Handout 1: Basic Notions in Morphology
Seminar Issues in Morphology; Andrew McIntyre

1. Preliminaries
   - Morphology: Study of the mental knowledge and processes involved in the structure of words and the creation of new (forms of) words.
   - Morphemes: The smallest linguistic elements with a meaning/grammatical function:
     (1) over-estim-at-ion; dis-pleas-ure; nerv-ous; electr-ic; walk-ed; tree-s; who-se
     Some morphemes consist of a single sound (sing-2, walk-ed), though not all sounds are morphemes (since most sounds don’t have meaning in themselves).

2. Types of morphemes
   - Free morphemes can occur as independent words. Bound morphemes cannot.
   - Cranberry morphemes (=unique morpheme(s)): bound morphemes occurring in only one word in a language (and in words derived from that word):
     (3) cranberry, inept, unkept, disgruntled, umpteen, affable
   - Affixes: Bound morphemes which have one or more identifiable semantic or grammatical functions/meanings and which occur in more than one word in the language.
     (4) a. oldest: speaks, spoken; dog, four-teen-th, driver, painful, beautiful
       b. non-gentility, un-great, ultra-stupid, behead
       c. anti-dis-c-stabil-ish, ment-arian-ism
   - Base: The morpheme(s) to which an affix is attached. (Advanced point: don’t confuse base with root (base consisting of a single morpheme); stem (base for inflectional affixes defined below), possibly consisting of more than one morpheme.)
   - Prefix = prefix before base; suffix = affix after base; infix = affix inside base; circumfix = affix consisting of both a prefix and a suffix
   - Portmanteau morpheme = single indivisible morpheme realising more than one feature. (The term is applied when the features are realised by separate morphemes in the same language, and less frequently in other languages.)
     (5) were (BE+past), she (3rd person singular feminine+subject)
   - Clitics: A cross between an affix and a word. They are phonologically so short they can’t be pronounced alone, they need to join to other words. Like words, their position is determined partly by syntactic rules. They are sometimes short forms of larger words.
     (6) I’m, he’s, you’re, you’d, le’s, lui donner? / y vais
     (7) Hasn’t she gone? (Contrast with parallel question with non-clitic not.)
     (8) [the man in the kitchen]’s wife

3. Allomorphy
   - Allomorphy: The phenomenon whereby a morpheme has more than one allomorph (=variant in pronunciation).
     (9) a. an owl b. a tree
     (10) a. bike, side-kick; b. duch-ess, duch-y
     (11) a. receive, re-cieve-er, re-cieve-able, de-cieve, de-cieve-able; con-cieve-able
       b. re-cieve-ion, re-cieve-ive; de-cieve-ion, con-cieve-iot, con-cieve-ual
     (12) a. en-prison, en-body, em-power, em-holden, en-bitter, en-panel
       b. en-chain, en-danger, en-list, en-train, en-slave, en-snare, en-tangle, en-large
   - Suppletion: Allomorphs of a morpheme are phonologically unrelated:
     (13) go/went; be/am/is/ was; good/bet-er; one/first

