

Special role of morphology in English writing

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The relationship between spelling and sound is highly inconsistent in English. This inconsistency is often caused by the preservation of morphological information in spelling (e.g. retaining the stem HEAL in HEALTH). In this paper, we report a large-scale computational linguistic analysis designed to explore the morphological regularities associated with derivational English suffixes. This analysis reveals that the spellings of derivational suffixes transmit unique semantic information that is not present in their pronunciations. Further, we show that skilled English readers acquire these bits of information from writing in the absence of any formal instruction, and successfully exploit these cues explicitly and implicitly when dealing with written language. We discuss the implications of these findings for literacy instruction.

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