Previous Edition

“Aronoff and Fudeman have provided an extremely pleasant tour of the issues in modern morphological theory for beginning students. The rich collection of exercises will be a godsend to instructors and students alike, and the thread of discussion of a single language throughout the book is a brilliant stroke that other texts should emulate.”

*Stephen R. Anderson, Yale University*

“This unusual book combines a basic start on morphology with an introduction to Kujamaat Jóola. It is a fine addition to teaching materials on morphology: a book for beginners to use with a teacher, yet one from which any linguist could learn. The authors intend students to develop ‘a lasting taste for morphology’. I think many will.”

*Greville Corbett, University of Surrey, Guildford*

“Morphology has its own organizing principles, distinct from those of syntax, phonology, and the lexicon. Too many morphology textbooks obscure this fascinating fact, but Aronoff and Fudeman refreshingly make it the cornerstone of their exposition.”

*Andrew Carstairs-McCarthy, University of Canterbury*
Fundamentals of Linguistics

Each book in the Fundamentals of Linguistics series is a concise and critical introduction to the major issues in a subfield of linguistics, including morphology, semantics, and syntax. The books presuppose little knowledge of linguistics, are authored by well-known scholars, and are useful for beginning students, specialists in other subfields of linguistics, and interested non-linguists.

What is Morphology?
Mark Aronoff and Kirsten Fudeman

What is Meaning? Fundamentals of Formal Semantics
Paul H. Portner

The Fundamentals of Psycholinguistics
Eva M. Fernández and Helen Smith Cairns
What is Morphology?
Second Edition

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and Kirsten Fudeman
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This little book is meant to introduce fundamental aspects of morphology to students with only a minimal background in linguistics. It presupposes only the very basic knowledge of phonetics, phonology, syntax, and semantics that an introductory course in linguistics provides. If, having worked through this book, a student has some understanding of the range of basic issues in morphological description and analysis; can appreciate what a good morphological description looks like, how a good morphological analysis works and what a good theory of morphology does; can actually do morphological analysis at an intermediate level; and most importantly understands that linguistic morphology can be rewarding; then the basic goal of the book will have been met.

The book departs from a trend common among current linguistics textbooks, even at the elementary level, which tend to be quite theoretical in orientation and even devoted to a single theory or set of related theories. We have chosen instead to concentrate on description, analysis, and the fundamental issues that face all theories of morphology. At the most basic level, we want to provide students with a grasp of how linguists think about and analyze the internal structure of complex words in a representative range of real languages. What are the fundamental problems, regardless of one’s theoretical perspective? We therefore dwell for the most part on questions that have occupied morphologists since the beginnings of modern linguistics in the late nineteenth century, rather than on more detailed technical points of particular theories.

Of course, this means that we assume that there are general questions, but in morphology, at least, the early modern masters were grappling with many of the same questions that occupy us to this day. Descriptions and analyses that Baudouin de Courtenay wrote in the 1880s are not
merely understandable, but even interesting and enlightening to the modern morphologist. The same is true of the work of Edward Sapir and Roman Jakobson from the 1920s and 1930s. Yes, the terminology and theories are different, but the overall goals are much the same. That is not to say that no progress has been made, only that the basic issues about word-internal structure have remained stable for quite a long time.

One fundamental assumption that goes back to the beginnings of modern linguistics is that each language is a system where everything holds together ("la langue forme un système où tout se tient et a un plan d’une merveilleuse rigueur": Antoine Meillet). More recent linguists have stressed the importance of universal properties that all languages have in common over properties of individual languages, but not even the most radical universalists will deny the systematicity of individual human languages. It is therefore important, from the very beginning, that a student be presented, not just with fragmentary bits of data from many languages, as tends to happen with both morphology and phonology, but with something approaching the entire morphological system of a single language. To that end, we have divided each of the chapters of this book up into two parts. The first part is the conventional sort of material that one would find in any textbook. Here our focus is often on standard American English, although we present data from many other languages, as well. The second part describes in some detail part of the morphology of Kujamaat Jóola, a language spoken in Senegal. For each chapter, we have tried to select an aspect of Kujamaat Jóola morphology that is close to the topic of the chapter. By the end of the book, the student should have a reasonable grasp of the entire system of Kujamaat Jóola morphology and thus understand how, at least for one language, the whole of the morphology holds together. Of course, no one language can be representative of all the world’s languages, and morphology is so varied that not even the most experienced analyst is ever completely prepared for what a new language may bring. But students certainly will benefit from a reasonably complete picture of how a single language works.