3.1. Three types of allomorphy
   - Phonologically conditioned allomorphy: The choice of allomorph is predictable on the basis of the pronunciation of adjacent morphemes:
     (14) Allomorphs of the indefinite article:
       an (before vowels): an eye/elephant/tow
       a (before consonants): a leg/dog/brick/stone
     (15) Allomorphs of the regular past tense morpheme:
       a. /Id/ (after [d,t]): defeated, hated, waded, threaded
       b. /t/ (after all other voiceless sounds): hissed, ripped, picked, fiddled
       c. /d/ (after all other voiced sounds): fizzed, wedged, measured, howled
     (16) Some allomorphs of the negative prefix in-:
       a. /Il/ (before /l/): illegal, illegible
       b. /In/ (elsewhere): inelligible, independent
   - Lexically conditioned allomorphy: The choice of allomorph is determined by particular morphemes, not just by their pronunciation. Thus, the morpheme -sune in (17) changes to -sumpt- in (18). This alternation is not predictable from the phonological laws of English, as (19) shows.
     (17) consume, presume, subssume, resume, assume
     (18) consumption, presumption, subsumption, resumption, assumption; consumptive, presumptuous
     (19) defumable/*defumptible, rezoomable/*rezumptible, consumptable/consumable
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A. Are the following cases of allomorphy lexically, phonologically or morphologically conditioned?
   1. The prefix en-em- in forming verbs meaning ‘(cause to) enter a particular thing or state’: emprison, embody, empower, embolden, embitter, empanel; enchain, endanger, enlist, enslave, ensure, enlarge
   2. The alternation between sifid and sesid in the following contexts:
      proceed/ procession; recede/ recession/ recessive; concede/ concession
   3. Allomorphy caused by voicing of final consonant in stems for –s plurals:
      a. Voicing: wires (cf. wife), leaves, thieves, shelves, lives, knives, loaves, calves, hooves, halves, wolves; houses, mouths,
      b. No voicing: cliffs, dyes, proofs, fits, clothes, fifths, births
      c. Dialect differences: warhorses/warshorses, dwarfs/dwarves, rooves/rooves; sheafs/sheaves, oafs, oaths, booths, baths, paths
   4. Allomorphs of the English noun plural morpheme:
      a. [z]: dogs, cats, deaths; kicks, cliffs
      b. [s]: cups, books, deaths; kicks, cliffs
      c. [z]: breezes, buses, dishes, edges, notches, foxes,
Basic Notions in Morphology

B. Can you think of a French example of the following phenomena?
   (i) suppletion (ii) allomorphy (a case not involving suppletion)
C. If you have done phonology, explain why it would be wrong to say that [z] and [s] as seen in the last question are allomorphs of the same phoneme. The words lonesome, tiresome, bothersome, falsome, awesome may help.
D. The English indefinite article has two phonologically conditioned allomorphs a and an. Does an analogous generalisation apply to French mon and ma? Consider the following examples: mon copain, ma copine, mon ami, mon amie

3.2. Morphs
Some linguists distinguish morphemes (abstract grammatical notions like PLURAL, COMPARATIVE) from morphs (concrete pieces of phonology realising them, e.g. -s, -er). Allomorphy is thus defined as the realisation of one morpheme by more than one morph. Many linguistseschew the term morph since allomorph is usable in most contexts where one would use morph and not morpheme. In the absence of allomorphy, the term seems redundant. For our purposes at least, there is no point in saying that the morph dog realises the morpheme DOG.

E. Why is it better to speak of cranberry morphs than of cranberry morphemes?

4. Morphological processes: Ways of creating new (forms of) words
The list below is confined to phenomena found in English.

4.1. Affixation (defined above)

4.2. Compounding
   ➢ creating a word (a compound) by combining two or more free morphemes:
   (20) girlfriend, chalk dust, blackbird, upload, seasick
   (21) World Trade Center conspiracy theory website managers

4.3. Conversion (zero derivation)
   ➢ change of syntactic category (e.g. noun, verb) of a word without adding affixes. It may involve a stress change or minor changes in the base. Some linguists see conversion as addition of zero affixes (=unpronounced affixes), while others say there is no affix.
   (22) N-V: torch (a house), access (a file), hammer, butter, accent, sign, blossom, e-mail
   V-N: a look, call, crack, cry, meet, walk
   A-V: slow (the tempo), cool (the wine), busy (oneself), bare, humble, empty
   (23) compounding vs. compounds: conflict, contest, protest, decrease, insult, remake, torment, transfer, reject, refill, remake
   (24) shelf/shelves; house/house; advise/advice

4.4. Clipping
   ➢ shortening a word by deleting phonological material (not morphemes):
   (25) prof (Professor), influence, laboratory, steroids, vaccination, situation comedy; prefabricated, detoxification centre, Rolling Stones

4.5. Blending
   ➢ merging of two words in which at least one of them undergoes clipping:
   (26) carjack (hijack+car), stagflation (inflation+stagnation), Reaganomics