The Kujamaat Jóola material complements the material in the main portion of the chapter, but it is not meant to mirror it exactly. Our inclusion of particular Kujamaat Jóola topics was dictated in part by the data that were available to us. Our primary sources were J. David Sapir’s *A Grammar of Diola-Fogny*, his 1967 revisions to the analysis of the Kujamaat Jóola verb (Thomas and Sapir 1967), and his unpublished
dictionary. In a number of cases, we have used the Kujamaat Jóola section of each chapter to delve into topics not treated in the main portion, or treated only superficially. Thus chapters 2 and 7 contain detailed examinations of Kujamaat Jóola noun classes and verb morphology, respectively, and in chapter 3 we address its rich interactions between vowel harmony and morphology.

We chose Kujamaat Jóola for this book because its morphology, though complex and sometimes unusual, is highly regular, which makes it an excellent teaching vehicle. Some might question this choice, preferring a language with a higher degree of morphological fusion. Such a language might have led to theoretical issues, for example, that we do not explore in any detail here. However, we felt that in a book of this type, aimed at the beginning or intermediate-level morphologist, Kujamaat Jóola was an ideal choice.

One value of presenting beginning students with the largely complete morphological description of a single language is that descriptive grammars (which more often than not concentrate on morphology and phonology) form a mainstay of linguistic research, not only at more advanced levels of study, but throughout a researcher’s career. The ability to work through a descriptive grammar is not innate, as many of us assume, but an acquired skill that takes practice. The Kujamaat Jóola sections taken together comprise an almost complete descriptive morphology of that language, so that by the end of the book students will have had the experience of working through an elementary morphological description of one language and will be somewhat prepared to tackle more complete descriptions when the time comes.

This brings us to the topic of how we intend the Kujamaat Jóola sections of this book to be used. Because of their inherent complexity, it is crucial that the instructor not simply assign these sections as readings. Instead, each must be gone over carefully in class until the students have a good grasp of the material in it. Otherwise, students are not likely to extract full value from the Kujamaat Jóola sections. Although we feel that these sections will be both useful and rewarding, it is also the case that the main portions of the chapter are freestanding, and an instructor who prefers not to do some or all of the Kujamaat Jóola sections does not have to.

Each chapter closes with a set of problems that are cross-referenced with the text, and we expect that the solutions to these problems will be discussed in detail in class. Some simpler exercises are integrated into the text itself, with answers provided. We feel that some exercises,
particularly open-ended questions, are especially well suited to class
discussion, and so instructors may decide not to assign them in written
form. Most chapters also contain Kujamaat Jóola exercises designed
to get students to apply the data we have provided creatively and ana-
lytically. Chapter 1 contains two sample problem sets with answers
(section 1.5.3). We suggest that instructors assign these separately from
the rest of the chapter reading and that they ask students to write them
out as they would a regular assignment, without reading the explana-
tion and analysis that go with them. Then students can check their work
on their own. This should prepare them for doing some of the other
analytical problems in the text.

Another feature of this book is a glossary. The terms in it appear in
**bold** the first time they are used or explained in the text.