4.6. Backformation
   ➢ the formation of a new word by the removing an affix:
   (27) self-destruct (from self-destruction) ➔ not formed by compounding of self+destruct, since destruct (an allomorph of destroy) is otherwise only found with suffixes: destruction, destructive, indestructable
   (28) dissertation (<dissertation), waive (<fission), enthuse (<enthusiasm), emote (<emotion), combat (combustion), redact (<redaction), opine (<opinion)
   ➔ Here the shorter words sound “less normal” and aren’t acceptable to every native speaker, suggesting they are perceived as being derived from the longer words.
   ➢ Backformation vs. clipping: Backformation involves the removal of affixes and changes meaning (and often syntactic category). Clipping is the deletion of random phonological material (not specifically affixes) and doesn’t change meaning/category. (The only effect relevant to meaning is a change in style level: prof is less formal than professor.)
   ➢ The words in (29) were originally backformations, but this is a diachronic fact, for which there is no evidence available today. (29) should thus not be called backformations in a synchronic analysis trying to describe the mental representation of language now.
   (29) a. edit (<editor), sculpt (<sculptor), barge (<bargain), laze (<lazy), preempt (<preemption), scavenge (<scavenger), swindle (<swindler), resurrect (<resurrection)
   b. cherry (<French cerise; final -z/ taken as plural affix; singular backformed from it)
   c. pea (<Old English pise 'a quantity of peas'; singular non-countable noun)
   d. stave (noun, <staves (older plural of staff in the sense 'stick')
   ➢ The structures in (30) look like compound verbs, but are actually backformations, since structures of this type don’t exist unless there is a longer affixed word. It is impossible to form compound verbs of the type [s N V] directly in English.
   (30) headbang (<headbanging), slapdance (<slamdancing), benchpress (<bunchpressing), vacuum-clean (<vacuum cleaner), aircrashing (<airconditioning), eavesdropper (<eavesdropping), long-divide (<longdivision), fundraiser (<fundraising)

4.7. Ablaut [aplaут] (also called apophony)
   ➢ creation of new (form of a) word by changing vowel in the base word:
   (31) synthesize; woman/women; house/house; joke/joke; live/life
   (32) Causative verbs: ride/raide; lie/lay; sit/set; fall/fell (as in to fell a tree)
   ➢ Ablaut combined with other processes: child/children; catch/caught

4.8. Acronym and abbreviation
   ➢ Acronyms words formed by taking the initial letters from the words in a compound or phrase and pronouncing the word spelled by them.
   (33) NATO, UNICEF, AIDS
   ➢ Abbreviations are like acronyms, but the names of the letters are pronounced.
   (34) BBC, cd, AC/DC (Anti-Christian Devil Children???)

4.9. Reduplication
   ➢ Reduplication: repetition of part of a word. Less important in English (mainly childspeak, onomatopoeia; lists in Middle English 430ff, but can be a very important way of forming new (forms of) words in other languages.
   (35) Andy-Pandy, lovey-dovey, super-duper, teeny-weeny, chicchat, mishmash
   (36) Latin: cucurri ‘I ran’ (<currere), pedendipendere; cecentincare
   (37) Gothic: faifah ‘I caught’ (<fahan); laiaik/laihan ‘jump’, laiof/letan ‘let’
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F. Name the morphological processes used in forming the words in italics below. In some cases more than one process was used. Note that some of the words are occasionalisms (words used rarely, not part of the standard vocabulary).

a. twiddle (‘twist and wiggle; produced as a speech error)

b. barbi (‘barbecue; Australian)

c. un-p.c. (‘not politically correct’)

d. ASIO [æsɪəʊ] (<Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation)

e. flautist (‘flute player’)

f. they tidied up the room

g. mike (<microphone)

h. FacMac (‘MacIntosh computer at Sydney University Faculty of Arts’)

i. [vidɪbɑː] (<vidɪblɪdʒ) ‘Volkswagen’

j. crash a party (‘come uninvited’ < gatecrash < gatecrasher ‘uninvited guest’)

k. it out-herody Herod (‘is more like H. than H. himself, Shakespeare, Hamlet’)

l. laser (‘Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation)

m. d-jane (‘female dj’; < disc jockey, Jane)

n. Dead head (an aficionado of the band ‘The Grateful Dead’)

p. Shall we nuke them, Ron? (‘attack them with nuclear bombs’)

q. monokini (‘one-piece swimsuit’; < bɪkɪnɪ<Bikini (island in Marshall Islands)

r. socialism, liberalism, capitalism and other ism’s

G. Can you find a French example for the following morphological phenomena?

(a) abbreviation (b) acronymy (c) compounding (d) conversion (e) clipping
(f) blending (g) affixation

H. How were the verbs in the examples below formed? Two answers are possible.

a. they colour-changed the garment; b. they whitewashed the wall

c. I deadlocked the door

d. they tidied up the room

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5. Analysing the structure of words

5.1. Tips for segmenting words into morphemes

1. We are analysing sounds, not spelling. The divisions happi-ness, vari-ous, he tri-es, fitt-ing are correct, even though happen, vary-ous, he try-s, fit-ing. Using IPA transcriptions would also be good.

2. Subtraction: ept in inept is a morpheme because in is a morpheme because it seems to have the negative sense in incompetent.

3. Semantic clues: E.g. –er is (arguably) a morpheme in butcher (despite there being no verb butch) because it expresses an agent, as in teacher, worker. But there is no similar semantic evidence for calling –er a morpheme in badger.

4. Systematic allomorphy: –sume in resume and –pel in repel are morphemes because they have allomorphs (–sump–, –puls–) that appear with other words, cf. (38). Notice that this supports a division into morphemes despite the fact that the morphemes do not mean anything on their own.

38. a. consume/consumption, resume/resumption, presume/presumption

b. repel/repulsion, compel/compulsion, expel/expulsion

I. Should –ation in the words in 1 below be divided into two morphemes? Hint: look at the examples in 2 and 3, and remember the notion of allomorphy.

1. normalisation, invitation, interpretation, accusation, deformation, taxation

2. action, confusion, inspection, option, election, division, destruction, invasion, fusion, dominion, function, nation

3. imitation, translation, intimidation, education, contemplation

4. justification, edification, purification, identification

J. How would you analyse the string ‘ification’ in group 4 in the last question?

K. What speaks for/against the division of the following words into morphemes?

1. nor-th / sou-th / ea-st / we-st

2. h-ear,

3. this / they / there

L. The initial consonant clusters in the following words are sometimes claimed to be meaningful. Assess the evidence for/against treating them as morphemes?

1. flash, flimmer, flicker, flame, flare (fl– ‘moving light’)

2. glit-ter, glimmer, glo-ow, gleam, glisten (gl- ‘light emanating from something’)

3. slush, slurp, slop, slime, slobber (sl– ‘wet’)

5.2. Constituency

Most linguists assume that if an English word has more than two morphemes, the morphemes join together in constituents each consisting of two morphemes.

Examples, using two notations, trees and labelled bracketing:

39. a. N       N        V   af   V        af

Evidence for the constituency in (39):

government
employee

is also wrong because we know that ment is a suffix, not a prefix.

40. a. un       N    b. N (wrong analysis!)

Here (a) is correct and (b) is wrong (even though happiness is a possible word) because un- attaches to adjectives (unlucky, unlovely) but not to nouns (*unluck, *unlove).

41. illustrates two ways of describing conversion. (a/b) assumes that conversion is just a change in category, while (c/d) assumes a silent (= unpronounced, zero) affix. It is not clear which analysis is better.

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41. a. V

b. [v [s access]]

c. V

d. [v [s access] [a Ø]]

Some linguists believe that affixes like –ment in government and the proposed zero affix in to have their own category. Thus, af in (39) and (41) is replaced by N and V respectively. We discuss the virtues and vices of this later.
6. Constraints on morphological processes

6.1. Productivity

- Productivity: The ability of an affix or process to form new words.

(42) Very productive affixes:
   a. -er: baker, runner, thinker, producer, emitter, SMS-er...
   b. -wise: timewise, moneywise, jobwise, healthwise; productivity-wise...
   c. -ful: awful, faithful, drawerful, mouthful, pothul, bathfulful, coffiful...

(43) An unproductive affix: -th only occurs in a few words, cf. (a); no new formations.
   a. breadth, growth, health, length, stealth, strength, truth, warmth, wealth, width

(44) Very productive processes in English: compounding, conversion

(45) Unproductive processes in English: ablaut

- It is not yet clear why some affixes/processes are productive and others not.

6.2. Blocking

- The formation of new words can be blocked by existing words with same meaning.

N. Which words block the following words? *ungood, *seeable, *stealer
   O. Cooker means 'stove' but cannot mean 'person who cooks'. Why?

6.3. Phonological constraints

- An affix/process might require or disallow bases with particular phonological properties.