New to the second edition are suggestions for further reading at the
end of each chapter. Some of these suggestions are classic treatments of
morphological problems, and others represent more recent analyses.
We have chosen a number of them because of the clear way in which
they illustrate phenomena raised in the chapter. Finally, some of the
suggested readings are short enough that instructors might want to
assign them in an introduction to morphology class. Other, longer read-
ings could be assigned in part or used by students as they work on
morphological problems on their own, whether independently or as a
class assignment. While not listed in the further reading for any of the
chapters, another extremely useful reference work for students is

Ideally, each class session will be divided into three parts, corre-
sponding to the division of the chapters: exposition of new pedagogi-
cal material; detailed discussion of Kujamaat Jóola; and discussion of
solutions for the homework problems of the day (we assume that prob-
lems will be assigned daily and that students’ performance on them
will comprise a good part of the basis of their grades in the course).

We close with a warning to both the instructor and the student: this
book does not pretend to cover all of morphology, but rather only a
number of general topics drawn from the breadth of the field that are of
special interest to its authors. We have purposely not gone deeply into
the aspects of morphology that interact most with other central areas of
linguistics (phonology, semantics, and syntax), because that would
require knowledge of these areas that beginning students might not
have. Thus there is little discussion of clitics, for example. In this, the
second edition, we have added more coverage of exciting new work
that uses experimental and computational methods, methods that are bound to be more central in the future, but we encourage instructors to supplement our text with current readings in this cutting-edge field. In closing, please permit us to remind the user that our ambitions in writing this volume are quite modest. We do not expect students who have worked through this book to have a full understanding, but to have developed a lasting taste for morphology that, with luck, will sustain them as it has us.

We owe a debt of thanks to the many people who helped us as we worked on this project. We are especially grateful to the various people who read drafts of the manuscript and made suggestions on how to make it better. These include Harald Baayen, Donald Lenfest, Lanko Marusic, and two anonymous Blackwell reviewers. We give special thanks to Phil Baldi and Barbara Bullock, who tested the original manuscript in a morphology class at the Pennsylvania State University, and to five anonymous student reviewers. Their comments were particularly thorough and helped us to improve this book on many different levels. Harald Baayen and some of our anonymous student reviewers also suggested a number of excellent exercises, which we incorporated into the current version. Peter Aronoff read the original manuscript over his winter break and still took a linguistics course the next semester. For their input and discussion, we thank Bill Ham, Alan Nussbaum, and Draga Zec. We are also grateful to Jane Kaplan, who shared her collection of language-related cartoon strips, advertisements, and other magazine and newspaper clippings with us.

J. David Sapir generously gave us permission to reproduce copious amounts of Kujamaat Jóola data from his published and unpublished work, and Eugene Nida allowed us to include exercises first published in his classic textbook on morphology. We are pleased that his exercises will be introduced to a new generation of students.

We are also grateful to the many people who wrote to us after using the first edition of this textbook. Many of them requested an answer key. The second edition indeed has one, available on the Wiley website at www.wiley.com/go/Aronoff. Jenny Mittelstaedt carefully prepared a list of questions and comments that enabled us to make a number of corrections and clarifications to the material presented here. Bill Ham also offered useful suggestions. Finally, reviews of the first edition in print and online by Barli Bram, Malcolm Finney, Margaret Sharp, John Stonham, Gregory Stump, and Jonathan White were enormously helpful to us in identifying elements of the book, small and large, that
needed to be revised or updated. In addition to the addition of suggestions for future reading and the expansion (and renaming) of chapter 8, “Morphological Productivity and the Mental Lexicon,” this new edition has been thoroughly revised for style and clarity; it has been updated to reflect current research; its glossary and reference list have been expanded; and some exercises have been revised or added.

This book owes a great deal to the guidance and particularly the patience of the editors at Wiley-Blackwell over the years: Philip Carpenter, Sarah Coleman, Danielle Descoteaux, Tami Kaplan, Julia Kirk, Beth Remmes, and Steve Smith. Thanks also to our project manager, Fiona Sewell. Writing this book has been a joint effort, and we would like to emphasize that the order of the authors’ names given on the title page is alphabetical.

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