   Example: The comparative morpheme -er disallows bases of more than one syllable except bisyllabic bases ending in syllabic [n], [l] or [i] (Spencer 1991:399):

(47) longer, fuller, greasier, fancier, commoner, subtler, nobler

P. Are the words lecturer, composer, programmer, provider exceptions to what was said about comparative affix -er? If not, why not?
   Q. Use the following data to determine a phonological constraint on the suffix -al.
      a. arrival, denial, approval, disposal, refusal, retrieval, dispersal, reversal
   R. Are the following words exceptions to what was said about the affix -al in the previous exercise? political, judgmental, original, suicidal
   S. Can you find reasons why the following adjectives are incompatible with the adverb-forming suffix -ly? good, heavenly, leisurely

- Point from exercises P, R: Just as two unrelated words can be homophonous, i.e.
  pronounced the same way (maiden/maid), unrelated affixes can be homophonous. Other examples: -s (John's sister sings pop songs).

6.4. Semantic/pragmatic constraints

T. Speculate on how the following data could be explained in terms of a constraint which we might call 'informativeness':
   bearded people, freckled people, one-legged people, *legged people, cold-hearted people, *hearted people, short-sighted people, *sighted people (sighted is, however, used in the blind community)

7. Inflection versus derivation

- Derivation (=word formation): The use of morphological processes to create new words.

- Inflection: Morphological operations changing the form of a word in response to syntactic requirements. Native speakers have an intuition that inflection doesn’t create a new word, it just results in a different form of the same word.

(48) Examples of derivational affixes:
   - killer
   - wise (productivity-wise, education-wise)

(49) Inflection in English:
   a. with verbs: rides (43)
   b. with adjectives: older, oldest
   c. with nouns: dogs, oxen, men

(50) Examples of inflection that English lacks:
   a. number/gender agreement on French adjectives: homme(s); il/elle est content(e)
   b. case inflection on Latin nouns: mensam (the table, nominative subject)
   c. passive inflection in Latin: amo (I love) vs. amo-r (I am loved)

- The inflection-derivation distinction is hard to define precisely. More specific criteria (see also Bauer 1988: ch. 6, Katamba 1993: ch. 10):

(51) Derivation changes the meaning of a word, while inflection either does not (e.g. sings/sings; they/them) or does so only with regard to a feature which is part of the grammar rather than the vocabulary of the language (dog/dogs; talks/talked).

(52) Inflection is obligatory, being forced by syntactic requirements. With derivation, we can decide whether we use it or not (e.g. green vs greenish, fascist vs neo-fascist).

(53) Inflection is mostly on the edge of a word, 'outside', derivation, since inflection occurs after derivation. E.g. piglets vs. *piglet.

(54) Derivation may change syntactic category ([X], [X]'s cheerfulness), inflection does not.

(55) Inflection is semantically regular (if it does change meaning). E.g. X longer, nicer, fuller; greasier, fancier, commoner, subtler, nobler

(56) Inflection can’t be repeated, while derivation can: neo-neo-conservative vs. *two dogs-ex (intended meaning: ‘two groups of dogs’).

(57) Derivation is not always fully productive. Cf. piglet but *doglet, *horsetlet. Inflection is almost completely productive. There are only a few verbs in English that don’t have a complete set of inflectional forms: quoth (past only), abide, beware, stride (no past participle), dive (no past tense for some speakers)
U. Which of the following are (apparent) problems for which criterion in (51)-(57)?
(a) betterment, worsen, lessen, mostly
(b) glasses, clothes
(c) the forms of the modal auxiliaries must, may, can, shall, need (in he needn’t go)
(d) a filling/boring meal, a destroyed city

V. What are the arguments for/against treating the affixes forming ordinal numbers from cardinal numbers (e.g. seventh) as inflectional.

Some deny the inflection/derivation distinction because of exceptions to the criteria. Proponents of the distinction point to aphasics mastering derivation but not inflection.

The group of inflected forms of a particular word (e.g. drives, driving, drove, driven) is called a paradigm.

The different inflected forms of the same word could in one sense be seen as different words and in another sense as the same word. A term for the latter sense of ‘word’ is lexeme. Thus, the lexeme WALK is realised by the forms walk, walks, walking, walked.

Citation form: the form used for talking about the lexeme in general (e.g. in definitions).

In English, the citation form of nouns is the singular and for verbs it is the infinitive:

Speaker A: He transmogrified it. Speaker B: What does transmogrify mean?

Speaker A: I saw six troglodytes. Speaker B: What is a troglodyte?

8. Motivation, lexicalisation and the lexicon

The product of a morphological process is motivated or compositional if the meaning is predictable from the meanings of the parts. If not, we say it is idiomatic or lexicalised.

Completely compositional: dog owner, car race, gold bracelet, uninterpretable

Partly idiomatic (meaning slightly narrower/wider than expected): blackboard, wetsuit, unreadable (in sense ‘boring to read’), wheelchair (only for disabled people)

Totally idiomatic: blackmail, cupboard, butterfly, hedgehog, profession, landlord

More exactly, lexicalised means that the word has an entry in the mental ‘dictionary’, the part of our memory containing unpredictable knowledge about the meaning and pronunciation of morphemes or words.

Examples of lexical entries:

Pronunciation: /sɪŋ/.
Semantics (rough): ‘create musical sounds using one’s voice’

(i) (simplified) lexical entry for sing:

Pronunciation: infinitive: /sɪŋ/.
past tense /sɪŋt/.
participle: /sɪŋ/.

(ii) (simplified) lexical entry for watchmaker:

Every morpheme has a lexical entry (because the sound-meaning correspondence is unpredictable). Every word formed by a morphological process that is not 100% compositional must also have a lexical entry.

W. What, if anything, is idiomatic about the following words? uneasy, hangman, shelf, forehead, table leg, midwife, understand, loudspeaker, cranberry

Sometimes words which were completely lexicalised at one stage in the history of a language are reinterpreted as at least partly motivated by subsequent generations. This is an instance of folk etymology. Examples:

(65) hamburger: Original use: a German word meaning ‘(something) from Hambur’

Folk etymological assumption: the word involves ham in sense ‘meat from pig’ and (by subtraction) burger means roughly ‘sandwich’. Hence we now find beefburger, cheeseburger.

(66) bridegroom: Original use: Old English brydguma meaning ‘man’, but became a cranberry morpheme, used only in brydguma.

Folk etymology: people assumed gum (later grom) was really grom, giving the word a more motivated interpretation (he ‘grooms’ the bride)

(67) inflammable: Original use: ‘able to burn’ (non-compositional meaning)

Folk etymology: people assumed that the word had a compositional meaning; they took once a free morpheme meaning ‘man’, but became a cranberry morpheme, giving from cardinal numbers (e.g. seventh) as inflectional.

X. Of the processes described in section 4, one is particularly likely to involve folk etymology. Which one?

9. The notion ‘head’

Head of a word = the element that determines the properties of the whole word.

Right-Hand Head Rule: In languages like English, the head of a word is on the right.

Relevance to grammar

Syntactic category of a word determined by the final morpheme:

(68) wetsuit, crybaby, theory-specific, relive

(69) [s] in [s v comprehens i bl] ity]

(70) [s] in [s music al] al ly]

The right-hand element determines irregular inflection in compounds, prefixed words:

(71) a. chairmen, milk teeth, b. foregone, underwent, c. twenty-second

Inflection is adjacent to the head of a word.

Grammatical Gender determined by the final element (irrelevant in English):

(72) le vice-recteur, la vice-rectrice, le demi-tarif, la demi-journée

(73) das Männlein, die Hausfrau, das Frauenhaus

Semantic definition of head (mainly applicable to lexical roots, not necessarily to affixes):

The meaning of the whole word describes an instance of the concept described by the head. E.g. school book (is a book, not a school), re-sing (expresses a type of singing)

Y. Indicate why the following phenomena could be seen as exceptions to the Right-Hand Head Rule. Do they prove that the RHR is wrong, or can you think of ways of reconciling them with the RHR?

1. enrich, enthrone, behead, derail

2. he wised up to the conspiracy (=became aware of it)

3. sabretooths, bigfoots

4. parachute, parachute, paragrêle, parasol, parafoudre, paratonnerre

Z. Some English speakers say sisters-in-law, governor-general, while most use only one –s in either of the positions. Why does this variation exist?